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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

"It takes a village to write a really good paper": A normative framework for peer reviewing in philosophy

Samantha Copeland | **Lavinia Marin**

Ethics and Philosophy of Technology Section, Delft University of Technology, Netherlands

Correspondence
Samantha Copeland, Ethics and Philosophy of Technology Section, Delft University of Technology, Jaffalaan 5, 2628 BX, Delft, Netherlands.
Email: s.m.copeland@tudelft.nl

Abstract
That there is a "crisis of peer review" at the moment is not in dispute, but sufficient attention has not yet been paid to the normative potential that lies in current calls for reform. In contrast to approaches to "fixing" the problems in peer review, which tend to maintain the status quo in terms of professionalising opportunities, this paper addresses the needs of philosophers and how peer-review reform can be an opportunity to improve the academic discipline of philosophy, whereby progress is understood as making the discipline more fair to the global academic community and more conducive to the flourishing of academic philosophers. The paper evaluates recent categories of relevant norms and correlating reforms. In conclusion, it recommends that philosophy pursue the norms of transparency and democracy explicitly when proposing peer-review reform and suggest that proposals for forum-based models of peer review are most likely to support those norms.

KEYWORDS
academic philosophy, fairness, flourishing, normativity, peer review

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE PEER-REVIEW CRISIS IN PHILOSOPHY AND A NEGLECTED NORMATIVE QUESTION

In February 2022, a blog post entitled "Seems like the peer review system has given up the ghost" at the *Philosophers' Cocoon* received considerable attention in the online community

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of philosophers.[1] In this post, author and journal editor Helen de Cruz commented on how it has become increasingly difficult to find reviewers for philosophy papers, requiring months of searches with reviewers often failing to even respond to requests. The post ended with a call for changing the peer-review system, structurally: “[I]t is my strong suspicion that the peer review system is finally broken beyond reasonable repair. We've seen a slow worsening of the situation and the pandemic has finally broken the system. People are burnt out and overburdened, job candidates increasingly desperate. Considering this, we need to do something. We owe it to authors to change the system, I think, rather than tinkering at the edges.”

This remark by de Cruz is echoed in various blogs posted in the early 2020s by and for the academic philosophy community (see the *Daily Nous* or *Philosophers' Cocoon*) arguing that something needs to change in how philosophy tackles the role and function of (journal) publications. We agree that this is an important cause and want to emphasise the opportunity for real change that such reform would offer. As transformation is an inherently normative enterprise, we also think any substantial change requires close consideration of which norms, values, or ideals are underpinning practical decisions about how systems and institutions ought to change and move forward. Thus, this paper intends to consider at least a few of the relevant normative aspects that should play a key role in decisions about how to reform peer review; we focus on those we see as most prominent in the literature around this issue, and also most likely to be affected (for better or worse) by peer review.

Over the past decade, several philosophers have taken up the discussion about how review practices ought to change in their discipline.[2] We distinguish two main trends within these proposals for reforming the peer-review system in philosophy. In the first, there are calls for opening up peer review to the community, through pre- or post-publication platforms—following Robert de Vries (2023), we call this idea the *forum*. In the second group, there is a push toward pursuing anonymity in the review process even more strictly, through techniques of triple blinding and asking reviewers to be more accountable at every step—this group takes an approach we can call *de-biasing through anonymisation*. It is unresolved, that is, whether we should move towards opening up the process in order to make room for justice considerations or towards closing peer review within a just process. Ideally, peer review would have all the features of both approaches: it would be rigorous, accountable, un-biased, timely, and reflect more than the opinions of only a few privileged people who are subject to in-group biases. In practice, however, different norms will give rise to contradicting measures (Waltman et al. 2022, 3). Our question is thus, should the forum or the de-biasing through anonymisation camp be preferred by philosophers? The answer to this depends on which norms for peer review we prioritise, and for what reasons.

We argue that it *further* depends on what we *want* for the future of philosophy. That is, we should consider what norms are most valuable for the community of academic philosophers, rather than focussing only on which of the norms already in play we should defend. While each camp addresses the potential for their proposed reforms to address issues such as bias, hierarchies, and professional impact, we suggest that the forum will do better in enabling progress in academic philosophy, by creating better opportunities for inclusion, diversity, and more fair evaluation, while also creating opportunities for building skills in doing philosophy for those who have otherwise limited access to professional feedback. In contrast, we think that anonymity-based reforms will have a greater likelihood of perpetuating the status quo,

[1] https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2022/02/seems-like-the-peer-review-system-has-given-up-the-ghost.html. The phrase “It takes a village to write a really good paper” used in our title was coined by Chris Tucker, in a comment to the following blog post: https://dailynous.com/2020/05/07/citing-referees-journal-rejected/

[2] E.g., Schaffalitzky de Muckadell and Petersen 2017; McKeever 2019; Heesen and Bright 2021; Arvan, Bright, and Heesen 2022.

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consisting of hierarchies based on style and institutional prestige. That is, we see the forum as more than a mere fix or preventative measure, regarding it as creating a real prospect for change towards the better in academic philosophy.

The "crisis of peer review" is often framed as a logistics problem, revolving around unpaid work and too much pressure on too few reviewers. Some have argued that the source of the problem is that there are simply too many papers out there to review, since publication works as currency for academic jobs, and ever more graduates and professionals in academic philosophy want to make their CVs stand out from the pile with a number of publications in prestigious journals. Ensuing proposals focus on the problem of peer review in philosophy as a practical problem, that of the increasing backlog of papers waiting to be reviewed and the concerns about quality that arise alongside. We ourselves have experience within the profession of an increasing use of peer review to outsource feedback on work in progress, attesting to the fact it is not only under-experienced graduate students who are submitting papers that require extra attention but also professionals who may have lowered their own bar for submission in response to the publish-or-perish trend that grips academia. A further cause of the backlog is the number of repeat submissions; as rejection numbers increase, authors begin to expect rejection as part of the process of things and are more likely to resubmit their paper somewhere else, with or without improving upon it.[3] There are, thus, good reasons for proposing practical solutions to mitigate this crisis.

In this paper, however, we propose adding to these practical suggestions a reassessment of the duties and responsibilities around peer review in philosophy by clarifying the norms that *should* underpin this practice. We show that, in addition to the logistics problem, there are underlying normative problems (and opportunities) that should guide our attempts to reform the system. Peer review, we argue, should provide a site for developing professional skills in writing and argumentation, and these are skills that benefit not only individual philosophers but the profession of philosophy as a whole, particularly when practised collaboratively. That is, the practice of these skills contributes to the flourishing of individual philosophers but also of the community of academic philosophers, who benefit from the attention to fairness and inclusion of new perspectives that results.[4] Proposals for reform should be grounded in such *normative reasons* for why we should change peer review *as academic philosophers*.

Debates around whether and how peer review is a flawed scholarly practice have been going on in many disciplines for a while now (see, among others, Davidoff 2004; Lee et al. 2013; Smith 2006), but it has recently hit its stride in philosophy. Here we focus explicitly on the value of peer review for philosophy as a practice and for philosophers as such. Given that peer review has a specific function for philosophy, as we show, it should not be reformed without specific concerns in mind. Looking at peer review from an ecosystem perspective—that is, at what it does for the discipline of philosophy as a whole—allows us to choose a direction for reform that not only avoids bias and discrimination but also offers opportunities for directly addressing them.

[3]This claim was eloquently made by Haixin Dang in a recent presentation at "The Social Epistemology of Philosophy Journals" symposium held by Leeds University on July 13, 2023. It is, however, also a claim that we have seen colloquially confirmed in our own graduate and professional lives, by mentors who have explicitly suggested that one not let a paper sit on one's desk post-rejection but rather submit it quickly to another journal. Others have explicitly recommended sending papers to journals to receive advice from reviewers.

[4]At this point in the paper, this claim is unfounded. See Marin and Copeland 2022 and section 2 of this paper for further expansion of the idea that critical engagement entails inclusion and consideration of diverse perspectives.

2 | FROM CERTIFICATION TO GATEKEEPING: WHAT DOES PEER REVIEW DO FOR PHILOSOPHY?

Peer review, in the form arranged by journals as a step to acceptance of papers for distribution by them, is clearly tied to the function of publications for contemporary academic philosophy. Scholarly publications are the currency for being hired at a university, which, in addition to gaining funding and promotion (Atkinson 1994, 148), is the primary way that philosophers "earn a living" doing philosophy. As a consequence, "[t]he official function of peer review is certification" (Katzav and Vaesen 2017, 6). Secondly, having citations of one's papers is also a proxy for the significance of the ideas they contain, which, again, is used by hiring and evaluation committees to decide on the value of one's work.

But given the additional and increasing competition to publish early and also often in prestigious journals, the aforementioned problem of backlog ensues. The institutional role of publications, for one, conflicts in a particular way with reward practices within the same institutions for academics who are hired and promoted on the basis of those very publications. That is, peer review is the gateway to publication, but it is also an unrewarded—voluntary and underappreciated—service that academics perform for one another. This is thus a circular system, where we labour both to produce the papers and to review them, in order that we might support a system upon which our own rewards in academia are based. This has led not only to a backlog in papers to be reviewed but also to the burnout of the writers, editors, and reviewers involved (that is, a large proportion of all academic philosophers). Since the epistemic authority of published philosophy relies on the skilled labour of its editors and reviewers, this circularity and resultant doubling of labour (rewarded with unrewarded labour) has created a "peer-review crisis" in academic philosophy.

Most of the proposals we have found for reforming peer review in philosophy aim primarily to tackle this logistical problem, by either reforming the norms of publishing in academic institutions or changing the process of peer review. The significance of publishing a paper, or multiple papers, and in certain journals, influences the academic careers of individual philosophers to such an extent that it has created not only a problem of labour, indicated above, but also a problem of systemic bias. In the following paragraphs, we briefly review how these issues are raised in the literature as well as several proposals for dealing with them.

The problem of labour—that is, the problem of finding enough reviewers to handle the increased volume of submissions—has raised, for example, the controversial suggestion made by David Velleman (2017) to discourage graduate students from publishing in the regular philosophy journals. The pressure to publish is now already felt at the master's level; entering a Ph.D. programme is ever more likely if an applicant has a ready list of publications (Schwitzgebel 2020). Another approach has been Jennifer Whiting's (2015) suggestion for "slow" philosophy—Whiting suggests that authors could select only their best publication to be considered for job applications, making the number of aggregated publications less significant. These solutions add practical nuance to the current system in order to stem the tide of submissions and resolve the peer-review labour problem, although it should be noted that the solutions do not attend to the potential for increased elitism in publication practices when we limit the number of publications. While we might hope that these constraints would send the right message and decrease the emphasis that universities put on the number of publications and correlating journal rankings, it is at least as likely that the constraints will not decrease the number of submissions but decrease only the number of those allowed past the threshold (Contesi 2023). At the very least, it will take time for such norms to change, and many authors will be caught in the transition.

A recent article by Remco Heesen and Liam Kofi Bright (2021, 640) evaluates the success of peer review through the metric of fostering efficient knowledge production. The alternative the authors propose is to shift peer review from being part of a process that occurs before

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publication to one that takes place after the paper is published. While this might not ultimately change the role of journals from being gatekeepers of professional "certification," it does make journals curators of (potentially) already well-read and peer-reviewed articles, in contrast to the current status of publishers as arbiters of novel contributions (Heesen and Bright 2021, 647; a similar system is adopted by "overlay" journals that scrape the Arxiv collection of preprint scientific papers posted online). In this system, the procedures of journal publication remain intact, but peer review is shifted out of the purview of journals and becomes a community responsibility. One worry is whether making peer review a less structured process would result in problems of dissemination: tendencies towards citing and reading only well-known philosophers would be reinforced, and there would be a lack of formal means to ensure that feedback is distributed evenly and fairly, ultimately discriminating against newcomers, outliers, and also innovators in the discipline.

In other words, such post-publication solutions raise concerns, but these are concerns also held with respect to the current peer-review system: the problems resulting from unduly restrictive gatekeeping, led by bias. Because journals do act as gatekeeping mechanisms in philosophy, junior scholars feel the pressure to adapt their style, their thinking, and the problems they tackle to what is currently perceived as the norm (or what is told to them by editors and reviewers is the norm), in order to be published. This may ultimately affect philosophy as a discipline, restricting the time spent discussing worthwhile ideas and arguments. But it also discourages creativity and exploration of new topics in philosophy, or new methods: it is "abused when, consciously or unconsciously, peer review is used to exercise too much content-control over what gets published. Forcing authors to respond to the recent literature is an example of that. . . . Peer review can be used to enforce a kind of conformity that is not appropriate to our subject" (Korsgaard 2022).

This concern, in fact, already exists within the current world of philosophy and other disciplines. Publication bias in the sciences, to compare, has led to the tendency to publish only positive results, leading to the duplication of experiments that will fail, because such failures were not disseminated through the literature. The *Journal of Trial and Error* was recently launched precisely to close that gap. In philosophy, we have seen controversies over publications that may lead to real-world harm, as they disseminate bias through the use of problematic empirical data to make arguments or neglect to consider the perspectives of the groups they are theorizing about, for example. The *Journal of Controversial Ideas* offers an alternative to what some perceive as restrictive gatekeeping in mainstream philosophy journals and allows for authors to retain their anonymity post-publication to reduce the risk they take of personal attacks for what they write about. But opening the gates for the expression of radical or controversial ideas in a new philosophy journal does not resolve the issue of gatekeeping; a limited number of people with a particular agenda will still determine which ideas are published, and how they are reviewed.

Journals in fact play a dual role—an admittedly key role in communicating the standards of philosophical writing, at least, but also an equally key role with respect to communicating new ideas and potential trends. Consequently, what we have to attend to is when gatekeeping amounts to simple conservative or self-serving bias, on the part of those keeping the gates. Note that where there is gatekeeping, it affects not only content but also methodology in philosophy. For example, in "Pluralism and Peer Review in Philosophy" Katzav and Vaesen (2017) point out several historical instances of documented systemic bias in philosophy journals that have influenced the development of the field as a whole. They argue in consequence for a pluralist stance on what counts as good philosophy and, based on this, against peer reviewers defending one way of doing philosophy over another, be this exclusion based on the style of writing or on the ontologies assumed. Their argument for pluralism of approaches in philosophy relies on the idea that (a) there is not currently "an established-to-be-reliable philosophical approach" (13) and (b) approaches now

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considered to be valuable were once new and revolutionary (13). Predicting what new methods and arguments will be of value in philosophy cannot be done from the perspective of a conservative peer reviewer who only endorses their pet theory. A similar point was made by Malcolm Atkinson (1994, 151)—there are no true “peers” for innovative research, and “the notion of peer review is inescapably regressive: reviewers are likely to be peers only in general standing. Even if the true scientific peer was found, there would be no guarantee that this person would be receptive and tolerant to new ideas” (151). It is difficult, that is, to practise gatekeeping without bias, and sometimes impossible to tell the difference.

Not all gatekeeping is equal, however. Gatekeeping can be a way of inviting in rather than keeping out, by offering rules of engagement, for instance; it is not gatekeeping itself that is the problem. Encouraging innovation, novelty, and courage in philosophical writing is often sold as the reason for reinforcing anonymity: without anonymity, writers will be afraid of being judged for who they are rather than the quality of their arguments and will be less likely to put forth courageous commentary on current issues. Matthew McKeever (2019) argues that the consequence of the exclusionary gatekeeping approach to peer review is the loss of potential philosophical knowledge. Several have argued that this has a stronger effect on traditionally excluded groups, when conservative members or disciplinary standards that are taken for granted dictate what counts as a contribution to the field.[5] Heesen and Bright (2021) suggest that current gatekeeping practices are failing to ensure that only “good” philosophy gets published, so even if, as Regina Rini (2022) points out, gatekeeping reduces the time philosophers spend reading bad philosophy, it is questionable whether the journals are performing that function well. As Erik Schliesser (2017) has noted, however, the reliance on anonymity by academic journals has as much to do with its close ties to the perception of scholarly quality (that is, as unbiased or as “objective” as is possible in peer review) as with its effectiveness for handling potentially problematic philosophy.[6]

That is, there is much to be said about whether the gatekeeping being done by journals and their select reviewers is the result of setting standards for quality or whether it is the result of bias. A recent piece by Filippo Contesi (2023) in this journal raises this question by looking at the overlap between English-language philosophy writing style and seemingly objective standards for clear, argumentative, analytic writing in philosophy: “Standards are very much needed to gatekeep an increasingly competitive market and to differentiate those who belong to the in-group from those who belong to the out-group. Such standards, however, have to be applied quickly and without as much regard to the content as in the past. . . . Consequently, the better the grasp and experience one has with a particular language [English], the more likely it is that one will make it in academic philosophy” (Contesi 2023, 669).[7]

So how might we eliminate bias while still holding a threshold of quality for philosophical publications? The desire to maintain the gatekeeping approach to ensuring quality leads us to try to avoid bias via anonymity, in order to save gatekeeping. We suggest in the following

[5]Haslanger 2008, 6; Katzav and Vaesen 2017, 3–6; Wilhelm, Conklin, and Hassoun 2018; Catala 2022; Contesi, Chapman, and Sandis 2022.

[6]Schliesser (2017) responds to the *Hypatia* controversy over a paper deemed unfit for publication in an esteemed journal because insufficiently rigorous and inattentive to relevant aspects of the arguments made. Despite the failure of anonymity in this case of peer review to gatekeep properly on quality—the editorial board's resignation indicates agreement with the perception of failure—the status of anonymity was not questioned. In this post Schliesser proposes something similar to what Heesen and Bright (2021) suggest.

[7]A similar argument is made by Rini (2022), but without the focus on linguistic differences. She suggests that current norms of review lead to an emphasis on signposting, suitable for quick reviews for argument cohesion but with less attention to content, so the latter becomes less important for getting through peer review. Like us, she suggests a re-imagining of the process, arguing that the current process stems from a “guild” approach to training newcomers by imposing hidden standards for success.

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section, however, that we can instead abandon gatekeeping in favour of skill building as the lens through which to understand how and why we ought to reform peer review. The point of inquiry, then, becomes determining what peer review ought to provide to the discipline and individual philosophers in academia, and from there we can assess which reforms are more likely to bring about any necessary changes to make that possible.

3 | THE VALUE OF PEER REVIEW FOR THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE OF PHILOSOPHY

We hold that the value peer review brings (and can bring) to philosophy is (and should be) different from what peer review does within empirical disciplines. For instance, in respect to the publication of scientific results, peer review is primarily thought of as a quality check on the methods, analysis, and validity of those results—indeed, some scientific journals have explicitly moved to only a community-based check on soundness, in a revision of their own peer-review processes (Spezi et al. 2017). Given, however, that there is no established set of methods in philosophy[8]—and, in fact, that methods themselves are subject to philosophical debate (Korsgaard 2022; Katzav and Vaesen 2017)—and thus that there is no clear way to check that all authors follow a method rigorously, peer review in philosophy cannot work as a straightforward methodological-soundness check. That scientific journals have the normative goal to ensure methodological soundness so that the information shared in them is correct and can be trusted is evidenced by the retraction numbers in scientific fields, when articles are removed from journal archives upon exposure of flaws or even fraud in results. In philosophy, however, few retractions take place; for us, this is a clear hint that the function of journals for philosophy might be different from that of journals in other disciplines. Problematic philosophical arguments in print are more often subject to critique in other papers, rather than retracted altogether.[9] That is, even imperfect arguments play a contributing and ongoing role in philosophical practice, in contrast to scientific practice, where they are almost universally damaging.

We would like to draw this out even further by looking at another venue where peer review frequently takes place in philosophy, and that is in the presentation of papers or works in progress for philosophical audiences, at colloquia or at conferences, for example. At scientific conferences, the aim of a presentation is generally to share the results of recent work; scientists attend conferences to see what other labs and research groups are working on, as well as to catch up socially with members of their disciplinary community. Similarly, philosophy conferences are sites for social connecting, but presentations are meant to raise questions and generate discussion, more so than to present a finished product or result. The presentation, that is, is an opportunity to gather genuine feedback from the audience, which will be incorporated into and may even shape the next version of the argument or paper. This dialogical engagement is part and parcel of how the paper will look in the end, a marked difference from the habit in the sciences of pre-publishing conference proceedings, where papers are finished products before they are presented. Some philosophers purposefully and systematically use conference feedback to refine their papers before submitting them to journals—see, for example, the Mumford method—while others, who do not have

[8]Some philosophical branches claim to have a method (see phenomenology, deconstruction, some branches of analytic philosophy, and so forth), but there is no way to say objectively whether the authors follow said methods accurately and whether nuance is allowed. There is no p-hacking possible in philosophy.

[9]Note that this is the topic of a correlative, live debate in philosophy—whether some articles contain arguments that indeed have bad or unethical consequences (for instance, when they can be used to ground discriminatory policies or as evidence for problematic assumptions). This issue remains unresolved; we leave it on the side for now and focus on the impact of paper publication/dissemination within the discipline of academic philosophy.

access to conferences, might use departmental colloquia and work-in-progress or peer-review groups to gather feedback.[10]

Ideally, then, peer review in philosophy at its best can act as a site for negotiation over ideas and arguments, which in turn changes and one hopes improves the arguments presented between rounds of review. Some authors see subjecting themselves to peer review from journals, in contrast to public presentations of their ideas, as a compromise: they have to give in to appease the reviewers to get their submissions past the goalpost of publication. We think that peer review, even for journals, does not have to be, and ought not to be, a compromise. At least in our own experience as writers and reviewers, we have noticed that after undergoing the dialogical struggle entailed by peer-review rounds, papers end up discernibly better, clearer, more thoughtful, and more thought provoking. This very paper is but one example, heavily influenced by the critique and advice we received from an anonymous peer. We know anecdotally of many philosophers, both junior and senior, who see this process of peer review as a necessary and welcome step in their writing of papers, expecting to go through several rounds and even submit to several journals to receive feedback before a paper is finished—peer review is exactly not, in such cases, seen as merely a final check on quality and soundness. Finally, we can also note how often authors thank anonymous reviewers (and audiences at conferences) in their acknowledgements sections; these act as evidence that accepting help and advice is customary and appreciated in philosophy, a facet about peer review we should like to keep and even encourage further.[11]

In addition, peer review by other philosophers with expertise ought to be more than vetting the quality of the writing in a paper in preparation for publication, or whether it has checked specific boxes (Contesi 2023; Rini 2022). Rather, we suggest it plays (and ought to continue to play) a key role in the kind of engagement in systematic dialogue that develops and demonstrates philosophical skill. The need for systematic dialogical engagement is baked into the practice of being a philosopher; the Socratic method is just this kind of back-and-forth and continues to be held as a high standard for teaching philosophy. Nobody is born a (great) philosopher: people become proficient philosophers the more they refine their philosophical skills. These skills include clarity and precision in writing, and other more specific skills, such as recognising a good argument, a relevant point, the precise use of concepts or examples, as well as a willingness and ability to critically engage with both one's own ideas and those of others.

Like any other skill, philosophical writing is learned by practising a lot and by receiving expert feedback about what counts as mastery in that field (Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014), including knowing what counts as skilful arguing for something, responding in a manner that considers objections, and knowing how to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant objections. The skills required to do good philosophy are writing, critical thinking, and argumentation—combined. And while some philosophers have famously suggested philosophy is best done in solitude, more often than not the skills of argumentation and reasoning are relational skills developed through engaging with other thinkers: even the supposedly solitary thinker Descartes is well known for his exchanges of philosophical letters with other intellectuals of his time. Philosophical skills are *dialogical* skills, we suggest, and one cannot develop these skills without engaging with real philosophers out there.

For example, we have argued elsewhere that critical thinking is a relational skill that needs specific social contexts to be developed: namely, contexts where one can find

[10]The Mumford method is a method for writing papers proposed by philosopher Stephen Mumford. Last accessed July 2023 at https://sites.google.com/site/stephendmumford/the-mumford-method

[11]Perhaps sometimes the thanking is purely performative, but given that the paper has already been accepted at the time of writing the acknowledgements, one need not appease the reviewers anymore, so we can assume that for many authors this acknowledgement of reviewer's input is sincere.

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dialogical engagement and social support from others (Marin and Copeland 2022). One does not become a critical thinker without having consistent and regular dialogical engagement with one's peers that gives feedback about the rules and norms of what counts as *critical*. This means that the skills that make up mastery in philosophy are, at least up to a point, relational skills that get developed through community feedback. Even if one does not subscribe to a skill-centred view of what makes good philosophers, one could then appeal as others have done to epistemic virtues. In that line of thought we find allies who highlight the large extent to which epistemic virtues are better conceived as second-order dispositions, heavily reliant on what others see in us and how they signal this to us. See, for example, Mark Alfano's argument: "[W]hether you are or become virtuous is not entirely up to you: others could strip you of virtue by failing to signal the right second-order dispositions or by signaling the wrong ones. Likewise, others could bestow virtue upon you by signaling the right second-order dispositions and not signaling the wrong ones" (Alfano 2014, 173). Epistemic virtues or epistemic skills, that is, are ultimately relational and therefore require an interactive and supportive context for their development.

It is also highly doubtful that all philosophers can learn these kinds of philosophical skills by relying solely on the graduate-school resources of their departments. Ph.D. programmes in philosophy have been ranked by reputation and hiring rates,[12] and even though there are good reasons to believe that hiring newly minted Ph.D.s follows a reputation bias (Contreras Kallens, Hicks, and Jennings 2022), we cannot dismiss the effect of different pedagogical styles represented in the various graduate schools in philosophy. Simply put, philosophy Ph.D.s training around the world will have access to different resources in terms of supervision and training in writing and deliberation skills. A Ph.D. graduate trained at a prestigious school, with access to many resources (mentors, staff, a library, available colleagues), will be more likely to submit papers to prestigious journals and be prepared to meet the often-hidden criteria for publication in those journals. Opportunities for dialogical engagement that foster philosophical skills rely on institutional scaffolds: regular departmental colloquia, seminars, training courses in writing and presentation skills, graduate conferences, mentoring, and so on. Those enrolled in an under-resourced graduate school or who are on their own will need to learn how to write by publishing, being rejected, and trying again, incorporating comments and feedback. Furthermore, professional philosophers who seek to continue improving their own skills and contributing to philosophy have a duty to ensure that they, too, are in a position to critically engage one another, as well as both to receive and to offer support. They can hold positions in underserved departments, in isolation from colleagues who work on the same topics, or be without funding to attend multiple conferences. In this ecosystem, for some philosophers the peer-review process is the best chance they get to engage dialogically with colleagues who can offer valuable feedback.

Finally, the standards of philosophy are community standards, and so must be learned by engaging the community at large. For one, the accessibility of current texts through journals online has changed expectations of the kind of philosophy we ought to do: fewer of us settle into the archives of one great thinker to become the expert in that line of thinking, and most of us are expected to engage a wide scope of critique and theory, even when focussing on what seems to be a small philosophical problem or single line of thought. This entails considering, critically and respectfully, ideas and arguments that may be presented in a variety of styles, conveying diverse perspectives. As Contesi (2023, 670) puts it, "[P]hilosophical talent is unlikely to be concentrated in one set of countries or a language." Philosophy is now done, that is, in a broader community than ever before, with relevant conversations happening

[12]See the *Philosophical Gourmet Reports*, the latest at https://dailynous.com/2022/01/07/reputational-ranking-of-philosophy-phd-programs-updated/ and also https://philosophydata.org/

globally, and hence the standards for philosophical conversation should also widen and increase accordingly.

To sum up, the role that peer review plays outside the formal, journal-based system in philosophy—for example, at conferences and post-publication—is clear: rather than a dissemination of results, critical engagement with even core ideas in the field is not only expected and encouraged but even required for the building and maintaining of the skills needed to do good philosophy. Thus, any formal peer-review system, so fully integrated into the hiring and reward processes as the current system is, should rather begin with the norms of philosophical practice that would guide effective (philosophical) peer review. More than a quality check is needed, and "certification by publication" ought to be more robust, creating room for philosophical talent to be recognized beyond conformity to stylistic or merely conservative standards. Further, we argue, peer review should also take place in a way that philosophers who would otherwise be neglected in our profession have access to this site for practising and maintaining their philosophical skills, earned through mutual, critical engagement.[13]

Beginning, as we have done, with the norms that should guide peer-review reforms, we hope to avoid the common conflation of the practical role that peer review currently plays in creating hierarchies within the profession with the normative role that it can and ought to play in enabling progress towards such ideals as fairness and flourishing, for all would-be and professional philosophers in academia. These norms and ideals, in the following section, ground our suggestion that what we are calling the forum approach to reforming peer-review structures is the better option for philosophy.

4 | A PROPOSED NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK: WHAT SHOULD MOTIVATE OUR PEER-REVIEW SYSTEMATIC REFORMS?

Heesen and Bright admit that their proposal for reforming peer review does not offer a solution for problems currently plaguing philosophical peer review that conflict with the ideals we have described above; that is, their proposal does not solve, for example, the likelihood of the Matthew Effect (2021, 655–56) or, for instance, gender bias affecting access to publication (644). That is, it is possible that post-publication public peer review would ultimately increase the attraction of readers to only the most well-known people in the field, since there will be no way to know if other papers are actually worth reading without a journal's stamp of approval as assurance. Further, in a public venue there is no guarantee that marginal groups will be given more attention and assistance with ensuring their publications meet standards that demonstrate their philosophical skills. Abandoning anonymity, that is, is no guarantee that reviewers and readers will respond with less bias overall.

In a similar proposal but with the express aim to tackle the power differential that keeps some groups unfairly out of philosophy, Caroline Schaffalitzky de Muckadell and Esben Nedenskov Petersen (2017) argue that we need to publish the peer-review reports alongside actual articles, together with the reports from previous journals that had rejected those papers. The reports would still be anonymous, but their publication would serve to deter people from acting on their bias, especially after the community would presumably react negatively to any dismissive and abusive peer-review reports so revealed. Again, however, this proposal relies upon expectations about how people will respond in the new context and sees the current

[13]This argument has also been made from the perspective of relevance—fields within philosophy, such as ethics of technology and bioethics, have necessarily engaged communities beyond their disciplinary borders. Other philosophical fields, however, have internalized their own standards for what counts as good philosophy to such an extent that they create self-supporting boundaries (see, e.g., Briggle and Frodeman 2016, 34).

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system as something to "fix," rather than to radically change. It may create the conditions for reviewers to be more accessible and considerate in their responses, for instance, but does not answer the practical problem of the limited engagement an author can receive from only two or (sometimes) three reviewers, which is part of the reason that the gatekeeping thus done can be too selective and even cruel. In contrast to the certification narrative, that is, it is not actually the philosophical community that accepts a paper for publication: three people do not a community make.

We suggested above that the guiding norms should be derived from the potential that peer review has as a site for developing the skills of philosophers in dialogical engagement and increasing their chances for flourishing in the profession, but also for widening the scope for innovative and diverse philosophical approaches to be evaluated fairly. There have been several attempts to classify peer-review systems based on the norms these systems endorse; we appeal here to the recent one by Ludo Waltman and colleagues, who distinguish between four schools of thinking about the norms of peer review: "the Quality & Reproducibility school, the Democracy & Transparency school, the Equity & Inclusion school, and the Efficiency & Incentives school" (Waltman et al. 2022, 3). Given the description of peer review's proper role within philosophy just offered, we now use the framework of these schools to explain why the norms we have highlighted lead us to suggest that the forum is the better option from the two camps we described in our Introduction.

Waltman et al. (2022) synthesise the literature proposing reforms to peer review from a broad scope of scientific disciplinary journals. We argued above that philosophy as a discipline uses peer review in a way different from the way empirical sciences do: the philosophical peer-review process ought to serve to refine ideas and shape arguments. Through peer review as a dialogical exchange, authors as individuals refine and improve their skills, as well as get to engage with more schools of thought than otherwise. Furthermore, philosophy as a field benefits from ongoing debates generated by both authors' and reviewers' insights. Papers, that is, are best built via dialogue, which refines and makes them clearer; in current peer-review and publication practices, once a paper is published in a journal the dialogue continues and expands, when other philosophers pick up or critique the arguments it presents.

We argue that the "Democracy & Transparency" (Waltman et al. 2022) school of thought for peer review captures best the norms we have described above as desirable for philosophy, as well as capturing the best aspects of the current system. This school of thought is characterised by the aims of "making the evaluation of scientific research more open and accountable. Peer review is seen as more democratic when participation in the evaluation of scientific work is open to a broader group of people" (Waltman et al. 2022, 6). Democracy and transparency serve to increase the accountability of peer reviewers to authors.

How, then, should the norms of transparency and democracy be adapted locally to philosophy? We propose a formulation of these norms that takes into account the specific role that peer review plays in philosophy.

4.1 | The transparency norm for dealing with bias

Lack of transparency leads to an unbalanced authority on the part of editors and reviewers, who can be aggressive in their epistemic gatekeeping without any accountability. It has been argued elsewhere, in social media studies, that anonymity makes users particularly vicious (Suler 2004). Furthermore, in granting anonymity to peer reviewers, we make possible unbalanced power differentials and vindictiveness: "[T]he [anonymous] design is simplistic because it is structured on the unwarranted assumption that reviewers are wholly objective in these circumstances. In reality the cloak of anonymity, concealing uncertain 'peer' status and possible vested interest, confers licence to indulge whims and express opinions that the

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referee might not care to defend publicly" (Atkinson 1994, 155). When scholars working on peer-review norms argue for transparency norms, their primary aim is to prevent the kind of abuses that go on when reviewers are biased, and to mitigate the power differential.

Here, we are arguing for a dual kind of transparency: first, transparency of reviewers to author and of author to reviewers, such that nobody can harass another under the veil of anonymity; and, second, transparency of epistemic norms endorsed by the journal as well as by the reviewers. Every journal has a set of epistemic norms it implicitly endorses about what counts as good philosophy, in terms of both content and style. Yet when these norms are not made public, those new to the field may get desk rejected without understanding why. For example, as Sally Haslanger (2008) put it, some top-tier journals in philosophy do not consider feminist philosophy a "serious" philosophy. Authors submitting papers to such journals will be turned down through desk rejections. If this were made explicit to the community (and not just to the hapless submitter), it would, first of all, save everyone's time from submitting to journals offering no hope, and, second, it would start a wider community conversation on why exactly certain approaches in philosophy are deemed not valuable. In making the epistemic norms explicit, some journals also need to defend these, and some norms will turn out to be undefendable. As it stands now, the epistemic norms of journals are hidden or assumed and hence cannot be challenged. Gatekeeping should not give rise to epistemic domination. Power relations should be exposed so that this struggle is philosophical rather than (disguisedly) political—good philosophy can justify its methods and not just outcomes. Transparency from the early start will, we suggest, (a) offer a more current state of the art to scholars new to a topic so they don't start out by repeating ideas already out there and (b) expose political or ad hominem reasons for dismissing approaches, by making them transparent and requiring good justification acceptable to the community (not just to a few editors).

4.2 | The democracy norm for expanding philosophical discussions beyond the current trends

If philosophy is dialogue and good philosophy requires justification, then this process should be in the open. There may be competition within the field among various schools and approaches, but this should not be disguised as authority; rather, it should be open for debate (following Heesen and Bright 2021, we would argue that peer review should work for sorting rather than gatekeeping).

Currently, many philosophers feel excluded from "the conversation" going on in the top-tier journals. Perhaps the fault lies in their writing style, their novel approaches, or their current standing as "a nobody from [a] lackluster university," as Helen de Cruz ironically put it in her blog post (de Cruz 2022). A variety of factors make some people feel at home in the publishing world while systematically excluding others. If we want to advance philosophy as a field, it needs to be open to new methods and approaches, and this means new voices from the not so well established academic establishments. This point is already acknowledged by some of the community (Beebee and McCallion 2020; Tripodi 2017), although it is not unanimously held, as nothing ever is in philosophy. It is unclear, however, how to make publication in philosophy more democratic. Democracy is more often posed as an ideal, rather than a regulative, norm.

Current attempts to democratise publication in philosophy revolve around equity and inclusion and suggest anonymity as the best approach. As we have suggested so far, however, even reduced anonymity will still fail to further democracy. Rather, we suggest that what is missing in anonymity approaches is a mechanism for creating and maintaining the expectation that individuals ought to be held responsible for their expressed opinions as reviewers as well as the impact it could have, not only on authors but also on philosophy as a practice.

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This responsibility is taken by reviewers when they share their views in public; little harm will be done, we expect, if those who do not want to take responsibility for their views also fail to share them.

We have thus far embellished two norms that should guide peer review in philosophy: transparency and democracy. We argue that the forum type of peer review works best for these localised norms. This entails a pre-publication community peer-review format. Following de Vries, we suggest that "we will need to fall back to a much older conception of the academic journal—not as a venue for nished [*sic*] research products, but as a forum for scientists to talk to each other. These forums could be implemented as separate community-run 'channels' on central repositories, which involve editorial oversight" (de Vries 2023).

This forum proposal for philosophy publication has some downsides. As de Vries (2023) has already noted, it could succumb to a different kind of publication hell, a popularity contest where the most outrageous papers get commented on and hence are most visible. One could have groups forming to support and comment on their peers, thus boosting their visibility and significance. This is a real danger, but if the process is entirely done in the public eye, then one could spot when certain scholars comment only on one another's work and thereby seldom engage or refuse to engage with other scholars' work on the same topic, whereas now the process of asking one's friends to review papers for one's journal is common but unspoken, yet has a similar effect. The networks of influence in philosophy—which already exist but are hard to show under the veil of blind peer review (Contreras Kallens, Hicks, and Jennings 2022)—would become more visible and thereby more open to critique. Popularity contests are a danger of the forum method of peer review, since relying on communities to surface the most interesting work that deserves publication is to rely on groups of people with subjective preferences and pet peeves and biases to decide on the value of another's work. Yet, blinded peer review does not remove the subjective aspect of review, it only means those who shape it are not held accountable.

One significant and novel danger we do foresee for the forum system of peer review is the potential aggregation of reviewers into harassing or bullying groups. A group harassing one writer is more intimidating than one or two voices hidden behind the curtain of blind peer review. Further, it is widely known that anonymity online can lead to bullying as well as serious harm to those targeted. Our hope is that, as we suggested above, transparency will lead to a forced acknowledgement of responsibility when contributing to this dialogue. But it will ultimately be up to the community—in particular, those well-known and more senior in the community—of philosophers themselves to monitor their own behaviour. It is not unknown for the philosophical community to correct for such behaviour: we have witnessed the transparent and explicit changes in many conference policies about how to chair a question-and-answer session after a presentation, for example, where rules were adopted and changed in order to prevent the same or only senior philosophers from dominating these sessions as well as minimizing the potential for bully philosophers to intimidate speakers. Thus, it is not only possible but indeed plausible that transparency about these behaviours will open avenues for preventing and improving them. In an ideal world, this adjustment and taking of responsibility will result not only in more diversity and wider acknowledgement of the value of more philosophy than is the canon but also in a further lessoning of the traditional pride some philosophers take in using viciousness in their critiques of one another's work.

A final counterargument to consider is whether the forum model fails to resolve the labour problem we introduced at the beginning of the paper. While we cannot predict for certain the practical outcomes of adopting a forum approach to peer review, we do not see this as a necessary outcome, or even a likely outcome. Indeed, if, as we suggest, peer-review contributions are publicly available, then they will more probably begin to "count" as contributions to philosophy and the field, and thereby to compete with publications as

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worthwhile labour. This might even have the effect of increasing the pool of willing reviewers, who now have to forgo the reviewing they would otherwise take on in favour of work that "counts." Thus, rather than speculate about how it would take shape, we point out that there is at least an opportunity to consider how to adopt the forum as a platform and method for peer review without increasing the labour required for peer review, perhaps even decreasing it overall.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we suggest that while most reforms proposed for peer review in philosophy take up the same concerns that we do here, our focus on the potential for transformation leads us to offer a more concrete idea of which norms ought to guide such reforms: our literature review and consideration of effective practices suggest that inclusivity and flourishing are key. Peer review can create and has created sites in philosophical practice where dialogical skills development can lead to professionalization—thus, we suggested replacing the framework of gatekeeping with one of skill building, utilizing arguments from critical engagement (see Marin and Copeland 2022). Further, we have shown that forum models for peer review, whether pre- or post-publication, can better accommodate these normative goals than can current or proposed models based on anonymity. That is, transparency- and democracy-based approaches are likely to lead to a more inclusive process, with the flourishing of more members of our community as an outcome.

We suggest that the empirical and design-based approaches to reforming the peer-review system as it currently exists will probably fall short. At least, these approaches rely on the good will of individuals to allow themselves to be reformed by these reforms, and good will is something that we already know does not flourish in conditions of anonymity or in the current system of peer review. Further, predictions about future behaviour and future research on which system will produce the best results need to be grounded in normative accounts of what "best results" should look like. These best results should not, we argue, be the same as the status quo. While several of the suggestions we describe above touch on the importance of epistemic goals, they also tend to agree that peer review in the form we currently practice it falls short of those goals. Hence, this paper suggests that there are additional goals to consider as our profession considers proposals for the reformation of peer review in philosophy. In sum, we propose to broaden the scope of the consideration of what peer review is, and what it should be, in philosophical practice, and thus how it can lead the discipline towards improvements without relying on the same power structures that have shaped it so far.

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ORCID

Samantha Copeland https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6946-7165
Lavinia Marin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8283-947X

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Samantha Copeland is an assistant professor in the Ethics and Philosophy of Technology Section at Delft University of Technology. She recently co-edited two volumes on the topic of serendipity, *Serendipity Science* (Springer, 2023) and *The Art of Serendipity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), focussing on the nature and rationality of discovery. She also publishes regularly on topics in social epistemology and ethics.

Lavinia Marin is an assistant professor in the Ethics and Philosophy of Technology Section at Delft University of Technology. Her current research investigates epistemic environments on social media, user epistemic agency, and user moral agency (both at the individual and the group level) for users of social-networking platforms, using approaches from ethics and situated cognition.

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