Preface

In 2001–2002, I took a sabbatical from Earlham College, planning to complete two or three unfinished articles in philosophy. The web had been around for more than 10 years, and web browsers for more than eight. I was already in the habit of putting my philosophy writings and course hand-outs online for anyone, human or machine, to use for any purpose. I was already experiencing the benefits of that wider exposure: correspondence from serious readers, citations to my work, speaking invitations, online discussions of my ideas, and a steadily rising number of incoming links.

As a scholar, I was living through the rise of the internet as a medium for scholarship. It was transformative and intoxicating. To me it was like an asteroid crash, fundamentally changing the environment, challenging dinosaurs to adapt, and challenging all of us to figure out whether we were dinosaurs. Not every academic saw it that way. To some, it was just one more medium for junk mail, advertising, narcissism, and pornography.

Two figures stood in the background as I thought about the communications revolution going on around me. One was Plato, who said he was lucky to have been born in Greece at the time of Socrates. The other was Bob Dylan, who said, *Keep your eyes wide, the chance won't come again.*

I felt distinctly lucky to be alive and intellectually awake at the birth of the internet. I used the net for my own work in ways that felt serious and constructive, and not just geeky and playful. But I also indulged a geeky side to play with the internet's power and potential. I watched carefully as some fellow academics tried to use it in serious and constructive ways, and as other fellow academics tried just as seriously not to. I was surprisingly late to realize that I wasn't just watching. I was personally making the transition that whole institutions, industries, and cultures were making, or were soon to make, and I was trying to understand and advance this transition.

Plato and Dylan reminded me that I wasn't just using new technology or participating in profound change. I was benefiting from lucky timing. I kept thinking: *Poor Ben Franklin. He would have loved this revolution. I wish I could talk to him about it.* (Of course he was lucky about another revolution even if unlucky about this one.)

The internet was created by researchers to share research. It's the offspring of ARPA-NET, the digital network created by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) to share computer-science research among ARPA labs. Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web 20 years later as an internet application to help researchers share research. Commerce was even prohibited on the internet until the web was about two years old. But as soon as the door opened, entrepreneurs raced to take advantage of the online environment for commerce and entertainment, and quickly overtook and over-shadowed its pioneering academic uses. Researchers who had been on board early didn't lose their momentum, but the larger academic world split into about four groups. One group raced ahead at least as fast as the commercial entrepreneurs, a second group moved ahead cautiously and experimentally, a third wondered whether sharing research online was a good idea, and a fourth noticed the hubbub but tried not to be distracted from their work, including the work of sharing research.

Scholars had always written cutting-edge, peer-reviewed journal articles for impact, not for money. Journals did not pay them for their articles, and yet scholars were eager to write new ones and give them to publishers, relinquishing both rights and revenue. They were keenly aware of the intangible benefits of publication, such as advancing knowledge and advancing their careers, and recognized that those incentives were more fitting for research articles, and far stronger, than royalties could ever be. In fact, they understood that they were paid salaries by universities in part to give away their research articles and avoid the need to write more popular and less specialized work for income. Royalties might come up for textbooks, but rarely for monographs and never for research articles. Scholars knew or should have known that a technology had just emerged to enlarge their audience and increase their impact without requiring any sacrifices they were not already making. They knew or should have known that this technology was entirely compatible with rigorous peer review. They knew or should have known that they were better positioned to use this new technology to their advantage than fellow authors, such as journalists and novelists, who depended on royalty income.

As academics, we knew what it was like to be held back by high prices and inadequate technology, for example in reading research we needed to read or distributing our own research to everyone who could make use of it. We were soon going to know what it was like to be held back by inadequate imagination and slow-changing academic customs.

By 2001 I was already using the web routinely for my own research and teaching, and thinking about how researchers and teachers could take better advantage of it. I saw some signs that other academics were doing the same, but I didn't see as many as I hoped to see. When I did notice that someone—anyone— took the internet seriously as a medium of scholarship, and especially as a revolutionary medium that could distribute research to a worldwide audience free of charge, I fired off excited emails to a

handful of colleagues. At first I wrote each colleague an individualized message. After a while I saved time by broadcasting one email to a list. I remember apologizing for shifting from personal messages to form letters. After another while, I realized that if I were willing to send depersonalized emails to a list of friends, I should be willing to send the same emails to a list of friends and willing strangers. So I moved the list online and let people sign up for it.

That's how my newsletter was born. I called it the Free Online Scholarship Newsletter (FOSN), starting in March 2001, and renamed it the SPARC Open Access Newsletter (SOAN) in July 2003 when SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition) became my sponsor and publisher. I wrote new issues of SOAN until June 2013.

But on that sabbatical in 2001, I really wanted to complete a few unfinished philosophy essays. I loved everything about my job as a philosophy professor except the frustrating way that teaching triggered ideas for more writing projects than I had time to finish. So as my sabbatical began, I was brimming with ideas and anticipation. But I was brimming with something else as well. My newsletter had just launched, and the public list of subscribers was growing with gratifying speed. Once I turned in my spring grades, I surprised myself by pushing the philosophy books off my desk and spending every hour of my work day, plus many other hours, on the topic of free online scholarship, better known today as open access or OA.

During that sabbatical, I published about one issue of the newsletter every week. When I returned to full-time teaching the next year, I suspended the newsletter and launched a blog—Open Access News—to take its place. Omitting a long story here, my wife and I used that year to arrange to leave our positions and move to the small town on the coast of Maine where we'd spent our sabbatical.

I've worked full-time on OA ever since leaving Earlham in 2003. I resumed my newsletter as soon as I could, and made it monthly. But I kept my blog and wrote the blog and newsletter together. For a variety of reasons, I had to lay down the blog in 2010, after eight years and 18,000+ posts, but the newsletter kept going for another three years.

This book is a selection of my writings on OA, mostly from the newsletter. The hardest part of putting it together was deciding what to omit. Our first whack at a selection was much too large for a single volume and we had to cut more than 20 whole essays. Our second whack was more feasible, but by the time we agreed on it I'd written half a dozen new articles and wanted to include a few of them.

In the end, we selected these 44 pieces published between March 2002 and March 2011. I've abridged some to minimize repetition, but haven't otherwise modified the texts.

For a more complete list of my writings on OA, here's an online bibliography that I keep up to date.

http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/~psuber/wiki/Writings_on_open_access

I don't have space here to thank everyone who has supported my work on OA. But I must thank Rick Johnson and Heather Joseph, two successive executive directors of SPARC. Rick invited me to move my newsletter to SPARC in 2003, and Heather ratified the arrangement when she took over in 2005. I showed them my drafts before publication, but neither ever told me to cut or reword something I wanted to say. Neither ever hinted that something I wanted to say might make their lives difficult. It's true that we agreed on the big things, such as the benefits of OA and the strategies for achieving it. We agreed on many small things as well. But I can't believe we saw eye to eye on every word every month for the 10 years that SPARC published the newsletter. Yet they were unstinting in their generosity in letting me put SPARC's good name at risk. I know that a writer rarely gets that kind of freedom, especially with a monthly check. It's a stroke of luck on a par with being alive and intellectually awake at the birth of the internet.

Above all, I thank my wife, Liffey Thorpe. Incredibly, she was ready to give up her tenured full professorship at the same time I was, so that we could move to Maine and start the next phase of our careers, in my case the OA phase. Without that, six years out of seven I'd still be waiting for my next sabbatical to finish the pieces I really wanted to write.