



Predatory Publishing, Predatory Academics, Predatory Conferences and Predatory Universities

Gregory T. Papanikos

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Predatory Publishing, Predatory Academics, Predatory Conferences and Predatory Universities

*By Gregory T. Papanikos**

This non-academic paper is based on the author's long experience in organizing academic and professional conferences as well as editing books and journals. The evidence is not scientific; it is anecdotal. However, personal contacts with more than 20,000 academics from 150 different countries are a good number (though not a scientifically-representative sample and without any structure) to shed some light on the issues discussed here. The purpose of the paper is purely didactic, or better, self-didactic, i.e., learning by writing. In other words, I am putting my thoughts on a piece of paper, or now on a parallelogrammatical screen. Hope and wish others learn as well.

Keywords: *predatory, journals, publishers, academics, researchers, universities, conferences*

Introduction

This paper is based on my more than twenty-five years' experience as the President of the *Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER): A World Association of Academics and Researchers*.¹ Since 1995, I had the pleasure to meet and discuss with 20,000 academics from 150 different countries;² I had the opportunity to organize and chair many forums on publishing and researching;³ and since 2014, I am administering the publication of 16 academic ejournals. All ATINER's conferences take place in Athens in an area that is considered as the worst (non-touristic) section of the city. Still, one may call it academic tourism

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¹I use this experience to form my own opinions, but I know many academic members of ATINER who would never agree with the style of expressing my arguments. Some of them would find it very offensive. However, I cannot help it because I am addicted (like many people are addicted to reading pornography) to the cynical school of thought, to the great ancient writer Aristophanes, and above all to the wisest man on earth, Socrates, who used the same method known now as Socratic irony. The fact that I use irony does not make me Socrates. Socrates had a very strong view on predatory academic schools as he had about predatory teachers, e.g., Protagoras. In other words, my opinions here do not echo the average opinion of ATINER's members. On the contrary, my thoughts are outliers, but not *outliers*. However, living in a democracy, I fully exercise my right to isegoria.

²I do not have to emphasize that not all participants appreciated my skills in organizing these events. As an economist, of course, I value what people do and not what they say. It seems that a growing number of people have liked what ATINER is doing because more events are added and more people are coming every year. In economic jargon, at ATINER, over the years, there is a monotonic increase in participation albeit a non-Euclidean one. More on ATINER's mission can be found at <https://www.atiner.gr/mission> and its policies at: <http://www.atiner.gr/acceptance>.

³A full list of these events is available at: <https://www.atiner.gr/event>.

because infamous parts of the city have their own merit and attract some tourists' attention. As explained below, all conference participants are beforehand warned about this; therefore, they are solely responsible for their choices.

The discussion on the issues discussed here has been endless, but not exhaustive. I am still learning because new academics and researchers are coming with fresh ideas. The most "authoritarian" opinions on how to organize academic events or publish an academic article/journal/book are usually held by professors affiliated with Anglo-Saxon universities (U.K., USA, Canadian, Australian etc.), who, by-the-way, have never organized a single academic event, or have been an academic publisher, or an editor of a publication. It is very common in the academic world for professors to have opinions without knowledge, which is the case if you express an opinion for an issue outside the area of your own research. On the other hand, my strong opinions on these issues remain the same before and after the symposiums; the latter is used in its ancient etymological sense and is an integral part of ATINER's events inspired by the logistics of the ancient Athenian symposiums as described by Plato and Xenophon.

In this paper, I will organize my arguments along four main themes. However, in the next section, I will give a dictionary definition of academic predatory practices. Using this definition, I will then outline what we (should) mean by predatory academic journals, predatory academic conferences, predatory academic researchers-professors, and, most importantly, predatory academic universities. Each one of these four themes is separately examined in the following four sections. Then, I will conclude.

More space is devoted to predatory economic journals and predatory academic conferences because they have attracted the attention of academics, primarily because of the new methods of disseminating information through the internet. Predatory researchers and universities--mainly in the Anglo-Saxon world—are left out of this nasty exchange of fire. Only independent publishers are caught in the cross-fire, even if they have been around for many, many years, as is the case with ATINER.

I will not discuss so much the issue of good and bad, low-quality and high-quality journals, high-quality and low-quality conferences, top and low academics, and top and low universities. Who am I to judge them? This depends very much on the criteria used. Predatory practices are ubiquitous for both low and high; top and bottom. The criteria affect the ranking of bad and good universities; a top and bottom university; a low and a high "quality" university.

Let me demonstrate with a personal experience. I was chairing a roundtable discussion on higher education; one of the many. One contributor, being affiliated with a top historical British university, was emphasizing the high ranking of her

university in the relevant and well-known lists;⁴ the criterion was the high-quality research production as measured, among many other things, by their faculty publications in academic journals; mostly predatory, as I define them in the following sections. Another contributor, who was the President of an applied university in Germany, smiling, said that our criterion of success is different. We value the employability of our graduates, and according to this criterion, we are number one in the world because all our graduates start working from day one after graduation. He added that they do not really care about research and publications, but do not discourage them either. Of course, both universities were “top” according to the criterion used. However, there was a huge difference in their predatory practices. The British university was charging fees that were ten times higher than the German university for their international students who were attracted by the “name” of the university. Predatory difference at its best. However, what are predatory practices anyway?

Academic Predatory Practices: A Definition

The Cambridge English Dictionary gives three definitions of the word “predatory”. Only one is relevant here: a predatory person or organization tries to get something that belongs to someone else.⁵

I will be using this definition to describe academic predatory practices. In academia, a person or an organization tries to get something, such as money, e.g., fees, salaries, promotions, and research funds, by publishing academic journals (predatory journals), organizing conferences (predatory conferences), teaching and researching (predatory professors and researchers), and offering courses (predatory universities).

I use money as being equivalent in meaning to any current and future material rewards; it does not include spiritual rewards from doing research and teaching which is useful to current and future generations; especially the youth of the world. This important issue has been the subject matter of all Platonic Dialogues especially *Protagoras* on which I say more below.

In the following four sections, I will explain all four academic predatory practices.

⁴The most popular of these lists are controlled by private companies which make profits by advertising university programs, among many other things. This implies that there are universities who pay money to advertise how good their academic programs are. There are students (customers) who are influenced by such advertisements. As an economist, I am not at all against these predatory practices. I am against not acknowledge them as predatory because it creates an unfair competition. Economists worship competition as long as it does not affect their salaries and honors. Then, it becomes unfair and they ask for government intervention.

⁵See <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/predatory>.

Predatory Publishing

How do publishers of academic journals make money? Where do they get their money from? How does one become a predatory publisher?

In the old good days of the pre-electronic epoch, academic journals were able to get their predatory money from (a) charging subscribers a predatory fee; (b) charging libraries an even higher predatory fee; (c) charging submitting authors all kinds of predatory fees; and (d) providing advertising space for books and other academic events.

I should note that this paper does not present any literature review even though this literature is known to the author, lest I create a white list of good articles and a black list by excluding many others; the interested reader can find on his/her own many papers and books that discuss the developments of the private publishing industry in the new epoch of electronic publishing. Thanks to digital technologies, these are easy to be found and available to download immediately.

On the “business” of citing and selecting references, it is a business because profits are being made. I was told the following Aristophanic story by an editor of a good journal. In the journal’s guidelines to the authors, they had an example of how to report references, using an imaginary (non-existent) publication. Many submitted papers had put this non-existent publication in their references, citing it in the main text. A paper that actually did not exist! This shows that many people cite and refer to publications without even reading them. Of course, reading is important, but understanding is more important; however, this, again, is another story.

Publishing in the Electronic (Digital) Age

The publishing industry has drastically changed in the post-electronic era. Now, everybody can become a publisher: an individual author who publishes (uploads) his own papers (as I do with this paper) or books (as I do with all my books now), a small organization, an academic association, and, above all, private publishing companies. The latter were and are the largest predatory publishers⁶ and are threatened by the existence of the independent publishers because publishing has become almost costless; very few academics and researchers use, and therefore buy, hardcopies. Papers and books are electronically distributed.

⁶The industry is oligopolistic with strong barriers to entry. One of the biggest private publishing companies controls the whole process; not only publishes predatory journals, but it is behind the evaluations of these journals by supplying impact factors by the method of popping up similar publications. Again, these tricks of the predatory private publishers need a separate paper to be described, which goes beyond this paper’s analysis.

Today, predatory publishers and predatory academic journals get their predatory money from eight sources:

1. Predatory submission fees
2. Predatory processing fees
3. Predatory editing fees
4. Predatory publication fees
5. Open access predatory fees paid by the author
6. Open access predatory fees paid by the reader
7. Transfer of property rights from authors to the publishing company
8. Providing editorial services to academic associations at a predatory fee, promising that it will increase the impact factor of the journal and the citations of the papers published

I briefly discuss all of them. Many good and bad journals charge a submission fee.⁷ Every paper submitted must be accompanied by a non-refundable submission fee.

If the paper is accepted, then the journal might ask for a processing or an editing fee. Some journals may not charge a submission fee, but they make sure that the paper needs editing which is done by the journal's publisher at a cost. The latter may include English editing or even translation from other languages to the language of the journal, usually English.

Predatory publication fees are usually related to hard copies of the journal and offprints. Authors pay to get a copy of a journal's issue in which their paper appeared and they pay more for additional offprints. This fee has been dying off because very few people use hard copies and/or offprints anymore.

The next two predatory fees are good sources of revenue. Many journals demand a fee from authors in order to make their paper freely available, i.e., readers do not pay to access the paper. This propagates the wider dissemination of scientific work. Only the papers whose authors paid the predatory fee are open to a wider audience.

A personal story follows. I published a paper after an invitation in a relatively good journal. After a year or so, I received an email from the publisher of the journal asking me if I wanted my paper to be open access. They demanded 2,000 US dollars for this. I never responded. I ignored them. I am old. I do not need citations for investment, but I do like citations because these can make me feel

⁷The roles of fees and the waiting time in publishing a paper has been extensively examined in the relevant literature; some justify fees as an efficient and effective way of discriminating between good and bad paper submissions. I totally disagree. The mistake they make is that all "publishers" have the same motivation, e.g., making money. They underestimate the role of "vanity". Again, this discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper.

important, i.e., I need them for consumption purposes. The role of “vanity” which I mentioned above. However, if I needed citations and international exposure, I might have been tempted to pay the fee as an investment which will bring me future returns in terms of higher salaries, promotions, distinctions, invitations to conferences as a keynote speaker with everything paid including an honorarium, etc.⁸

The predatory open access fee is similar to the previous one, but with one important exception: the fee is per reader; all other readers do not have free access to the paper. Private predatory publishing companies thrive on these two open access fees.

I consider all academic periodicals who demand the authors to sign a transfer of property rights such as the copyright to the publisher as being predatory.

Finally, private (for-profit) publishers make a lot of money by providing editorial services to various independent academic associations promising them that they can increase their impact factors. What is important to note is not the quality of the paper which matters, but the private business which promotes it. One of the most ridiculous arguments I have heard from predatory professors is that a good journal must have good English. Usually, apart from not speaking English very well, they know no other language. What is ridiculous? Suppose I write an econometrics paper, full of mathematics, statistics, numbers etc. My English is good, but it does not meet the standards of their cockney accent. Should the paper be rejected? I leave the answer to the readers, even though this was a rhetorical question.

The above criteria are necessary, but not sufficient. Many journals may not satisfy all eight categories, but they can still be considered predatory. These journals are the victims of what I call academic “pornography”, i.e., they are listed in various black lists, which, like pornography, are visited and cited by academics. This important issue is discussed in the next section which readers are warned of its obscene language.

The Academic “Pornographic” Industry

(Warning: this section is for adults only; not necessarily determined by age)

Pornography is a Greek word. It has been used by Aristophanes, Demosthenes and many others. This section of the paper is based on this ancient long Greek tradition. Of course, the word is used here metaphorically. Readers who do not like

⁸Even though in the old good days--meaning that I was young and not that my old days were something special—, such fees did not exist, I had enjoyed all these benefits coming from a journal publication. Predatory fees included mainly journal subscription fees and some submission fees. The big money was made by the subscriptions of the university and other libraries following the common microeconomic policy of price discrimination.

the “dirty” language of Aristophanes, can read all the following sections of the paper, but not the conclusion, where I use again Aristophanes’ approach.

It is well known that the English language is a predatory language. They have stolen many words from the Greek language along with many monuments that now proudly and unashamedly are displayed in the British Museum. Their culture is mostly predatory and plagiaristic (they do not cite their sources, such as music which has many Indian characteristics). The word “pornography” is a synthesis of two words “porno” which means a prostitute and the well-known “graphy” which means writing. By the way, prostitute is another word which was the prey of the English language predatory practices. However, I leave its etymology to my readers’ imagination for the time being; I will discuss it again in the concluding section of this non-academic Aristophanic paper.

I found out, in 2015, when ATINER started the publication of its ejournals (16 now), that there is another criterion of classified a journal as “predatory”. According to this criterion, if you have the *potential* to charge any of the fees mentioned above, then your journal is a predatory journal, and as such, is included in the black lists which are uploaded onto websites and social media. Please notice: you do not charge anything now, but you have the potential to charge in the future, according to one man’s opinion, which is expressed without knowledge. This is the reason your journal is *possibly* a predatory journal. Some knowledgeable readers— I feel like Diogenes searching for them in the bright Athenian daylight— may point out correctly that this is a direct recognition of the journal’s high quality because only good journals can survive in the long run. If the journal does not survive, then it cannot charge a fee. This Aristotelian thinking does not square well with those who read academic pornography, i.e., visit and cite black list of any sort.

I am not joking! These lists are freely available on the internet and they clearly state, for obvious legal purposes, that the list includes such journals. It is amazing how many idiot⁹ academics¹⁰ use these lists that they fish in the internet to defame independent publishers who are not predatory according to the eight criteria, but they will possibly become predatory in the future because they have the potential. These academics that use such information uncritically from the internet and various social media are engaging in reading academic “pornography”. Academic “pornography” includes all websites whose aim is to defame other academics’ works by developing black lists. Academics who visit these websites are reading academic “pornography”.

⁹The word is used in its modern English version which is different from its ancient and modern Greek meaning. Sometimes the predators of other peoples’ languages are not the best to appreciate such things as the meaning of words.

¹⁰My evidence is anecdotal, but I have found out that those academics, who visit these academic “pornographic” websites, do so after doing a search with the word “porno”. All academic “pornographic” websites pop up along with the non-academic ones. Given that all academics-researchers have an intrinsic curiosity about everything, they click on the academic “pornography”. This explains their popularity.

Normal non-pornographic academics value white lists. Black lists, grey lists or of any other color lists are academic “pornographic” lists maintained by academic “prostitutes”.¹¹ Many universities and their professors maintain such websites and social media in order to promote academic “pornography”. In this case the university is the “whore” house; the professors who maintain black lists¹² are the “hetaerae” and those who visit them are the customers of these “porno” houses. As I have found out from much feedback over the recent years, there are many academics, from good and bad universities, primarily from the Anglo-Saxon countries, who systematically visit such “academic pornographic” websites and “pornographic” social media. It is obvious that they are addicted to academic “pornographic” literature.

My feeling is that visits to academic “pornographic” websites may exceed the visits to regular porno websites and they might be strongly correlated. I think that their universities should block visits to such websites as they should do in the regular pornographic websites. My prognosis is that their faculty mental health will improve and from totally unstable it can become more stable. This will reduce tensions in various departmental meetings, which are due to too much watching of academic “pornographic” websites. Unfortunately for many, it may be too late because the feedback I am getting from some of them is that they are completely lost causes. I have pinpointed such lost causes in very good universities;¹³ they host and maintain academic “pornographic” websites and various kinds of academic “pornographic” social media.¹⁴ Academic “pornographic” websites are not

¹¹Pornography is directly related to prostitution. It is quite common in the academic world many professors to prostitute themselves, literally and metaphorically, in order to advance in academia. It happens in so many other places of work. Academia could not be an exception. The expression “they suck” the professor, the chair, the dean, the president of the university is not used by accident in the English language. Sucking in the English-speaking institutes is flourishing and ubiquitous. The larger and more prestigious the university, the bigger and more professional its “suckers” are. They start as students and they continue as teachers and researchers. I met many academics who advertised and promoted their ability of “sucking” by uploading this information on their personal website with the necessary photos attached to it.

¹²Apart from the obvious sexual connotations that I imply here on the black lists, their existence has a very black political connotation: Nazis and many other dictators develop black lists in order to kill the “other”. A similar role plays the black lists in the academia: they want to “kill” other academics. For example, big private publishing companies lose a lot of money by the existence of independent publishers.

¹³One of our Vice Presidents, a professor himself in an American university, told me that a professor of a top university used his blog, which is hosted by his university to defame associations and publishers based on evidence from academic “pornographic” websites. The Vice President sent him an email, but he never responded; he is continuing his academic “pornographic” use. He is either a lost cause or is making money by creating barriers to entry in this industry through the use of unethical and illegal practices.

¹⁴Actually, one small American university which hosted such an academic “pornographic” website closed the academic “whore” house after many complaints that he was selling hard core academic “pornography”. The university even made a public announcement that the academic “whore” house is not open for business. However, as in the old good days in the American Wild West when a whore house was closing down in a city because of people’s reactions then the whole business with its “prostitutes” and “pimps” was moved to

limited only to academic journals evaluations, but they have been expanded to defame (some call it evaluate) academic teachers and universities as well. The internet is full of such “pornographic” websites. In many cases, I cannot avoid them because when I write a professor’s name to get more information on him, at the top of the list comes all the ratings of this professor as a teacher. If it is true that what comes on the first page of a search is because of so many people visiting these websites, then, I must admit, that these “pornographic” websites have many visitors.

Why Do Academics Want to Publish?

Why would someone want to publish? Socrates never published a piece. His citations per published work tend to infinity. I will come back to Socrates below because he was the first to point out predatory practices by universities (schools) and professors (teachers). Academics want to publish in order to become predatory academics so they can command a higher predatory fee for their predatory teaching and researching.¹⁵ This is examined in more detail below in this paper.

At this point, I want to express my thoughts on publishing in top journals as a requirement for promotion and tenure. Many top universities, most of them predatory universities, demand that their academic staff publish a certain number of papers every year to specific journals. In doing so, they create a demand for journal publications. This is the reason which explains why predatory journals flourish. They do not care about the quality of the paper or the idiosyncratic self-plagiarism of their paper which no software of originality can capture, but it must be published in a top journal; usually a predatory journal.

I had the opportunity to evaluate applications for tenure in some North American universities under my capacity of ATINER’s President. I was appalled by the similarity of the research papers of the applicant. I read all their publications and I could not find what their real contribution was. One after the other repeated the same argument, using the same literature and only changing their data generation process a little.

Let me give a hypothetical example to demonstrate this important fact which explains why professors have such shallow knowledge. It makes perfect economic sense if you want to thrive in the academic world. An excellent Ph.D. graduate from a top predatory university in the world, usually known as Ivy League universities, did an excellent study developing a new theoretical framework in some of the many educational processes and applied it using the data generation process of the state of his university. He published 1-2 papers out of this thesis in top

another city. This is what happened with this “whore” house as well. It moved to another whore house, i.e., website.

¹⁵‘Wealth is what their soul wants’, said Hesiod in 8th century BCE, and they can sell their soul to get it, I add.

predatory journals. Then, all his life applied the same framework to all other USA states, publishing 1-2 papers per state, and of course citing all the previous papers. In a couple of years, this fellow, professor now, would have produced more than 100 papers published in various top predatory journals. Of course, once he runs out of data generation processes in the USA, he can expand the applications to other countries (200 of them), areas and regions. Of course, every five years he can reproduce the old studies using the new data generated in these years.

I was told that top departments of economics demand from their academic staff to publish in top journals--like the ones published by the *American Economic Association*--a certain number of papers per year. In the good old days, the total number of papers to be published in these journals was fixed. Now, not only have they increased the number of journals published (currently eight), but they increased the issues per year and the papers per issue. This gives more publication spaces to potential authors of papers.

There is something fishy here. Suppose that the top university required someone to publish in a few top journals that published only 100 papers per year. Now the journal doubles the number of papers published per year. This way the author has doubled his probability of being published, assuming, of course, that the numbers of researchers who want to publish does not increase. Given that such publications like the ones published by the *American Economic Association* are controlled by the same professors whose publications, or their students' publications, in these journals are evaluated by their university, an increase in the supply of paper spaces increases the probability of getting published.¹⁶ In this case we have an inflation due to monetary expansion (supply of more paper space) which of course will devalue the value of money (research quality). I predict a hyper-inflation.

Predatory Academic Conferences

Academics not only need papers in academic journals, but they should participate in international and national conferences. This is big business, money to be made, by organizing academic conferences. It is called academic tourism. What constitutes a predatory academic conference? It is very difficult to define what is a questionable (predatory, vanity, bogus) conference, since most conferences charge fees to cover their costs. According to a resource guide developed by Sarah Elaine

¹⁶Another big business for predatory professors and researchers is co-authorship, but this requires another long paper. Part of this fraud includes academics "prostituting" themselves by co-authoring papers for money. This might explain why you see so many international co-authorships (they call it collaborations) between let's say USA academics and Chinese academics. Many presenters at ATINER did not understand the paper they were presenting. Some of them did not even read it. If you asked them a question, the street-smart would respond that my co-author wrote that part of the paper. All "prostitutes" are street-smart boys.

Eaton,¹⁷ questionable conferences must have 12 typical characteristics. These characteristics are reproduced in Table 1.

Even though the existence of a few such characteristics do not make a conference questionable, nevertheless all of them are useful to demonstrate what a perfect non-predatory conference is. I use ATINER's experience in organizing more than 500 academic conferences and other academic events since 1995 to show how these can be applied in a real setting. I am not discussing them here, but I have prepared a table in the appendix which demonstrates the application of these criteria *vis-a-vis* my long experience with ATINER.

I critically evaluate the criteria of Table 1 and propose some reforms. Criterion 1 is very important. Not only should the academic conference not be organized by a for-profit organization, but non-profit conference organizers should not get funding from for profit organizations. Many credible scholarly or scientific societies or associations get money (funding) from not so credible private companies. This is more than obvious in the medical and pharmaceutical conferences of very "credible" international associations. One way of bribing the medical profession is through conferences in exotic places.

Table 1. *Conference Criteria*

1	Event is organized by a for-profit entity, rather than a credible scholarly or scientific society or association.	7	The conference is marketed as a holiday in a desirable location. The event is held at a resort or a popular tourist destination and marketed as a holiday, rather than an academic or scientific event.
2	Conferences that combine a number of fields, topics or disciplines into a single conference. Be particularly wary of alleged conferences that combine multiple, unrelated topics into a single event.	8	The conference name bears a striking resemblance to that of a credible or highly prestigious conference, but has subtle minor differences in its name.
3	The conference uses a free e-mail address, such as a Gmail address.	9	Organizers guarantee your contribution will be published as an article in the journal associated with the conference. Like the conference, the journal is also predatory and the organizers may later insist on additional article processing charges to publish your article.
4	The organizers spam prospective attendees to submit proposals and register. Often, these spam e-mails contain hyperbolic language about how prestigious the conference is.	10	The conference websites are unstable. They may change URLs or have no record of conferences in previous years.

¹⁷See <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579189.pdf>.

5	Information about who is organizing the conference is either unclear or nonexistent; or the organizer is not well known or reputable.	11	The website text contains poor grammar or numerous spelling errors.
6	Acceptances are promised with a very short turnaround time (often less than four weeks).	12	Conference fees seem quite high, compared to those run by non-profit scholarly societies or associations.

Source: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579189.pdf>.

Number two is tricky. For example, a conference on methodology and research ethics cuts across all disciplines. At ATINER, we wanted to organize a conference on education and research practices: similarities and differences across disciplines. Does this conference violate the second criterion? My feeling is that it does not. This depends very much on the number of participants allowed to present. At ATINER, the number of participants is restricted to a maximum of 50 per conference and a minimum required of 20 presentations. Usually, conferences which cover all disciplines aim at attracting hundreds or thousands of participants with an unlimited upper limit. However, if you have an upper limit this criterion becomes redundant. In many conferences which take place in the country with the most predatory journals, conferences, professors and universities, such conferences are a big business with thousands of participants every year.

Number three is completely irrelevant because the cost of getting an email and a website is nil now. Thus, there is no need to use a gmail. Many professors use gmail as well.

Number four and five are good criteria. ATINER claims the opposite. Its conferences are not the best in the world. Professors who are at the top of the list are overqualified to present at ATINER's conferences which never invite keynote speakers and never pay such predatory requests. Personal experience follows. Many years back when a few philosophers asked us to organize an annual international conference in philosophy because there was not a single conference organized permanently in Athens, I was approached by a group of people who were representing a well-known professor of philosophy to invite him as a keynote speaker.¹⁸ I explained to them that we never invite keynote speakers and of course never pay for them. For us all, our speakers are invited and welcomed speakers. Then, I added, according to their criteria usually applied to rank a predatory conference as high quality, ATINER's conferences are of low quality. Using a food analogy, we sell souvlaki and not filet mignon. We invite academics who are ranked below the 10% of the list of academic achievement. "Yes," they responded, "but by inviting the Great Philosopher they can be improved." I

¹⁸There are private agencies which at a fee undertake to promote a professor to be invited to various conferences as a keynote speaker. A good "whore" needs a good "pimp". By the way I was approached by such an agency to "prostitute" my academic services. I leave to my readers' imagination my response.

responded that this is not in our mission. ATINER's mission is to bring to Athens all those who teach the youth of the world, i.e., they are academics to learn by seeing and not learn by listening to someone for hours.

Number six is problematic because it says something of substance. At ATINER, we follow a process that lasts less than 2 weeks. Firstly, all incoming abstracts get a code so they become anonymous (one day's work by an administrative assistant). Secondly, a research assistant relevant to the conference subject checks all the entries of the abstract; checks the credentials of the submitting authors (one day's work). If the entries in the abstract form are not clear, then the research assistant asks the author(s) for clarification (another day's work). In many cases if the claims of the author(s) are too bogus to believe them discounted by his/her previous contribution to the literature, then the entire paper is requested not for publication, but to be considered for presentation. If the abstract is proper, then an academic member is looking to see if the abstract meets the basic requirements of ATINER's mission and policy (another day's work). If not, they are rejected. If they are not rejected, they are sent out for review to reviewers and the academic members responsible for the specific conference, making clear to them that these abstracts meet the basic criteria set by ATINER, which everybody can see because they are on the internet for decades now. Usually, the academic members respond in less than a week. In total, 10 days are too many for a decision to be made. What are the results of this process? On average they are not bad, but the standard deviation is very large, meaning some presentations are excellent, but some are very bad and ATINER knows that; although all teach the youth of the world. ATINER's policy is a balance of countries. Thus, countries whose academics never presented at ATINER are given a priority even though their presentation is shaky.

Actually, the decision on a presentation could be made in one day. At 9:00 a.m. (Athens time) an abstract is received from a Chinese Professor from Beijing (3:00 p.m. in China) and he begs that he wants a decision and an official letter of acceptance because tomorrow morning he has an appointment with the notorious Greek Embassy in Beijing for a visa. Just today, they told him, they need an official letter from ATINER and the appointment is tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. Beijing time. At ATINER we initiate the emergency plan. At 9:00 a.m. (Athens time) the abstract is evaluated by the administration and the researchers; at 10:00 a.m. the abstract is evaluated by the President¹⁹ or one of the Vice Presidents, whoever is available,

¹⁹I have estimated that since 1995, I have read, as President, more than 50,000 abstracts before were sent to reviewers, but after have been examined by our researchers. The researchers state the facts, but me or a VP decides what is sent out for review or is desk rejected. In the early years my verdict had considerable difference from the verdicts of the reviewers. Now, after so many years my verdict is 99% the same as the decision taken by the independent and more relevant reviewers. The time it takes me to review a 300-words abstract is less than 5 minutes. I call it effectiveness. By the way I am not being paid for this job. I really enjoy it; it is my leisure time. Others read books (novels or pornographic); I read abstracts, which to many people looks like a kind of perversion.

and decides whether the abstract can proceed with the review; at 11:00 a.m. (Athens time) the abstract is sent to Scotland (9:00 a.m. local time) to the academic member responsible for the conference who is professor in a top university for review and simultaneously to as many other reviewers as possible who are close to Athens time zone (from the thousands available; all are listed in ATINER's website). For the USA we must wait a few hours depending whether it was sent to the east or west coast, but it would be too late for the Chinese professor. By 1:00 p.m. (Athens time), evaluations are received. The administration prepares the official acceptance letter and sends it to the author. Local time in Beijing is 7:00 p.m. The professor, who has an appointment with the Greek embassy to get a visa, can sleep worryless in China. In total the decision is reached in four hours. It is called effectiveness. We have done it many times for some abstracts whose authors needed a decision very fast. In other words, the time that a decision is taken has absolutely nothing to do with the credibility of the whole process. The process matters. The same decision could have taken 6 months. Would it be better? In other words, for six months the professor would read and evaluate the abstract of 300 words and 5 keywords.²⁰

I totally agree with number seven. So much so that all ATINER's participants get the following warnings among many other information about what they are going to face:

- Athens: Here are a few words about Athens that may be useful if you are a first-time visitor. This city was designed 2,500 years ago. It is relatively safe (according to European statistics, it is one of the safest capitals in Europe), but it is also the third dirtiest (especially downtown where the conference takes place) in Europe, after London and Paris. On the latter issue, many Greeks, including some visitors to Athens, are working very hard to surpass these other two historical cities. Also, for conferences that take place in downtown Athens (centre) please be prepared to face traffic, noise, pollution, demonstrations and all kind of "revolutions" by small groups of people, usually university students. There are common (everyday) phenomena since antiquity. Useful general information can be found at <http://www.thisisathens.org>, an official website for the city of Athens. The

²⁰When I was master student in Canada it happened to be at the office of a very good professor with excellent record of publications. It just happened that he received a snail mail (no emails those years) from the President of the Canadian Economic Association announcing a decision they have made on his abstract submission for the annual meeting of the Canadian Economic Association. His abstract was rejected. He got upset and called the President. The President told him that both blind reviewers had rejected his abstract. And then he told him something that surprised me: "I take it as a joke. This paper has been accepted for publication in the American Economic Review and you rejected it as being bad for a presentation in the annual meeting of the Canadian Economic Association." I promised myself that at ATINER, we would never make such a big mistake.

total population of Athens is close to 6 million, which includes all kinds of people from many different countries of the world.

- **Taxi Drivers: Famous last words:** Athenian taxi drivers are perfect people, when they don't drive a taxi. As human beings, they make mistakes when they deal with money. Even though no hard evidence is available, those mistakes are always to the detriment of their customers. So PLEASE, at the airport or anywhere else, if you take a taxi, BE WELL PREPARED. Give the taxi-driver a typewritten note of the hotel, or other destination, and its address. Make sure that you get a clear receipt. Tell him that you need one for your company/university in order to get reimbursed. As you enter the taxi, make a note of its license plate number. If you fall in love with the driver, this would be the only way we can find him/her. If you hate taxi-drivers, take an airport bus or the metro. You do not save money if you take a bus and then a taxi. In general, the cost of a taxi is very cheap in Athens, but NEVER pick a taxi from the street; this is a sport that only Athenians are able to play, and not all of them play it very well. Always call for a taxi, or ask someone else to do it for you, e.g., hotel, restaurant, etc. There might be an additional small charge when you call a taxi.
- If you are curious how Greece, Greeks, and Democracy were created please click [here](#). Warning: If you hate Aristophanes, please do not read it. You will be offended!

These warnings hardly make the place of the conference a desirable one. Of course, visitors and conference participants can do many things, but not as a part of the conference days which are normally scheduled on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Number eight is straightforward and it is up to the participant to find this out. At ATINER we have been victims of such predatory practices because all ATINER's events are unique, and as the ancient Pericles said in his famous words, Athens "is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing," and to that extent from copying.

Number nine is very important. To tackle this important issue ATINER does not publish any conference proceedings and it makes clear that very few papers are accepted in its journals, which, by the way, meet all eight requirements, presented in the previous section, of a non-predatory journal, with the exception of the criterion of being potentially predatory. It is true that given the improvement of ATINER's journals, predatory is at the door. However, to meet this tremendous pressure of publishing, ATINER edits six types of publications:

1. Abstract Books (4 days after the conference used to be but starting 2022 the time lapse was extended to 2-3 weeks because the format has changed)
2. ATINER's Conference Presentation Series (based on submission)

3. Online Paper Series (based on submission and reviewing)
4. Books: Collection of Papers from various conferences
5. 16 e-Journals

Number 10 is the most important of all. ATINER's conference website remains the same and it does not change year after year. On the first page of the website, the visitor can see and download all the previous years' programs of the conference as well as the abstract book.

Number 11 is completely irrelevant. My English is not good. Does this make my conference questionable? Does it make my paper poor? Even though at ATINER we do not face such a problem, I repeat what I do say in my opening remarks since 1995: English is unfortunately an international language. Many academics are unaware of the fact that English is not the only language in the world. They are "monophonies" and most importantly monolithic. Their monophony in English makes them so boring. The worst participants in ATINER's conferences are the ones that their mother tongue is English and is the only language they know.

The last point is about the fees. Conferences without fees are possible only if they are financed by profit organizations and/or government organizations. However, these cannot be independent academic conferences. ATINER has never accepted sponsors with very few exceptions when international publishers, such as the Cambridge University Press, wanted to exhibit their publications. Even in this case we did not get money, but we retained the books.

In conclusion, the twelve criteria are good criteria with the qualifications I made above. However, I should mention that there are two more criteria that are not listed in Table 1, which are unique and should be added to the list when conferences are evaluated. Firstly, ATINER's events are 100% international, and secondly, the final program of every event is uploaded after the conference. It strictly displays only the names of those who actually presented and chaired sessions. Nobody else is included, even if a fee was paid. Thus, those who did not present and did not chair sessions do not appear in the final program. How many conferences in the world can claim that they meet these two criteria? I know none.

Some good predatory conferences even allow presentations in absentia. I have signed many certificates of conference attendance and paper presentations. In many cases papers are co-authored, but only one of them came to present the paper. The co-authors would ask for a certificate of attendance. I tell them that their certificate will be different. I will sign a certificate that their paper was presented by one of the authors, but the others did not attend.

Personal experience follows. Many years ago, I applied to participate in a prestigious North American Economics conference. I could not go even though I paid the fee. My name appeared in the program for years. Of course, in my CV I never included this as a paper presentation in this conference. A few years later, I

received a letter from someone who wanted a favour. He told me that we had met in the conference that I did not attend. Many prestigious predatory conferences beef up their program and make more money by allowing multiple presentations by authors. At ATINER only one presentation is allowed per participating author even if the author is willing to pay a second fee.

Predatory Academic Professors and Researchers

This and the following section are based on Plato's Dialogue *Protagoras*. Socrates accused Protagoras as being a predatory professor (teacher) and his university (school of sophism) a predatory school. According to Plato's testimony, Socrates had a great respect for the top-quality teaching and thought of Protagoras. According to Socrates, then, predatory professors and predatory universities can be of top quality, like Protagoras.

Socrates used only one criterion to define predatory professors: they get money which is based on students' fees. As researchers, they are being paid by private and public organizations to do research. One of the top Canadian universities in the world asked a good acquaintance of mine who wanted to follow Socrates' example and proposed an excellent thesis proposal and who later became very good researcher and university professor. The graduate advisor told him that here we do Ph.D. research financed by a manufacturing company and all our research should be in accordance with their demands otherwise we do not have money to give you as a scholarship. My acquaintance did his Ph.D. in the area that the big manufacturing company wanted.

Does it sound familiar? Professors and researchers are evaluated by how much research funds they bring into the university. These are the ones who have many Ph.D. students. These are what Socrates called predatory professors and researchers. Protagoras was their predecessor.

Predatory Universities and Predatory Research Institutes

Following Socrates, I define all universities which charge fees to their students as predatory universities, and all universities which get money from private and public companies to do research as predatory universities. The higher the fee, the higher is the predatoriness of the university. Remember that the correlation between how predatory a university is and its quality is strongly positive. They serve "filet mignon". However, this is a pseudo-positive correlation. Something else moves towards the same direction, which I am not analyzing here.

One might then ask the question: is it possible to have a university that does not charge fees or does not get research funds from unscrupulous organizations, which includes government departments? The answer is yes. The quality of the university has nothing to do with how predatory they are.

Education must be free for all. It must be a public good pretty much as Adam Smith claimed in his *Wealth of Nation* in 1776. Do such universities exist? Of course, they do; I studied in one of them.

All Greek universities are truly public universities. Who attends depends on merit and not on their families' material wealth (money). Students are selected after being examined in panhellenic exams. They are being relatively ranked according to their success in the tests. Of course, many families pay private tutors to increase their children's chance of getting into a university, but, at the end of the day, merit is what counts.²¹

Then students choose the order of their preferences, departments, and universities. If they do well, they go to the department and the university of their first choice. The less-qualified get into their second-best choices and some do not make it at all. Students determine which university is ranked first by revealing their preference for them.

In all Greek universities students pay no fees at all. In addition, they get all their textbooks for free. All of them get free meals per day and partial or total finance of their accommodation if they come from relatively poor families. All Greek universities are not predatory universities. Who finances them? A true public education must be financed by tax payers' money; as it should be. Anything else is nothing less than a predatory university.

How do the Greek universities perform? In absolute terms some Greek universities are ranked high in the relevant white lists. Greece has 13 universities; 11 of them make it to the top 1,000 (<10%) of the world. In relative terms they rank even higher because the majority of the Greek universities are small and have a limited number of academic departments. For example, the Athens University of Business and Economics has only 8 departments and is listed as a top university.

More important are the graduates of Greek universities. According to some studies, the USA universities employ many professors and teachers who graduated from a non-USA university. I think 50%. If the country of origin is weighted by population, then the Greek graduates are second only to Israel's. This is an indicator that truly non-predatory universities can produce good graduates. Of course, very good students can graduate from extremely predatory universities.

²¹In the mid-1970s, I wrote my own entrance exam to the Greek universities. I did not go to any private tutoring schools called *frontistirio* in Greek. My father could not really afford it without a big sacrifice. I had no difficulty getting into my preferred department which was economics. Many of my friends and schoolmates did not attend *frontistirio* either. Merit and hard work are the secrets to get knowledge, but one should enjoy knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself. In Greece we have many good examples to follow that go back 3,000 years such as Hesiod and Homer.

The interested reader-researcher can find the relevant literature easily; if s/he cannot find it, s/he is not a good researcher.

Conclusions: Sex and Education

I will come back to Aristophanes. In his masterpiece of *Plutus* (wealth), he discusses the issue of equal distribution of wealth. To demonstrate his point, he used male prostitution as an example. The old rich lady had a young lover who had sex with her for money. Once wealth was equally distributed the lady lost all the benefits she had with the unequal distribution of wealth. She did not want more money; she wanted sex with young lovers. She did not love the young man; she used him only for sex. Now she cannot because the young man has the same wealth as she does. In this society of equal distribution of wealth nobody can buy sex. This makes many people, women and men, very unhappy. However, people can still have the joy of sexual pleasure, but it will be a non-paid one.

Sex and education (research) have many common characteristics. Education (knowledge), like sex, provides great pleasure. However, some pay to consume or are being paid to produce education (sexual) services. When someone pays for sex and someone is being paid to get sex we call it prostitution, i.e., or as it is called in Plato's *Symposium*, they worship the earthy Aphrodite (the goddess of love) and this was done in "churches", but in English language they are defamed and are called "whore houses". In ancient Greek language they were called the "Temple of Love". In modern Greek they are, unfortunately, called the "Houses of Tolerance". Still, much better than the English "whore house". In its ancient English version, it meant a woman that sells her body (sexual services) for money. However, in its modern meaning it has been generalized to mean anybody who takes money to provide a service that is unethical, e.g., predatory professors and researchers. Another word for whores is prostitutes. The latter is more relative when sex and education are compared. Prostitute comes originally from two ancient Greek words: *προ + ἵσταμαι*. The meaning of word "προ" is "before", which is widely used in English as well, e.g., prognosis. The word "ἵσταμαι" means "stand out" and is the root of the English word "status or state". It is interesting that some good predatory universities and researchers are "standing out," or as it is usually called, they are "outstanding". This has the same meaning as the etymology of the Greek word prostitution. Words never lie; they always say the truth.

In Plato's *Symposium* there was another Aphrodite: The divine Aphrodite that no money was required to have sex with her. It only required ethics and knowledge. All non-predatory professors and universities should worship the divine Aphrodite. Sex and education at full harmony.

Appendix: ATINER's Conferences

It is very difficult to define what a questionable (predatory, vanity, bogus) conference is, since most conferences charge fees to cover their costs. According to a resource guide developed by Sarah Elaine Eaton (see <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED579189.pdf>), questionable conferences must have 12 typical characteristics. Even though the existence of a few such characteristics does not make a conference questionable, ATINER's events (conferences, symposiums, forums, academic meetings, courses, roundtable discussions, etc.) do not meet any of these criteria of a questionable conference. Please note that ATINER's policies on organizing events have been implemented for the past 30 years; long before the various white, black, grey and other lists were established.

	Characteristics of a Questionable Conference	ATINER's Corresponding Characteristic
1	Event is organized by a for-profit entity, rather than a credible scholarly or scientific society or association.	ATINER is a 'nonprofit-nongovernment' world association of Academics and Researchers conceived in Toronto Canada and established in 1995 in Athens Greece. Mission https://www.atiner.gr/mission and Policies (https://www.atiner.gr/policy) are available on the website. Currently, ATINER has 2507 members from 117 countries (https://www.atiner.gr/academic-members). In the past, ATINER has organized its events (including courses and research projects) jointly with international universities, such as the Institute of Education (University of London), University of Maryland, University of Oklahoma, MLC Management & Law College of Ljubljana, Georgia State University, University of Stirling, University of Glasgow, University of Birmingham, Nanyang Technology University, Sam Houston State University, University of Ottawa, etc, and with Greek Universities (AUEB, University of Athens, etc.).
2	Conferences that combine a number of fields topics or disciplines into a single conference. Be particularly wary of alleged conferences that combine multiple, unrelated topics into a single event.	All ATINER's events are organized by its various divisions and units. Each one of them corresponds to a modern university's faculties and/or departments. All these are well defined and separate disciplines. In any case, ATINER's events are small events and there is no need to combine unrelated topics.

3	<p>The conference uses a free e-mail address, such as a Gmail address.</p>	<p>ATINER employs 15 administrative and research staff, all of whom have their email addresses with an Atiner extension. In addition, all ATINER's academic members who organize the various events have their own Atiner email addresses.</p>
4	<p>The organizers spam prospective attendees to submit proposals and register. Often, these spam e-mails contain hyperbolic language about how prestigious the conference is.</p>	<p>ATINER's mission since 1995 has been exactly the opposite: ATINER DOES NOT ORGANIZE PRESTIGIOUS CONFERENCES and this is clearly stated in its policies by giving priority "to academics and researchers from countries and institutions (small universities, colleges, etc) whose access to international academic conferences and events is restricted for subjective or objective reasons". "Prestigious" and "non-prestigious" speakers present their work in sessions. Two characteristic examples are worth mentioning. A well-known Professor of Arts and Humanities and past President of a well-known North American Academic Association applied and was accepted to present as a regular presenter. Similarly, a well know scientist from a very prestigious University who was nominated for the Nobel Prize for his/her work, applied and presented as a regular presenter. No keynote speakers are allowed. Only "prestigious" events discriminate between keynote and non-keynote speakers. ATINER receives many applications to invite academics as keynote speakers for free, but given that our conferences are not "prestigious", we never do.</p>
5	<p>Information about who is organizing the conference is either unclear or nonexistent; or the organizer is not well known or reputable.</p>	<p>ATINER's events are fully transparent. Each event has one or more academics responsible for the event, whose names are on display in the opening page of each event's website and they also appear all together on a special location on the website (https://www.atiner.gr/academic-committee). These lists include all the members who have assisted with the conference. This list is compiled ex post, i.e. after the conference, because this is the only way to include only those who actually assisted with the conference, i.e. evaluated submissions, chaired sessions, organized panels etc. This is a unique characteristic of ATINER's events: <i>Academics, who expressed an interest to help but eventually did not help, do not appear on the relevant list of organizers.</i></p>
6	<p>Acceptances are promised with a very short turnaround time (often less than four weeks).</p>	<p>ATINER's acceptance policy is unique at this (see point 2 of our policy, available at https://www.atiner.gr/policy). The time frame for abstracts' screening varies because in many cases the abstract is necessary but not sufficient for approval to present. On occasion, ATINER asks for the full paper in order to decide on acceptance or rejection.</p>

7	<p>The conference is marketed as a holiday in a desirable location. The event is held at a resort or a popular tourist destination and marketed as a holiday, rather than an academic or scientific event.</p>	<p>ATINER's events always take place in Athens. Participants are advised that these events take place in a non-tourist, non-resort area of Athens. Every participant receives the following warning: "Athens is the third dirtiest (especially downtown, where the conference takes place) in Europe, after London and Paris. On the latter issue, many Greeks, including some visitors to Athens, are working very hard to surpass these other two historical cities. Also, for conferences that take place in downtown Athens, please be prepared to encounter traffic, noise, pollution and demonstrations by small groups of people, usually University students. These have been common phenomena since antiquity. The total population of Athens is close to 6 million, and includes all kinds of people from many different countries".</p>
8	<p>The conference name bears a striking resemblance to that of a credible or highly prestigious conference, but has subtle minor differences in its name.</p>	<p>ATINER's conference names are not unique, but they have their own characteristic name. In addition, the conferences always take place in Athens, Greece.</p>
9	<p>Organizers guarantee your contribution will be published as an article in the journal associated with the conference. Like the conference, the journal is also predatory and the organizers may later insist on additional article processing charges to publish your article.</p>	<p>ATINER guarantees exactly the opposite. In its policy (see https://www.atiner.gr/policy) it is clearly stated: "Please note that acceptance of a paper opens the door to presentation, NOT publication" (point 2), and "...a few selected papers (currently the acceptance rate is below 25%) are considered for publication in one of ATINER's English language Academic Online Journals" (point 3). Furthermore, publishing in any of ATINER's journals is free of any charge, and submissions may be accepted even if the paper was not presented at any of ATINER's events.</p>
10	<p>The conference websites are unstable. They may change URLs or have no record of conferences in previous years.</p>	<p>ATINER's conference websites have been the same for decades, with previous years' programs and abstract books appearing on the first (opening) page of each conference website. All programs include only those who attended the Athens conference and presented.</p>
11	<p>The website text contains poor grammar or numerous spelling errors.</p>	<p>This is a rarity with ATINER's conferences, because participants, contributors and staff review the program to remove any spelling errors. Also, the text of the website has been prepared and edited by native English speakers.</p>

12	Conference fees seem quite high, compared to those run by non-profit scholarly societies or associations.	The basic ATINER fee is 560 euros which is all-inclusive (2 meals per day, hotel accommodation, continuous supply of refreshments). This fee covers the participants' entire stay in Athens during the conference. The only additional cost is the travel to Athens.
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Two more characteristics, not mentioned above, are unique to ATINER and should be added to the list where conferences are evaluated. First, ATINER's events are 100% international, second, the final program of every event is uploaded after the conference so as to strictly display only the names of those who actually presented and chaired sessions. No others are included in the program, even if a registration fee has been paid.