

爱思唯尔的衰落——我在其中的角色

Elsevier — my part in its downfall

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荷兰人办的出版公司爱思唯尔（Elsevier）出版了许多世界上最知名的数学期刊，包括《数学进展》、《法国科学院报告》、《离散数学》、《欧洲组合数学》、《数学史》、《代数》、《逼近论》、《组合数学理论—A卷》、《泛函分析》、《几何与物理》、《数学分析和应用》、《数论》、《拓扑学》和《拓扑学及其应用》。然而多年来，它的运作方式却招致业内人士的强烈批评。这些批评可以大致归纳为以下几点：

1. 它的价位奇高——远高于平均值而至今未受惩罚，这简直是个奇迹。
2. 它侥幸成功的秘诀之一是“捆绑式销售”。出版商事先包装好的“包”，用户或者全要，或者全不要，不给图书馆自己选择期刊的余地。这样一来，为了几个必须的期刊，图书馆就不得不花大价钱去购买包罗万象的“包”。这里面大部分期刊根本不是用户所需的（比如声名狼藉的《混沌、孤立子和分形》是一个被许多数学家认为荒唐的杂志，然而世界各地的图书馆却不得不订购）。受到经费的限制，

The Dutch publisher Elsevier publishes many of the world's best known mathematics journals, including *Advances in Mathematics*, *Comptes Rendus Mathématique*, *Discrete Mathematics*, *The European Journal of Combinatorics*, *Historia Mathematica*, *Journal of Algebra*, *Journal of Approximation Theory*, *Journal of Combinatorics Theory Series-A*, *Journal of Functional Analysis*, *Journal of Geometry and Physics*, *Journal of Mathematical Analysis and Applications*, *Journal of Number Theory*, *Topology*, and *Topology and its Applications*. For many years, it has also been heavily criticized for its business practices. Let me briefly summarize these criticisms.

1. It charges very high prices — so far above the average that it seems quite extraordinary that they can get away with it.
2. One method that they have for getting away with it is a practice known as "bundling", where instead of giving libraries the choice of which journals they want to subscribe to, they offer them the choice between a large collection of journals (chosen by them) or nothing at all. So if some Elsevier journals in the "bundle" are indispensable to a library, that library is forced to subscribe at very high subscription rates to a large number of journals, across all the sciences, many of which they do not want. (The journal *Chaos, Solitons and Fractals* is a notorious example of a journal that is regarded as a joke by many mathematicians, but which libraries all round the world must nevertheless subscribe to.) Given that libraries have limited budgets, this often means that they cannot subscribe to journals that they would much rather subscribe to, so it is not just libraries that are harmed, but other publishers, which is of course part of the motivation for the scheme.
3. If libraries attempt to negotiate better deals, Elsevier is ruthless about cutting off access to all their journals.

用户经常无力订购那些所需的杂志。这样一来受害者不仅仅是图书馆，也包括其他出版商，这当然也是爱思唯尔整个阴谋的一部分。

3. 假如图书馆想讨价还价，爱思唯尔会毫不留情地取消其所有期刊的订购。

4. 爱思唯尔支持许多阻止互联网开放阅读的方案，比如“研究成果议案”。他们还为 SOPA（Stop Online Privacy Act, 即停止网络盗版）以及 PIPA（Protect IP Act, 保护知识产权法）的通过进行了大量的游说。

我可以列举更多，但这已足够了。

真的难以理解，数学家们（包括其他科学家们）抱怨了这许多年，人们竟然允许这种状况持续至今。为什么不能告诉爱思唯尔我们不想在他们那里发表任何东西？

部分答案是：我们可以说不。众所周知（并非唯一）的例子是《拓扑学》整个编委会的集体辞职以及《拓扑学杂志》的创立——网站 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_\(journal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topology_(journal)) 可以找到此事件的简单陈述。然而这毕竟是个例。问题在于，为什么我们听任如此不公正的待遇到了登峰造极的地步？我们为什么不想想没有他们事情会简单的多。

一个可能的解释是：改变现状需要联合行动。仅有一个图书馆拒绝订购是不足以动摇爱思唯尔的根基的。如果

4. Elsevier supports many of the measures, such as the Research Works Act, that attempt to stop the move to open access. They also supported SOPA and PIPA and lobbied strongly for them.

I could carry on, but I'll leave it there.

It might seem inexplicable that this situation has been allowed to continue. After all, mathematicians (and other scientists) have been complaining about it for a long time. Why can't we just tell Elsevier that we no longer wish to publish with them?

Well, part of the answer is that we can. A famous (and not unique) example where we did so was the resignation of the entire editorial board of *Topology* and the founding of the *Journal of Topology*. But as the list above shows, such examples are very much the exception rather than the rule, so the basic question remains: why do we allow ourselves to be messed about to this extraordinary extent, when one would have thought that nothing would be easier than to do without them?

A possible explanation is that to do something about the situation requires coordinated action. Even if one library refuses to subscribe to Elsevier journals, plenty of others will feel that they can't refuse, and Elsevier won't mind too much. But if all libraries were prepared to club together and negotiate jointly, doing a kind of reverse bundling — accept this deal or none of us will subscribe to any of your journals — then Elsevier's profits (which are huge, by the way) would be genuinely threatened. However, it seems unlikely that any such massive coordination between libraries will ever take place.

What about coordination between academics? What is to stop all the other editorial boards of Elsevier journals following the example of the board of the *Journal of Topology*? I actually don't know the answer to that: I can only assume that not enough people on those editorial boards care to make it worth it to them to go through what is likely to be a somewhat unpleasant and time-consuming process.

If top-down approaches to the problem don't work, then what about bottom-up approaches? Why do any of us publish papers in Elsevier journals? Let me answer that question in my own case. I have a paper in the *European Journal of Combinatorics*, which I submitted about 20 years ago, before I knew anything about the objections to Elsevier. And what's more, I didn't know it was an Elsevier journal until a few days ago. (Part of my reason for listing the journals at the beginning of this post was to



所有图书馆结成联盟去和他们谈判，实行逆向捆绑式销售——接受我们的条件，否则没有一家图书馆会订购你的杂志——只有这样，爱思唯尔的巨额利润才会真正受到威胁。不幸的是，这样的大规模图书馆联盟很难实现。

那么学术界的联盟呢？如果全部爱思唯尔所属期刊的编委会都仿效《拓扑学杂志》编委会的做法会怎样呢？事实上我没法回答这个问题：我只能假设没有足够的编委会认为值得去经历这个痛苦漫长的过程。

如果这种自上而下的方式行不通，那么自下而上呢？试问我们每个人为什么要在爱思唯尔的期刊上发表文章？让我以自己为例来回答这个问题。我有篇文章发表在《欧洲组合数学》上，大概 20 年前投的稿，远在我了解到公众反对爱思唯尔之前；更糟糕的是，我是几天前才发现那是爱思唯尔的期刊。（我在本文开始列那个清单的部分原因就是奉劝读过本文的同行们不再用同样的不知道的借口把文章投给爱思唯尔。更完整的爱思唯尔期刊名单可以在以下网站找到，http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/P11.cws_home/mathjournals）。

了解到爱思唯尔的种种劣迹之后，我清醒地意识到并决定从今不再向爱思唯尔的期刊投稿。我开始厌恶和他们有任何形式的合作。我过去还没有走到直接拒绝那一步；但是现在如果被邀加入一个爱思唯尔期刊的编委会，仅仅属于爱思唯尔本身就足以使我打定主意，毫不犹豫地加以拒绝。（这种情形确实发生过。但我当时有些退缩，把刊物隶属于爱思唯尔作为我犹豫不决的另一原因而非主要原因，但至少我提到了这个原因。）我目前没有加入任何爱思唯尔期刊的编委会，过去也没有。

然而现在，我感到之前的无声抗议还远远不够。我想我们与爱思唯尔合作的另一个原因仅仅是出于避免尴尬。如果我受邀为一个爱思唯尔期刊审稿，而我的确是一个合适的人选，那么拒绝就意味着对向我发出邀请的编辑不敬，而此人很可能是我的熟人。拒绝成为审稿人也有逃避义务之嫌和对作者（很可能也是熟人）有失公平。

由于这些原因，作为个人拒绝与爱思唯尔合作的道德论据似乎并不那么有说服力。的确，如果我们将爱思唯尔的虐待作为生活中无法避免的不幸事件，从而心平气和地接受它，那么拒绝与其合作就没有理由了。然而，我认为互联网最终会让这种虐待消失。那么数学界的利益所在就是让这光明的一天早日到来，越快越好，它远胜

make the second excuse less valid for anyone who reads this. A more complete list can be found http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/P11.cws_home/mathjournals.

Once I did hear about Elsevier's behaviour, I made a conscious decision not to publish in Elsevier journals and I started to feel bad about cooperating with them in any way. I didn't go as far as to refuse, but if, say, I was asked to join the editorial board of an Elsevier journal and wasn't quite sure I wanted to, then the fact that it was Elsevier was enough to make my mind up. (This actually happened. I was a little cowardly and gave it as an additional reason for reluctance rather than the main reason, but I did at least mention it.) I am not knowingly on the editorial board of any Elsevier journal, and haven't been in the past either.

Now, however, I have decided that my previous quiet approach was not enough. I think another reason that we cooperate with Elsevier is simply that it is embarrassing not to. If I'm asked to referee a paper for an Elsevier journal and I am clearly an appropriate choice of referee, then refusing to do it feels like a criticism of the editor who has asked me, who may well be somebody I know. It also feels like shirking my duty and slightly letting down the authors, who may well also be people I know.

It is because of that that the moral argument in favour of refusing to cooperate, as an individual, with Elsevier is not quite straightforward. Indeed, if we were just to accept Elsevier's abuses as an unfortunate fact of life that is not going to go away, then there would be a genuine argument that refusing to cooperate with them is the wrong thing to do. However, I think that the abuses are eventually going to go away — the internet will see to that — so I think that the doing-my-duty argument is outweighed by the argument that it is in the interests of the mathematical community to get to that happy day as soon as we can. I also don't see any argument at all against refusing to submit papers to Elsevier journals.

So I am not only going to refuse to have anything to do with Elsevier journals from now on, but I am saying so publicly. I am by no means the first person to do this, but the more of us there are, the more socially acceptable it becomes, and that is my main reason for writing this post.

It occurs to me that it might help if there were a website somewhere, where mathematicians who have decided not to contribute in any way to Elsevier journals could sign their names

于履行义务的理由。另一方面，对于拒绝向爱思唯尔期刊投稿，我也看不到有任何反对的理由。

所以，从今往后，我不但拒绝与爱思唯尔的期刊有任何关系，而且向公众公开我的立场。我绝不是这样做的第一人，然而越多的人加入我们的行列，我们的抗争就越会被社会认可，这也是我撰写本文的主要目的。

我产生了一个念头，应该建立这样一个网站，使得决定不以任何方式为爱思唯尔期刊服务的数学家可以公开地签名。看到许多同行的名字，很多人会受到鼓励而采取同样的行动，这是表明自己立场的一个绝好方式。也许这样的网站已经存在。如果真是这样，我愿立刻签名；如果还没有，建立一个应该不难，但这远在我的专业能力之外。有人愿意做吗？

回到伦理的话题。谴责爱思唯尔不道德于事无补，很简单，作为大公司，他们一定要把利益最大化。然而与目前我们所采取的行动相比，我们手中其实有更大的筹码：我们根本不需要他们的服务。这不是说这里面没有伦理问题，但它是数学家之间的职业道德问题，这点不存在于数学家与爱思唯尔之间。简言之，我们不应该在爱思唯尔期刊上发表文章，这样可以有效地阻止出版商轻易采取行动伤害学术机构。（我曾经听到不少名牌大学数学家被爱思唯尔期刊拒之门外的故事。另外，我更想知道发展中国家的数学家们能否负担得起爱思唯尔的期刊的高价位；如果答案是否定的，我们又多了一个不向他们屈服的道德理由。）

即使由于众多的数学家拒绝与爱思唯尔合作而使其旗下的期刊质量下降，也不见得会改变它的经营方式。他们仍然能够将那些剩下的垃圾数学杂志与重要的物理、化学以及生物学杂志捆绑销售。然而，这将是一个强有力的宣战——可能最终会推动其他学科效仿——至少，数学界可以率先摆脱困扰。

最后我要说的是，爱思唯尔不是唯一的表现糟糕的出版公司，但似乎是最恶劣的。

附言：提醒一下非英语读者，本文标题参考的是这一书名——《阿道夫·希特勒的灭亡：我在其中扮演的角色》。

electronically. I think that some people would be encouraged to take a stand if they could see that many others were already doing so, and that it would be a good way of making that stand public. Perhaps such a site already exists, in which case I'd like to hear about it and add my name. If it doesn't, it should be pretty easy to set up, but way beyond my competence I'm afraid. Is there anyone out there who feels like doing it?

Returning to the subject of morality, I don't think it is helpful to accuse Elsevier of immoral behaviour: they are a big business and they want to maximize their profits, as businesses do. I see the argument as a straightforward practical one. Yes, they are like that, as one would expect, but we have much greater bargaining power than we are wielding at the moment, for the very simple reason that we don't actually need their services. That is not to say that morality doesn't come into it, but the moral issues are between mathematicians and other mathematicians rather than between mathematicians and Elsevier. In brief, if you publish in Elsevier journals you are making it easier for Elsevier to take action that harms academic institutions, so you shouldn't. (I'm thinking of stories I've been told about mathematicians at major universities who have been cut off from Elsevier journals. Something I don't know, but would be interested to learn, is whether mathematicians in developing countries can afford to get access to Elsevier journals. If not, then that would be another powerful moral argument against submitting to them.)

Even if so many mathematicians refused to cooperate with Elsevier that the quality of their journals plummeted, that wouldn't necessarily force Elsevier to change its ways, since it could continue to bundle its by now rubbishy mathematics journals together with important journals in physics, chemistry and biology. However, it would be a powerful gesture — perhaps even powerful enough for other sciences to follow suit eventually — and at least mathematics would be free of the problem.

One final remark is that Elsevier is not the only publisher to behave in an objectionable way. However, it seems to be the worst.

PS For non-British readers, the titles of this post and the previous one are an oblique reference to the book titled "Adolf Hitler: My Part in his Downfall".