

Submitting a Proposal - Guidelines for Editors

General Editor, Christia Mercer

- ***Main Goal of Series***
- ***Planning a Volume***
- ***Individual Books in the Series***
- ***Enlisting Contributors***
- ***Reflections: Getting them Right***
- ***Illustrations and Images***
- ***Workshops***
- ***Submitting a Proposal***

Main Goal of Series

The main goal of OPC is to offer philosophically subtle and historically sound accounts of concepts that have played decisive roles in the history of philosophy. Each volume will be a *history* of its concept in that it will offer a story about the most significant events in the life of the concept from its inception through its transformations to its modern use. Its guiding aim is to deepen understanding of the concept and explore its role in the history of philosophy. Volumes will include the best international scholars, “extra-philosophical” material or Reflections, thorough indices, and sometimes a lexicon mapping the relation between the concept and terms referring to it. All *OPC* volumes are published as inexpensive paperbacks and distributed internationally. All are accessible via *Oxford Scholarship Online*.

Planning a Volume

Volume Focus and Length

Think of a volume as describing the prominent events in the life of the concept. The first questions to ask as editor are how long did the concept live, what were the major events in its career, and how often did it reinvent itself? Most concepts do not have a neat linear history. Most are born in the ancient period, transformed in medieval or early modern thought, and continue to develop in unpredictable ways. As editor, you will present “a history” of your concept in that you will set the focus of the volume and collect specialists who are willing to take up that focus.

The goal of the series is to offer philosophically astute *histories*, not historical surveys related to contemporary debates. While it is appropriate to end

with a chapter (or two brief ones) on twentieth-century treatment(s) of the topic, the main focus of each volume is historical.

The books should be no longer than 350 printed pages or (roughly) 130,000 words (including front and back materials). Although every concept meriting a volume has had a fascinating and varied history, the entirety of that history cannot be included. The editor must select the most significant historical discussions of the concept as they relate to the volume's central questions.

Contributors

The best international scholars should be engaged as contributors. Most editors will need advice about contributors outside their field. Feel free to contact the series editor, Christia Mercer, for help. Thus far, the Area Advisers have been very helpful in making recommendations. See more information below.

Scholarly Standards

Recent scholarship has made evident the benefit in reexamining the standard narrative about the history of western philosophy and broadening our philosophical sources. Editors are encouraged to heed recent innovations in the following areas.

(1) Arabic and Jewish thinkers significantly influenced the development of western thought. When appropriate, editors should explore the intersections between their concepts and these rich philosophical traditions and aim to include Arabic and/or Jewish thinkers. Experts of Islamic, Arabic, and Jewish philosophy are prepared to make recommendations.

(2) The important contributions that women have made to the history of philosophy, especially in the early modern period, have now been widely acknowledged. Editors are encouraged to engage contributors who are able to include this material, when appropriate. Specialists on women philosophers and the history of feminism are available to advise.

(3) The history of western philosophy has traditionally been divided into neat periods: ancient Greek, medieval, Renaissance, early modern, nineteenth century, modern. While these temporal boundaries may suit some concepts, other notions have marched to their own temporal drum. Editors are encouraged to rethink conventional periodizations and present their historical narrative in the form most suitable to the arc of the volume. The need to reconfigure historical boundaries would be an important point to discuss in the introduction.

(4) The books in the OPC series will not use the term 'Neoplatonism' or its cognates. Rather, 'Platonism' and 'Platonist' will be used with specific periods noted. The former is an invention of the eighteenth century and encourages more confusion than clarity, especially when applied to Renaissance and early modern figures. The latter is clearer, especially for books with a wide audience in mind.

(5) The books in the series will be sensitive to recent historical work that questions standard historical categories and implies that words like 'western' and 'counter-reformation' not be capitalized.

Interdisciplinarity

One of the most innovative features of OPC is its recognition of the rich relation that art, architecture, music, literature, science, religion, and other cultural practices have with philosophy. Historians in all fields flirt with philosophical ideas, while historians of philosophy have learned the philosophical benefits of greater contextualization. OPC *Reflections* speak to this need for smart interdisciplinary exchange between philosophy and non-philosophical materials. Editors are expected to include at least four *Reflections*; they are encouraged to have more (see details below).

Individual Books in the Series

Each book will have five main parts.

1. The *introduction*, written by the editor(s), is an important part of the volume. It should do two things: motivate the concept and trace the arc of the volume. Often, the best way to motivate the concept will be to explicate the main problems it was designed to solve. The goal here is to make clear both *why* philosophers were concerned to solve *those* problems and *how* the concept was supposed to do so. Having displayed the philosophical significance of the concept, the introduction will then tell the over-arching story of the chapters. This introductory material should engage philosophers and be comprehensible to upper level students and scholars in related fields.

2. The 8-12 *chapters* will explicate the most significant steps in the transformations of the concept in the history of European philosophy and in some cases describe the role of the concept in other prominent traditions. Most volumes will contain 6-8 chapters, which are meant to tell an integrated story.

3. *Reflections* are short essays (about 1200-1600 words or 3-4 pages of printed text), written by specialists in art, literature, music, religion, science, or other disciplines related to philosophy that reflect on the concept from a new or surprising perspective. For more information on Reflections, see section below, *Reflections: Getting them Right*.

4. Illustrations and Images are encouraged. Black and white images may be included in chapters and many Reflections will have at least one image. For more information, see *Illustrations and Images* below.

5. Back matter will include:

(1) Bibliography, divided into primary and secondary materials. Some editors may also want to include an *Index locorum* (index of texts cited).

(2) Thorough Index, see below

(3) A *Lexicon* will be included in some volumes. Because terms go in and out of use, are translated into other languages in surprising ways, and often do not track the shifts in the construal of the concept, a *Lexicon* will be a helpful addition to some books. Non-Latin scripts (e.g., Arabic, Hebrew) will be allowed. Christia Mercer, the series editor, will offer some help with these, if editors need it.

Enlisting Contributors

Here are some recommendations about enlisting contributors:

- Make clear the nature of the series, what it is (an attempt to offer tightly argued histories of main concepts and to be somewhat interdisciplinary) and what it is not (*not* another “companion”).
- It is important to invite contributors who have a clear record of scholarly excellence.
- Potential contributors will want to know the strategy of the volume. So, they should be sent a summary of the editor’s understanding of the concept, including the main questions of focus (or a first stab at them). This can act as a draft of the introduction to the volume.
- Enlist 3-4 contributors whom you know and then write to those scholars with whom you are less familiar.

Reflections: Getting them Right

What they are supposed to be: *Reflections* are short essays (about 1200-1600 words or 3-4 pages of printed text). Each is a self-contained unit, placed between chapters. They should be written by specialists in art, literature, music, religion, science, or other disciplines related to philosophy and should *reflect* on the concept from a new or surprising perspective. Every volume is expected to include at least one Reflection using an example drawn from art or music. Reflections are not a way to fill gaps in the philosophical story. Rather, they should explore the boundary between philosophical and extra-philosophical materials. Most will focus on examples drawn from art, music, theater, science, or literature. In other words, the point of Reflections is to use non-philosophical materials to enliven, enrich, or exemplify the philosophical concept. Successful Reflections usually focus on one or two specific examples (of literature, art, music) in order to make their case. For examples, see *Reflections* on the website. Reflection authors are encouraged to use images when they are directly relevant to their point. Once again, every volume must include a Reflection drawn from the visual arts or music.

How to make them work: Editors have sometimes found it challenging to find the right authors for Reflections. Strategies for finding appropriate authors are: enlist a friend or colleague in the relevant departments (e.g., music, art, biology) or

ask such colleagues to identify talented advanced graduate students (although this should be the exception and not the rule). Feel free to confer with Christia Mercer. It is important to communicate clearly to the prospective Reflection author the set of problems discussed in the volume. A Reflection should engage (at least) one of these problems from the perspective of its author's discipline.

Illustrations and Images

Most Reflections and some chapters will use illustrations and images to illustrate points and enrich discussion. For models of Reflections and their use of illustrations, see the OPC website. For help with tracking down appropriate images and obtaining permissions, see Submitting a Manuscript on the OPC website.

Workshops

To maximize collaboration among authors and encourage philosophical coherence, every volume editor is expected to have a workshop. Each workshop has three main goals. It will set a firm deadline for contributions, allow scholars to discuss their work, and make the volume as consistent in terminology and ideas as possible. Having exchanged drafts of chapters ahead of time, contributors will be able to discuss their views and coordinate their efforts at the workshop. Each workshop will also encourage a broader interdisciplinary range than historians of philosophy usually attempt. Workshop organizers are encouraged to invite some Reflection authors and/or specialists from other disciplines who will write Reflections, with the aim of approaching the concept from other perspectives (artistic, cultural, literary, scientific, and so on).

Submitting a Proposal

An editor should first submit a draft proposal to the series editor and then (upon her recommendation) to Lucy Randall (Lucy.Randall@oup.com), Philosophy Editor at OUP, who will have it peer-reviewed. Editors should NOT submit it directly to OUP without confirmation from Christia Mercer that it is ready to go.

Proposals should include:

--- A summary of the goal of the series. This will help referees in assessing the proposal. Editors can either use the Main Goals of the Series (see above) or materials on the OPC website.

--- A provisional summary of the volume, including predictions about its focus and arc. In effect, this is a preliminary version of the introduction. In most cases, 2-3

pages will suffice. This is the trickiest and most important part of the proposal. It needs to inform both the contributors and the outside readers about the volume's focus before the details of the volume are in place. Questions to address are: what debates does the concept engage and what problems is it supposed to solve? Some concepts shift in meaning and centrality. Do the problems that the concept is supposed to solve change significantly? Try to offer some predictions about the overall arc of the volume and a series of questions that articulate its main concerns. The questions will keep the contributors focused. See OPC website for examples of successful proposals.

--- A list of contents, including a brief abstract of each chapter (3-5 sentences) and a bio of each contributor (1-2 sentences). Each abstract should summarize the point of the chapter paying attention to the questions posed by the editor.

--- Ideas about 3 or 4 *Reflections*. These suggestions may be very preliminary.

--- Time-line, including proposed deadlines for chapter drafts, workshop, and completed manuscript.

Editors should feel free to contact the series editor, Christia Mercer, with questions.