



PROJECT MUSE®

Digital Transitions

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THE ENDS OF KNOWLEDGE ARE SERVED BY THE institutions and practices of publication as well as by the fundamental work of research itself. While other former editors have reflected here on what the “history of philosophy” is or ought to be, my focus will be slightly different, on the machinery of editing and publishing, as an expression of and an attempt to attain a set of scholarly ideals that I think we have all shared, even when we have disagreed about how exactly to define the subject.

Of the living former editors, I am the only one other than David Norton who also worked on the *JHP* as a graduate student.¹ Like him this was at the University of California at San Diego, but my years were 1973–1974. At the time, communications with contributors and referees were conducted by what we now call “snail mail,” and letters were typed (on an electric typewriter, using carbon paper to make copies, which were retained in file folders). The submitted manuscripts were managed via a large cork board at the west end of the office, divided by vertical pieces of blue yarn tied between push pins into sections for manuscripts received but not yet assigned to referees, those sent out to a first referee but report not yet filed, those sent out to a second referee, and those accepted but not yet queued for publication in the next issue. Each submission was represented there by a 3” × 5” card with author’s name, title, and date of receipt typed at the top, followed by handwritten dates when each successive action had been taken. Besides updating the 3” × 5” cards, my job included buttonholing Popkin when he was in the office to say that this or that invited referee had declined or that this or that referee report had come in. Acknowledgements were preprinted postcards. Since it took a minimum of one to two weeks to create and mail a typewritten letter and then receive a written, mailed reply, it could be very time-consuming if multiple invitees declined to referee a submitted manuscript, as sometimes happened, and a good deal of decision time was taken up in this way. Much of the delay in decisions, about which contributors were complaining by the 1990s, was attributable to snail mail. Delays also occurred in university mail systems, and particularly in mail between the United States and other countries, which could often take weeks

¹Norton, “Keeping the *Journal* Alive,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 153–58.

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or be lost—and the loss itself not discovered for more weeks. The result was that we used foreign referees far less than we would have preferred.

As Editorial Assistant for the *JHP*, there were some givens. Overall office work was guided by the principle that each issue of the *JHP* was to contain one article in each of four major periods in the history of Western philosophy along with fifteen book reviews, also in historical order and covering all the major periods. It was—and has remained—a necessary condition that a publishable article be based on knowledge of the philosopher or text in question in the original language, and that philosopher or text be interpreted within the framework of philosophical, religious, and scientific theories and debates of its own time, of contemporaneous intellectual, political, and economic institutions and events. This gave an operational definition of the kind of ‘history’ we sought, later described as ‘contextual.’ A publishable article would also necessarily be conversant with and responsive to the secondary literature on its topic, not only in English, but also in the other major scholarly languages. This points to the *JHP*’s original and continuing aspiration to international reach for submissions, refereeing, and book reviewing. From the beginning, the *JHP* undertook to publish in three languages rather than English alone, and the standards just mentioned—later codified in a referee report form—were understood to be international standards of scholarship, as illustrated by the work of founding Board members and advisors such as Paul Oskar Kristeller, Richard Popkin, and Herbert Schneider. The most persistent voice on the Board for increased internationalism was Craig Walton.

Besides these positive givens, there were also two persistent problem areas I came to know about only later: printing and distribution, and money.² Besides subscription revenue, the *JHP* had relied, as Norton wrote, “on subsidies provided by foundations, individuals, and universities,”³ which included, crucially, the financial and material support of the editor’s home college or university.

Like David Norton and Rudolf Makkreel, I became Editor after having served as Book Review Editor (BRE). I was appointed Associate BRE in 1989 and BRE the following year. When I started, the book reviewers’ files were a large set of 3” × 5” cards in boxes that I inherited from my predecessor, Jim Force, who served from 1982 to 1989, but were originally developed by Force’s predecessor, Craig Walton. I too served for seven years (1990–97), and was succeeded by Manfred Kuehn (1998–2000), Jan Wojcik (2000–2005), and Jack Zupko (2006–present). As BRE, I understood my jobs to be selecting the sixty books each year of greatest significance for contextual history of philosophy, making sure to maintain a balance among various periods, enlisting the most respected reviewers possible, getting the reviews submitted as quickly as possible, and delivering fifteen of them to the editor each quarter.

As BRE, I made a number of changes, adapting standard procedures to digital media. Beginning from the box of 3” × 5” cards, I generated a digital list of potential book reviewers, by period and specialization, with e-mail addresses culled

²See Popkin, “Founding Editor’s Note,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (2002): 418; Norton, “Keeping the *Journal* Alive”; and Makkreel, “Editorial Reflections—Expanding Beyond Canonical Figures and Periods,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 312.

³Norton, “Keeping the *Journal* Alive,” 154.

(at first) from the American Philosophical Association's annual list, to which we added information about invitations accepted and declined and the timeliness of reviews received.

I created a database to manage Books Received. The database made more visible that a number of the books we received each quarter were not monographs, but editions and translations. So, I added a separate section to the Books Received list for "Editions and Translations." A sabbatical leave in 1993–94, when I lived in Washington, D.C. while the book review office remained in New York City, occasioned the initial transition to e-mail, which at that point depended on external modems and dial-up internet connections whose performance was fragile, to say the least, by today's standards. Nevertheless, by 1997 I was able to report to the Board that eighty percent of consulting took place via e-mail. The increased use of e-mail and databases substantially reduced the time needed for book review assignments and for receipt and editing of reviews, and thus time to publication. This benefitted both the book's author and its reviewer as well as the *JHP*, since we were now publishing reviews a full year closer to the date of publication of the book than had been our norm previously. It also facilitated increasing the number of reviewers from abroad, avoiding the added time, expense, and vagaries of the post.

As Makkreel has indicated,⁴ at the time of his retirement and my selection as Editor, it had become clear that the *JHP* needed to move toward digitization both in internal processes and in production. My goals as Editor remained the traditional ones, to select the best contextual history of philosophy submissions and produce issues balanced among historical periods. As always, we wanted to decrease the time from receipt to decision about each manuscript and the time between final acceptance and publication. As BRE I had learned that use of digital media could facilitate attaining these goals; this turned out to be even more true of the Editor's job.

From the job interview on, my service as Editor explicitly aimed at maintaining the *JHP*'s traditional standards and commitments while managing innovations that enabled us to carry out our traditional mission more efficiently and in a more up-to-date way. One of the first things I set in motion was a redesign of the physical book. Working with a graphic designer we came up with the digital *JHP* logo and the present cover design. Another early intervention was the creation of *JHP*'s first web site, a primitive version of which went up on a Hunter College server in 1998 and which grew and added content—submission guidelines, Editorial Board, forthcoming Tables of Contents, American Philosophical Association's recommended journal practices guidelines—over the next few years.

In the handling of manuscripts, my office from the beginning followed the same steps as had Makkreel—as, indeed, had the *JHP* office at UCSD in the 1960s and 70s—but, also from the beginning, we made increasing use of digital technology. We requested that contributors supply e-mail addresses and we shifted to e-mail acknowledgements only, except in rare, special cases. Our first revision of the submission guidelines required the file on disk in addition to the previously

⁴Makkreel, "Editorial Reflections—Expanding Beyond Canonical Figures and Periods," 312.

required two hard copies. Later this was reduced to one hard copy plus the file on disk, then to permitting purely electronic submissions and to accepting e-mail attachments rather than disks.

Manuscript handling was adapted to digital media in several ways. As with book reviewing, we utilized a set of electronic referee lists, building on those we had received from Dennis Dugan at Emory, one for each of the major periods, consisting of an alphabetical list of names, postal and e-mail addresses, topic competences and preferences, and a chronological list of invitation dates, acceptances and declines, receipt of report, and from time to time indications that a report had been especially good (long, detailed, appropriately worded to share with the contributor) or bad. From the beginning we offered referees the option of receiving the manuscripts in electronic form, and we encouraged referees to file their reports electronically, though in neither case, at the outset, did we make this a requirement. The generation of scholars with whom we dealt at that time was transitional; some eminent scholars barely used computers. The editorial office's intention was to increase the use of electronic media, but only insofar as we could maintain our traditional reliance on manuscript assessments from the best available scholars in each period.

Even in this hedged initial form, the transition enabled us to decrease time to decision and simultaneously make greater use of referees outside of North America, thus increasing our international base. But the scholarly world was changing rapidly, and by 2000 I was able to report to the Board that the *average* time from receipt of a manuscript to its transmission to a referee had been reduced to three days, and by 2001 that fifty percent of referees were willing to receive manuscripts via e-mail. Similarly, electronic submission of referee reports began at once and grew steadily. In 2002, I reported to the Board that average time from receipt of a manuscript to decision had decreased to three months. Over these years, too, our acceptance rate declined from eighteen percent (1998–99) to eight percent (2002–3).

My first Assistant Editor, James Feast, and I designed and created a database to manage submitted manuscripts. It integrated data about contributors and the tracking of their submissions with data about referees and the tracking of their reports, as well as maintaining control over the publication queue of accepted manuscripts. So far, the story is one of improvements in achieving traditional aims by digital transitions. There were also problems, some more global, others quite local.

Several developments in academic publishing began affecting the *JHP* in the 1990s. Increasing publishing costs were adding upward pressure to journal subscription rates; and the number of books the BRE received decreased, reflecting perhaps an absolute decline in the number of books published each year, at least in the history of philosophy. Subscriptions had steadily declined from the 1700s to the 1400s, and publishers presented this to us as part of an irreversible replacement of print by electronic media. At the same time, our distributed institutional support network—sponsorship subscriptions of \$100 per year—had been declining, as was revenue from print advertising, adding further pressure to our annual balance sheet.

In the late 1990s, a committee of the *JHP*'s Board had protracted but inconclusive negotiations with one vendor to create digital access to back issues. In 1999, we decided to solicit proposals from several publishers in the United States and abroad for digital archiving. In the discussions that ensued, the proposals came to include both print and digital publication and distribution as well as subscriptions management, and we decided to partner with Johns Hopkins University Press (JHUP), who became our publisher beginning with volume 40 (2002).

The transition constituted a major rearrangement of editorial office tasks: returning from a long, fraught history of self-publication already mentioned to institutional publication and transferring subscription and back issues management, and more recently copyediting, to an outside vendor enabled the editorial office to focus its attention on manuscript selection and issue composition. As Makkreel noted ("Editorial Reflections," 312), the editorial office now ceased to be also a business office. The more local problems had to do with staffing and institutional support. In 2000–2001, I had to cope with replacing my Assistant Editor as well as the surprise resignation of the Book Review Editor and an institutional support crisis.

David Norton has detailed some of the financial difficulties of the *JHP*'s editorial office in the early years ("Keeping the *Journal* Alive," 154–55). As indicated, they were of two types: the *JHP* itself needed revenue equal to or greater than expenses, and editors' home institutions needed to provide sufficient support to run the office, because the *JHP* did not earn enough to pay for it. Although there was a period of financial optimism with respect to the *JHP*'s profitability in the mid-1980s—by 1992 we had a small endowment fund—by 1988 *JHP* faced a \$6,000–7,000 deficit, and began looking into cost-saving measures. In 1989 we stopped sending contributors offprints and began sending subscriptions in plastic wrap to save a few thousand dollars. We considered it a good year in 1990 when we were \$11,000 in the black. In 1990, rather belatedly, we began charging publishers to reprint articles. This became a significant source of revenue in the next ten years.

As for local institutional support, during my tenure as Editor I was sufficiently funded by my home institution to begin with, but later was confronted with two crises in five years, when it seemed that our funding would be cut off or substantially reduced. Although I was able to negotiate satisfactory resolutions of these crises, they were important considerations when I declined the Board's offer of a second term as Editor. The combined effect of these resignations and financial difficulties also resulted in the deferral of an idea I had proposed to the Board when I was interviewed: creating an ongoing series of solicited *status quaestionis* articles on major figures and movements in the history of Western philosophy. I am pleased that the "Current Scholarship" series was initiated by my successor, Tad Schmaltz, and is being carried on by Steven Nadler. Like the "Editions and Translations" lists, it constitutes an additional contribution the *JHP* makes to scholarship beyond that made by the articles that are our core.

The decision to go to electronic publication was not unanimous. Some board members at the time feared that we would lose independence, that individual subscription rates would skyrocket, and that university press publishing missteps

would recur. Many doubted JHUP's prediction that we would be profitable. After ten years, it is fair to say that none of these fears or doubts have been substantiated. Individual subscription rates have risen very little. At the same time our effective subscription base has increased through electronic subscriptions, including consortial arrangements with groups of colleges and universities. This more than offsets the loss of institutional support earlier derived from institutional supporting subscriptions.

A large portion of our annual profit comes not only from electronic subscriptions, but (especially) from electronic access to and downloads of material published throughout the *JHP*'s history. Digitally archived back issues have become a major income source. This vindicates in an unexpected way the *JHP*'s commitment to high scholarly standards as well as to contextual history of philosophy. At least in North America, we remain the only journal committed to contextual work covering the entire history of Western philosophy, and global interest in work of that sort remains substantial, even as the sheer number of professional journals has increased at a rate differentially much greater than the increase in the number of students and professionals.

Digital publication and dissemination have thus resulted in a major turnaround in the *JHP*'s financial situation. Through the early 1990s the *JHP* remained marginally profitable, and we had little or no endowment that would enable us to stay in business in a financial crisis. From the first year of digital publication on, the annual profit share has been substantial, enabling us to build an adequate endowment and also attain independence in principle from the vagaries and inconsistencies of university funding.

Over the years, as several previous editors have noted, the Board of Directors spent time dealing with and worrying about the fate of our paper archives. It may sum up the sort of developments reported here that the current editor told the Board this year that he generates virtually *no* paper archives. Here is another indication of the ways in which the digital transitions have enabled us to do our traditional job better. The Editorial Board in 1973 included only two names from outside North America. The current Editorial Board includes nine from Australia, England, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, as well as two from Canada.

And, finally, this. The profits we earn from digital publication have enabled us to make contributions to historical scholarship of a kind different from publication. We now offer several annual prizes and awards, which scholars can learn more about on the *JHP* homepage, philosophy.wisc.edu/jhp. Besides the Kristeller-Popkin Travel Grants that were established by donations in the late 1990s, we now give an annual award for the best book of the year in the history of philosophy, the best article published each year in the *JHP*, and the Jan Wojcik Memorial Prize. Our newest initiative is the *JHP* Master Classes, the first of which occurred in summer 2012.