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The Scholarly Publishing Scene-Annual PROSE Awards Science and Math Books Roundup

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rules force the Internet to function under Title II of the *1934 Federal Communications Act*. Does that sound modern to you? Do you even remember what the Internet was like in 1934? Oh, wait.

Ditching the current rules will not result in Armageddon. One of the more oft-cited complaints is that the Internet will slow down to a crawl for some people. **Ian Tuttle** reported that when the **FCC** first tackled this “problem” in 2010, they could only mention four, **FOUR** examples of anticompetitive behavior, and they were designated as minor. We fear fear, and that’s not a good way to make decisions. Net neutrality is a solution for which there is no problem.

Ditching the current rules secures more privacy. Are you sure you want government, especially *this* government, nosing into your Internet business? Well, it can and doubtless will if the rules remain the same. At least changing the rules places our privacy, which we all know is unicorn-like anyway, in the hands of nongovernment entities.

Ditching the current rules forces Brobdingnagian broadband gobblers to pay for that service. Netflix, streaming videos, pornography, and others like them are all hogging the “lanes” on the World Wide Web. Let’s make them pay for it. And while we’re at it, if I want superfast, super wide lanes, then I’ll pay for them, too. Besides, do you really think that an email and a

streaming video should have equal opportunity on the Internet? Miss a second or two and the movie is a jumble; a second or two delay on an email is a blessing.

Ditching the current rules is another safeguard against censorship. I’m sure I’m not telling you anything new, but governments have a bad track record when it comes to censorship. If the government controls the Internet, it can also shut it down. Egypt, the Soviet Union, North Korea, Turkey — to name only a few — have all been untrustworthy when it comes to censorship and the Internet. Spreading out that control among many strikes me as a safer bet than leaving it in the hands of government alone.

I could go on, but I won’t. It’s not that I favor jettisoning all the rules. I am, however, in favor of what Layton calls “a light regulatory touch.” Since I have been alive, more regulations have always meant more taxes, more red tape, and more hoops through which to jump. This would be the first time in my lifetime that regulations imposed by government on an innovative entity caused it to thrive.

Are there no good arguments for net neutrality? Of course there are, but many of them seem to me to be fear of what might be, not what is. The UK, Paris, Seoul, Tokyo and other locales have much less Internet regulation, higher levels of innovation, and *cheaper* costs. Does that sound bad to you?

This isn’t an either-or. We can have less regulation and still have some light regulatory control. But it will be a kind of control that

benefits everyone, not just big providers, or fat bureaucrats.

Some net neutrality proponents have not done themselves or their arguments any favors. They have subjected **Ajit Pai** and his family to the most monstrous behavior, picketing his house, his family, hounding him and his wife wherever they go, threatening murder, and terrifying his children. Even *Slate*, hardly a **Trump** fan, reported on the Internet whackos’ ridiculous and illegal behavior. This is not the way to have a discussion in America, and their behavior should be enough to make even the most ardent fan of net neutrality keep an open mind about it.

N.B. Below are a few representative links to articles, both old and new, used in composing this column:

<https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2014/06/we-dont-need-net-neutrality-we-need-competition/>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshsteimle/2014/05/14/ami-the-only-techie-against-net-neutrality/#1732bf2d70d5>

<https://www.usnews.com/opinion/economic-intelligence/articles/2017-11-27/the-fcc-is-right-to-toss-out-net-neutrality-rules>

<http://www.dailywire.com/news/18613/7-reasons-net-neutrality-idiotic-aaron-bandler#>

<http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2014/11/10/7-reasons-net-neutrality/> 🐻

The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Annual PROSE Awards Science and Math Books Roundup

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The cartons, sent from **Association of American Publishers** headquarters in Washington, DC, began appearing on the stoop in front of the kitchen door (which is on the driveway side, near the front of the house) in late October. They contained entries in the **PROSE Awards** competition — mostly academic scientific and mathematics books, many of which are of door-stop proportions. Under my lanky wife’s wary gaze, lest I suffer a sudden heart attack, I split open the cartons on the stoop and brought the books through the house and into my office a few at a time. There they now sit, in seven piles, five of them divided by discipline — environmental science (nine titles); earth science (9); chemistry and physics (9); mathematics (6); astronomy and cosmology (6) — plus a pile of eight textbooks and another 17 of popular science and math books. That’s a total of 64 titles, which is typical during my many years as a **PROSE** judge.



In addition, four weighty multi-volume sets, each in its own carton, went into the garage (a few volumes at a time, of course).

My job as a **PROSE** judge is to evaluate the titles in each pile and on a comparative basis recommend to my fellow judges which books deserve consideration as winners and honorable mentions in their categories. We’ll have to take into account electronic and subscription products, recommended for potential award by the innovations and journals committees of **AAP’s Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division**, with the participation of relevant **PROSE** judges. Any of the judges can ask that books not initially recommended for a prize by the judge responsible for a particular category be elevated into contention.

Given the nature of the books throughout the STEM and humanities disciplines across the **PROSE** competition, discussions are usually on

a high intellectual level. They can also be rather spirited. Judges find them exhilarating, and most eagerly return year after year. After each discussion we’ll vote by a show of hands for the winner and any honorable mentions in that category.

The judging takes place in early January — in New York in past years, but because **AAP** has closed the New York office in a cost-saving measure, this year it will be at **AAP’s** Washington headquarters. That actually gives me enough time to evaluate 68 titles, given my academic and professional engineering background, my years as an acquisitions editor and running sci-tech publishing at **Wiley**, and my having published over a score of monographs and engineering handbooks with **Wiley, McGraw-Hill**, and **Elsevier**. Indeed, I welcome the large number of titles spread over so many categories. With this largesse, I can get a sense of what hard-science commercial and not-for-profit publishers, such as **Elsevier, Marcel**

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Dekker, Wiley, Cambridge, Princeton, MIT, Oxford, etc. are up to.

So without letting you in on my recommendations for winners and honorable mentions (they won't be announced until the Awards Luncheon at the **PSP Annual Conference** in early February), here are some impressions of the state of science and math book publishing for not only professional and undergraduate audiences, but also for the general reading public. But before I delve into the books on my office and garage floors, let me say that I could spend the rest of this column talking about how it's a miracle that so many of them get published in the first place. Consider the dominance of journals in providing profits for the academic/research publishing industry and the myriad distractions that keep even the educated public from having any time to read books. It all seems so hopeless, until you tell yourself that these books must fill needs, whether they involve business or pleasure. You can put the doom and gloom aside, I tell myself, as I go through each of the book piles in search of whatever trends I can perceive.

Speaking of doom and gloom, it seemed to me on first pass through the book piles that this year there are fewer titles devoted to bleak general assessments of our planet's environmental future. On the whole, topics that the books in the environmental science pile address seem

more narrowly focused, while being treated in the depth offered by hundreds of pages. There's a book on the ecological future of Martha's Vineyard, for example. Among the popular science titles, there is only one that offers a look into a future of world-wide environmental ruin. Not that the subject, painted with a broad brush, has outlived its usefulness for informing specialist and general readers. Instead, it may be that publishers have moved on from the notion that such books will win prizes.

Overall, the quality of the books I receive remains as high as it has been for the past decade-plus that I've been judging them. What strikes me as different this year is that there don't seem to be any individual titles that I can latch onto at first blush as being in the running for top prizes in the PROSE competition. Of course, it can happen that upon further review over the five or six weeks I spend with the books, those that make a powerful first impression make way for more outstanding titles. In any case, my favorite type of book is one that combines observations made while working in the field with analysis made in the office or laboratory.

For just about all the titles I see, quality, in terms of covers and paper stock, remains as high as ever, even as some publisher use soft, rather than hard, covers for hefty academic titles. Color isn't used lavishly in most monographs, or in the even upper-level textbooks, that I see, but I don't get the impression that publishers shy away from color when it's necessary. One way or another, publishers deal with the extra cost for color when a book depends on it.

This year, there seems to be a good mix of contributed titles and books with a single or two or three authors. I do expect, as happens every year, to find authors who are famous stars in their fields, either in academia or in the general culture or in both. For example, this time around, **Yuval Peres** has co-authored two academic math books that are in the competition. He's a well known principal researcher at Microsoft's Theory Group and a Berkeley adjunct. Apparently, he's not so tied down by his day job and journal-article commitments, that he can't find the time to write books.

Some years ago, I split popular science and math books from academic titles, in order to level the playing field, so to speak. As usual, the pile of popular titles is the tallest on my office floor, despite the fact that books for general audiences are far slimmer than academic titles. As in previous years, while some unexpected topics are featured (as soon as my wife spotted a book on sleep, she grabbed it and quickly devoured it), there's a generous supply of math titles. I guess there's a stable market for these math books. What I don't know is whether it's growing or if the same individuals have such affection for math books that they buy whatever they come across in bookstores or in advertisements.

A market that may not be growing is the need for multi-volume reference science works in print. The four print sets that I received this year constitute the lowest number ever. Whether that's a dip or a trend, I'll have to wait and see. 🌿

Random Ramblings — Peer Reviewing of Articles from Third World Countries: My Personal Experience

Column Editor: **Bob Holley** (Professor Emeritus, Wayne State University, 13303 Borgman Avenue, Huntington Woods, MI 48070-1005; Phone: 248-547-0306) <aa3805@wayne.edu>

Peer reviewing of articles from Third World countries has posed challenges for me since I often encounter articles whose intellectual content is excellent but have flaws that work against their acceptance because of the obstacles that these authors face. I review library science publications for four journals. I enjoy doing so and have received more articles than many because I say "yes" when editors ask me. Editors have provided positive feedback. They tell me that many authors find my comments useful. In addition, I usually complete my reviews well before the deadline. I don't have an exact count, but I would guess that I annually peer review about fifteen publications.

I would estimate that more than half the authors of these papers reside in Third World countries. I am using the term "Third World" as the best way to designate those countries outside the Euro-centric/North American orbit since the term has less of a political connotation after the fall of the Soviet Empire. I am also not using it to designate poverty or underdevelopment since many of the countries are rich

enough to support a higher education system that rewards scholarly publishing. I have primarily reviewed papers from Nigeria, the richer and more stable Middle Eastern countries, and India/Pakistan. Editors have sent me very few papers from China, which is surprising given the sense that the Chinese government is working very hard to increase the scholarly reputation of its higher education system. My hypothesis is that these efforts have focused on the STEM disciplines with less attention paid to areas like library science.

I recognize that my impressions have absolutely no statistical validity because of the very limited sample size and the fact that I'm lumping together a variety of countries and regions. As with many of my columns, my goal is to pose questions, invite others to think about the issue, and hope that someone can prove or disprove my "ramblings" with valid research. I would suggest, however, that research on peer reviewing is more difficult because the process is confidential in most cases so that any data would be difficult to obtain. Even if

a journal editor has access to a broad range of decisions, analyzing the data poses the possibility of "outing" authors in a way that might discourage future submissions.

Major Problems

This section will be short. While many factors make an article unacceptable for publication, I have encountered only one that consistently eliminates articles from Third World countries but is rarely found in Euro-centric/North American publications that I review. Some Third World authors include recommendations and observations in the conclusion that are not justified by the research in the main body of the article and appear to come out of thin air. My hunch is that these points are important enough to the authors that they include them even when the research methodology or survey results do not provide the grounds to do so. These articles also usually exhibit some or

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