

Where to Publish Your Paper

You do not get to pick where to publish your paper. You get to pick where to submit your paper. After that, it is mostly out of your hands.

To some extent your decision about where to submit will be driven by factors like how likely a journal is to accept your paper, how long it is likely to take them to get back to you, and whether the journal has a publication fee which is prohibitive (which in philosophy is rare). However:

- 1) It's almost impossible to know how likely a journal is to accept your paper, but if your paper is good, you can expect to have chances similar to everyone else, which for good journals typically hover between 0 to 10 percent. Some journals publicize this information (like *Ethics*, which publishes their past year's acceptance rate in an editorial in the first issue each year). Most don't, and it's thus difficult or impossible to know your chances, except that it's a fair assumption that journals of similar tiers are similarly likely to accept papers.
- 2) It's almost impossible to know how long a journal is going to take to respond to you unless they publicize this information (and most don't).
- 3) There are some websites that aim to publicize acceptance rates and decision times for lots of journals, but their data are not obviously representative. It's very hard to know. (The websites are [PJIP](#) and the [APA Journal Survey Project](#).)
- 4) You can check publication fees before you submit, and it's rare for philosophy journals to have them, but when they do, they will typically be too much to pay (e.g. the journal *Thought* charges about ₹1.5 lakh to publish an article).

Thus, the main driving factors in choosing where to submit are the likely outcomes of publishing in that journal.

One relevant consideration is whether the journal is open access: it is nice to publish in a venue where anyone can read your paper for free. But that is not a big deal. Typically if someone wants to read your paper and they don't have access, they will find some way to get it, like emailing you for a copy.

Most other differences between journals are basically irrelevant, like how good they are at copyediting (who cares?) or how attractive their formatting is (again, who cares?).

This leaves two main considerations: ethics and reputation. Ethically, you should have objections to submitting to journals run by the evil for-profit publishers like Elsevier. If you are in a position to boycott these journals, it's good to do so, but it's rare to be in that position, especially given that the evil publishers control many of the good philosophy journals.

This leaves reputation. Like all other areas of academia, philosophy is a reputation-obsessed field. There are approximately 7 “tiers” of journals to publish in. The distinctions among tiers are driven by, and are worth tracking largely because they drive, philosophers’s evaluations of reputations. The whole situation is built on, and is used to build, judgments about status. This makes the whole process elitist, subjective, self-obsessed, biased, and objectionably comparative and competitive. There is a lot of other bad stuff to be said for it too!

But, there’s at least some good stuff to be said for it, and anyways the purpose of this document is not to evaluate things but to describe the situation that you find yourself in. Your goal is typically to maximize your reputation among the philosophers whose judgments are relevant to your success. I will describe the judgments that philosophers like me typically make. Not everyone judges like me, and in fact in India, most philosophers do not judge like me. But the result of almost the entire country using alternative judgment methods is that almost nobody in India outside of Ashoka publishes any philosophy that anyone reads. So although there is a lot to say negatively about how I (and others at Ashoka) judge, in some ways it’s better than what most of the country is up to. Holding oneself to the standards involved in my kinds of judgments results in publishing research that is read, engaged with, and (one hopes) respected. That is perhaps a good goal to pursue.

Tier 1 (tied): The “Top” Generalist Journals

These are the best of the best according to how some philosophers understand the field of philosophy (and especially analytic philosophy). You may notice that for many fields of philosophy (most notably much of what falls under “Continental” philosophy), many or all “top” journals do not publish this kind of philosophy. For philosophers who work in these fields of philosophy, the “top” journals are not considered as such. Even for philosophers who do work in the relevant fields, there is nowhere near unanimity about the “top” journals. But, to the extent there is any agreement on these things, the “top” generalist journals are set apart from others.

If you can publish in a “top” generalist journal, it is basically always worth it to do so. The only main downside is that for some subfields, the “top” subfield journals are more prestigious than the “top” generalist journals, and in those cases, if your paper could go in a “top” subfield journal instead, it might benefit you more if it ends up there.

Examples of “top” generalist journals in analytic philosophy include *The Philosophical Review*, *Noûs*, *Mind*, *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, and *The Journal of Philosophy*, roughly in that order, and perhaps no others, or just a few others.

Tier 1 (tied): The “Top” Subfield Journals

These are the best journals for particular subfields of philosophy. For some subfields, agreement on the “top” journals is more or less unanimous. For others there is broad disagreement. In many cases, especially for fields in which the “top” generalist journals do not

publish much or anything, a “top” subfield journal is considered to be just as good or better than all the “top” generalist journals.

If you can publish in a “top” subfield journal, it is basically always worth it to do so. Pretty much the only conceivable downside is that philosophers unfamiliar with your subfield might be more impressed with a publication in a “top” generalist journal, and if your publication could go there instead, it would therefore be more likely to impress more philosophers. You may notice that this conflicts with the point made above in the discussion of “top” generalist journals, where I said that philosophers in your subfield might be less impressed if you publish in one of those rather than a “top” subfield journal. That is indeed how it works.

“Top” subfield journals are subfield specific so there is no way to list them here. An example of a “top” subfield journal in ethics is *Ethics*.

Tier 3: Great Journals

These are journals that are more or less unanimously accepted as publishing good stuff, but which are not so good as to count as one of the “top” journals. Publications in these journals are extremely prestigious and (given disagreement about what the “top” journals are) often just as good (or almost as good) for one’s reputation as publishing in a “top” journal.

Depending on who you ask, great generalist journals in analytic philosophy include *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Analysis*, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, *Ergo*, *Erkenntnis*, *European Journal of Philosophy*, *Inquiry*, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophers’ Imprint*, *Philosophical Perspectives*, *Philosophical Quarterly*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Ratio*, *Res Philosophica*, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *Synthese*, *The Monist*, and maybe not much else.

Tier 4: Good Journals

The only difference between a good journal and a great journal is someone’s subjective evaluation of the quality of the journal. Many philosophers have opinions about which journals are good but not great, although there is not a lot of agreement about *which* journals fall into which category. But, it is good to keep in mind that philosophers make these distinctions, and that they disagree about them, such that one philosopher’s good journal is another philosopher’s great journal, and if you publish in a journal that one philosopher counts as good rather than great, then that philosopher will judge you slightly less favorably than if you had published in a journal they take to be great.

Because the only difference between good and great is who you ask, there is no general list of good journals in analytic philosophy.

Tier 5: Mediocre Journals

These are journals that exercise discretion in what they publish, but which do not apply particularly exacting standards. The peer reviewers for these journals will often be happy with more or less anything they read so long as it's clearly written and halfway original, and will ask for a few minor changes, or the journal will ignore one or more negative peer reviews when deciding what to publish (or both). Because these journals have relatively lax standards, a lot of philosophers will see publications in mediocre journals as not very impressive, and may even look down on you for publishing in one of these journals.

There are too many mediocre journals in analytic philosophy to list. A representative one from my subfield is *Ethics & Global Politics*.

Tier 6: Trash Journals

These are journals that will publish more or less anything on-topic and comprehensible that is sent to them. Because they exercise very little discretion in choosing what to publish, there is no reason to take very seriously the fact that something has been published in them. Publishing in one of these journals therefore will typically not lead to a positive evaluation in the eyes of philosophers who care about journal quality. It may even make them think less of you, because they will evaluate you as someone who cannot publish in better journals, or who does not have the discernment to choose a better journal to publish in.

There can be reasons to publish in trash journals, like for instance if a friend of yours is an editor and you want to do them a favor, or if you do not care about your reputation because it is already high enough or because success in the future is not going to depend on reputation judgments that others make, but you should understand that this will sometimes result in a reputation hit, so to speak.

In philosophy, most "conference proceedings" fall into this category. ("Conference proceedings" are distinct from special issues of journal that include papers from a conference, which might fall into any of the tiers.) This is not true of other fields: in computer science, for instance, many conference proceedings are among the most prestigious publishing venues.

Tier 7: Predatory Journals

A predatory journal is a journal that accepts papers for publication so that it can make money. It accepts basically everything that is submitted, and then charges authors a publication fee. Publishing in these journals indicates that you don't care about peer review (because these journals conduct only nominal peer review) and thus you do not care about the quality of your paper as judged by others; that you are bad with money (your own or your institution's, if you are using your research budget to pay for the publication); that you provide financial support to unethical scams (either because you are immoral or because you don't know any better); and generally that you are not a serious scholar (or you're so serious and hence above worldly concerns that you don't care about silly things like reputation, money, peer review, ethics, etc.).

Publications in predatory journals will thus be an active detriment to your reputation in many philosophers's eyes. Predatory journals will often send spam emails aiming to get you to submit to them. Most journals published by MDPI are predatory.

A Caveat about Special Issues

Journals will sometimes publish "special issues" supervised by guest editors. A journal special issue can be of a different reputation tier than the journal itself. For instance, I listed *Ethics & Global Politics* as an example of a tier 5 journal, but sometimes that journal has special issues that are in tier 4 or 3. *Synthese* (around tier 3 or 4) used to be notorious for having crummy special issues that would be in tier 5 or 6, but they have since cleaned up their act.

Archives

There is nothing wrong with putting your paper in an archive, like PhilPapers/PhilArchive (for papers in philosophy), arXiv (for papers in physics, mathematics, computer science, quantitative biology, quantitative finance, statistics, electrical engineering and systems science, and economics), PsyArXiv (psychology papers), Research Square (everything), etc. However, there are two things to keep in mind. First, this is not the same as publishing a paper. When a paper is published, it is printed in a journal or a book. An archive is not a journal or a book: it is just a repository. Second, many journals have a policy that says they will not publish material that is available elsewhere. Some take their policy seriously and some don't. For those that take it seriously, anything in an archive is ineligible for submission and hence publication. So, that is a reason not to put something in an archive (or anywhere online) until it is accepted for publication.

Another Option: Book Chapters

Papers do not need to be published in journals. They can be published as a chapter in an edited volume, which is a fancy word for a book with chapters written by different people. Some books are *de facto* journals, like the *Oxford Studies in X* books, and these books are usually tier 1, tier 3, or tier 4. Most books are separate entities, though. Reputationally, book chapters are typically the equivalent of about tier 4 or tier 5 journals, depending on who is judging. To some extent it depends on the book: specifically, on who publishes it, who edits it, and who else is published in it. In general though, lots of philosophers judge book chapters as much less impressive than journal publications, since they are often driven by who you know rather than other considerations. This means that often you are typically better served (reputationally speaking) by publishing a paper in a journal than in a book.

Why Can't Philosophers Judge Based on the Work, Rather than the Journal?

One natural question is why in the world it could conceivably matter where you have published your paper. Shouldn't philosophers form judgments of you on the basis of reading your work and

judging its quality? Why should it matter *where* the paper is published? There are three things to say about this.

First, in some contexts, this is in fact how it works. For example, if you work on secession, a topic that I am a world-class expert in, I will read what you publish and form my own judgments. I won't care where it was published. For many philosophers this is true for the things they are world-class experts in. But, the typical philosopher is a world class expert in between 0 and 1 subjects when they finish their PhD. For some philosophers that number never increases. For others it goes up, but very slowly. Another context in which someone might form their own judgment is if they are looking very closely at you for some reason. Pretty much the only reason they would ever do this is if they are deciding whether you should be hired for a job or whether you should get tenure or a promotion. In this context some philosophers read what you've written and form their own judgments. So, for these contexts, it mostly doesn't matter where you have published.

Second, it is rare for someone to be a world-class expert on what you've written, and it is rare for someone to be judging you for a job hire or a tenure or promotion case. Mostly philosophers are judging you in other contexts. More importantly, when judging you for a job hire, lots of philosophers either do not have the time to read everything you've written, or they do not have the expertise to judge it. In these contexts, a lot of philosophers will fall back on journal reputation to judge you.

Third, although most philosophers either don't realize this, or they realize it at some level but pretend it isn't true, personal evaluations of publication quality in philosophy are mostly bullshit. You can take two excellent philosophers and ask them their opinion on a paper and it will not be unusual for one to say the paper is great and the other to say it is terrible, or at least for their evaluations to differ quite a bit. You can find many philosophers at the top of their fields willing to say all sorts of canonical work in philosophy is crummy, from classic papers like Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" or Dennett's "Quining Qualia" to even the works of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and so on. (Most top philosophers will not even have read any non-Western philosophy, although if you managed to get them to do so, probably they'd judge half of that to be terrible too.) But, crucially, *nobody can agree on what the good stuff is and what the bad stuff is.*¹ The powers of tradition and reputation prevent some philosophers from forming negative judgments about extremely famous works and authors, but most philosophy is not in that category. This means that unless you are unusually pigheaded, narcissistic, or otherwise self-centered, you will eventually realize that your own personal judgments of contemporary philosophical quality are

¹ For an example of this, see [this issue of *Topoi* on the future of philosophy](#). One article, by Graham Priest, one of the most respected philosophers alive today, predicts that Heidegger is one of the two 20th century philosophers most likely to be regarded as important 100 years from now. Another article, by Jonathan Barnes, an important philosopher of ancient Greek philosophy, says that taking Heidegger seriously is "the beginning of the end" for philosophy. For another example see the article "[Great Philosophers Are Bad Philosophers](#)" by Michael Huemer, who is no Graham Priest or Jonathan Barnes, but who is a full professor in a very good philosophy department with many widely-cited publications.

not likely to generalize, so it's going to be difficult to insist too strongly upon them in many contexts. One option is to give up the practice of judging philosophical quality altogether, but most philosophers find this impossible. The only option left is to rely to some extent on aggregates of judgments, for which journal reputations are a proxy. If you judge someone on the basis of their having published in highly respected journals, your judgment is more likely to be accepted by others, and others will not have as much leeway to push back against your judgment. So to some extent philosophers have converged on using journal reputation judgments as a more neutral and widely accepted standard than personal taste in many contexts. For example, if I think we should hire someone, it's not much use for me to say "this article they wrote is very good," because my equally competent colleague is just as likely to think it's trash, and there's nowhere to go from there, especially if neither of us are experts on that topic. But I can say "this article they wrote is in *Mind*," and we can all agree that this is very impressive. It would be hard for my colleague to say "I don't care, I still think it's bad," because that is just their personal evaluation.

Note that I have said personal evaluations are *mostly or largely* subjective or bullshit. This doesn't mean they are complete nonsense, or that the journal tier evaluations (which are mostly aggregates of personal judgments) are complete nonsense either. Some philosophy is not as good as other philosophy. When I was an undergraduate preparing to write a philosophy thesis, I gave a list to my advisor of all the things I was proposing to read. He said I didn't need to read the things that were published in the lower tier journals. I thought to myself "like most philosophers, my advisor is an elitist snob. I am not going to stick only to the good journals. I will read all the stuff and form my own judgments." I worked through the entirety of my reading list, forming judgments about quality based entirely on my own evaluation and not at all on publication venue. At the end of the process, looking over my notes, it turns out I ended up judging 90% of the stuff in the bad journals to be bad. Ultimately, it was still good for me that I read the bad stuff in addition to the good stuff. It was about secession, about which I eventually became a world-class expert, and to be a world-class expert you have to have read everything. You *definitely* have to have read the 10% of good stuff that gets published in bad journals. But for the stuff about which you are not looking to become a world-class expert? Maybe the journal reputation heuristic is not so bad after all.

So Where Should I Publish?

Hard to say! If you're trying to get an academic job outside of India, you almost certainly *must* publish in tier 1, or at worst tier 3. Your PhD is from an unknown program with no reputation and so the only thing you will have going for you is whatever reputation you can get from publishing. For getting a job within India, since there is wide variation in how philosophers in India are judging publications, it can be hard to say anything general. Setting self-interest aside, there are other reasons to publish in good journals, as noted above. And, slowly, other parts of India are coming to resemble Ashoka (or, rather, to resemble much of the rest of the world) in their judgments. So, these are reasons to aim high.

On the other hand, it is very hard to publish in higher tier journals. The acceptance rates are low, and because personal evaluations of quality are mostly bullshit, lots of reviewers and

editors will reject your paper even if it's good. It can take years to publish a single good paper in a good journal. Success is mostly a matter of luck. Do you have that much time? And is it worth the trouble? Your paper is the same paper no matter where it gets published, and chances are you will end up applying for (and, hopefully, successfully acquiring) a job where it doesn't matter if you've published in a tier 1 versus a tier 5 or 6 journal. (Your job may not even care if you publish much at all.) Aiming lower lets you sidestep the toxic prestige obsessiveness to some extent, which is good. And if you get a job, it will likely be in India, where it is still the case that most people are not judging in the ways described above. So, these are reasons not to aim high.

I would suggest not publishing in predatory journals. You should respect yourself and the profession too much to go that low, and it's a waste of money. Stick to tier 6 or above. If you ever feel the impulse to publish in a predatory journal, just put the paper in an archive and share it around until you run across someone who is publishing an edited volume on a topic close enough to your paper that you can get it into the book.

Resources

Informal ranking polls conducted by Brian Leiter:

- [Best "general" journals of philosophy, 2022](#)
- [Specialist journals that publish the best articles in moral and/or political philosophy, 2022](#)
 - Note that since 2022, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* has been replaced by *Free & Equal*, and *The Journal of Political Philosophy* has been replaced by *Political Philosophy*. A new *Philosophy & Public Affairs* numerically distinct from the old one has come into being with a reputation that is still inchoate.
- [Discussion about the polls](#)

[Ranking philosophy journals: a meta-ranking and a new survey ranking](#) by Boudewijn de Bruin and [discussion](#).

[Another discussion of this topic](#) by Liam Kofi Bright.