Introduction: Writerly Virtues, Technology and Human Knowledge

Saroj GC[1]

In our call for papers for this issue, *The Spectrum* (volume 4, issue 1), we were delighted to receive submissions that exceeded those for any previous issue by a huge margin, which, for a locally based journal, was an immense perk. The interdisciplinary scope of this journal may also have encouraged the submissions. We typically publish our call for papers (CFP) on our website and share it on social media, through groups and personal connections, and in networks. Partly, these technologies enable us to reach a broader audience; more importantly, they allow us to participate in the tradition that seeks to disrupt elite, coterie-based publication practices by expanding access beyond those who have historically benefited from their social, cultural, and material capital regarding getting published. In that sense, we try to be cognizant of the contested, unequal, oligopolistic history of intellectual and academic publishing across global contexts (Morgan et al., 2018; Puehringer et al., 2021; Bellen et al., 2025; Ayala et al., 2026), and the Nepali publishing field also reveals parallel tensions and struggles shaped by its own institutional, cultural, and material, technological constraints (Onta, 2005, 2010; Chudal, 2021; Baral, 2020). Technology—from card catalogues and microfiche through the typewriter and printing press to contemporary digital composing/publishing and citation management tools—has long shaped the affordances and limitations of writing and publishing. At the present juncture, with the advent of generative artificial intelligence (GAI), we encounter a new technological moment—one that not only reshapes the processes of writing and publishing but also raises profound ontological and epistemological questions about what writing is, who—or what—writes, and how knowledge comes into being. This question was accentuated by our experiences during our first round of screening, as we witnessed submissions that we hesitated, to a great extent, to categorize as scholarly contributions.

[1] Department of English, Rhetoric and Composition, University of Louisville, KY, USA

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Whereas acceptance and referral to peer review typically depend on scholarly merits such as originality, methodological transparency, analytical depth, and contribution to the field, in this instance, such decisions were largely depended on, conspicuous, rather negative, effects of artificial intelligence tools. In the current situation, our writing spaces and learning spaces are heavily injected and increasingly permeated with agentic AI-assisted tools that have the capacity of generating human-like texts. Moreover, in ongoing conversations they are cast with a lofty promise to push the boundaries of human knowledge production, bringing a seismic shift. While this could be true in many other fields of human knowledge, this moment in the context of writing compels us to rethink writing and publishing not simply as technical acts, but as ethical and intellectual practices through which human knowledge (knowledge is not only what science creates) is created and communicated. Technologies have long assisted human efforts to write, transforming and decentralizing publication opportunities and composition processes in ways that can feel empowering and agentive. Yet, the new phenomenon that these technologies can generate and assemble text at scale has once again inspired the discussion about the role of technology in authorship, ownership of writing, and publishing.

Throughout its history, technological innovation in the pursuit of expanding human knowledge has invited moments of pause and reflection, asking scholars to consider whether such pursuits undermine ethical scholarly practice or the public good, whether they constrain or enfranchise. Critical theorists have variously understood technology as regressive—an instrument of domination and a major source of reification (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002)—and as a potentially transformative force (Benjamin, 1961). That means there have always been check-in points as the applicability of technology is subject to situatedness. Walter Benjamin, particularly with reference to photography and film, argued that technology undermines the traditional “aura” or uniqueness of art, shifts its value from ritual, elite value to politics, and thereby holds emancipatory possibilities (Benjamin, 1969). Benjamin asserted that "mechanical reproduction of art," empowered by technology, "changes the reaction of the masses” (p. 14). About the potential of the public's access to technology, he puts: "The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, affecting both thought and perception" (p. 6). In other words, the political potential Benjamin saw in film and photography has

brought authorship to the access of the middle class and the proletariat, which they can use to write back. In recent years, this potential has been evident in social media and other digital, algorithmic tools, as users have capitalized on their speed, reach, and scale in electoral and political campaigns, as well as in social and cultural movements, to both express their perception and shape public perception. However, Benjamin also pointed out that the same potential available to fascists for propaganda.

Heidegger (1977), too, held a skeptical view, particularly toward modern technology. Although technology, in principle, has the capacity to bring forth truth, it places humans in a state of "standing-reserve," treating them as resources, like libraries contain information resources and nature contains natural resources, rather than as agents of revealing truth (p. 10). In fact, for him, modern technology "enframes" humans, threatening to deny them the possibility of encountering a more original form of revealing and of responding to a more primal truth (p. 10). *Enframing* is the word Heidegger uses to refer to a certain worldview, that is, the driving force behind the technology. Heidegger argues human "is needed and used for the safekeeping of the essence of truth" (p. 12). Heidegger's formulation does not directly address the familiar dangers of 21st-century technology, including environmental destruction from fossil fuels, job displacement through automation and potential erosion of writerly agency through AI tools. By asking us to understand technology as one of the worldviews, he nevertheless offers a crucial suggestion: that we must learn how to become *free* in our use of technology.

Excess, Authorship and Writing

In the context of writing, what AI tools have brought us is excess, or what Kirschenbaum calls "Textapolypse," an unlimited brooding of verbal or other types of text/content. Such a view reduces writing to a supply of information. Long before AI tools existed, we were already challenged by the overwhelming flow of information, the task of making sense of its messages, and the need to resist the spread of disinformation. Now, the situation has worsened. When you input a prompt, large language models (LLMs) can generate responses as many as you can handle and read. Based on patterns learned during training on large datasets, LLMs use probabilistic methods to predict and assemble text (Dobrin, 2026, p. 25). While the models themselves are not updated in real time, modern AI systems can integrate real-time web data through external retrieval pipelines

(e.g., scraping, web-crawling, or search-based systems) that allow LLMs to generate more current and contextually relevant responses (Gauhl et al., 2025; Roziewski & Kozłowski, 2021). With agentic tools integrated into word-processing software and browsers, "that enormous mid-range of workaday writing content is where generative AI is already starting to take hold" (Kirschenbaum). Hence, information generation has become more instantaneous. Ironically, these tools are described as agentic, anthropic, and humanized, yet the human element as an agent in the meaning-making process seems absent from this process of text creation, especially when writers hand over their meaning-making decisions to an algorithm. However, as workplaces, including universities, campuses, and schools, increasingly adopt these tools in everyday and professional communication, the meaning-making decision as a human-centered activity has become more complicated.

We have seen this version of excess of text and content in web-based popular culture. We encounter the same videos, YouTube shorts, Instagram reels, Facebook watch, posters, memes, and other web content, essentially the same, though with some tweaks and turns, but under the name/author of various people. This has seriously complicated the idea of authorship. The advent of AI tools has rendered these simulations easier, more "sophisticated," and more resistant to copyright scrutiny. Much influenced by market-based monetary logic of neoliberal philosophy, content available in public platforms is duplicated to "make money online by creating something out of nothing. And with the help of AI, they can even make money by making nothing out of nothing" (Tiffany). In academic writing and publishing, the pursuit may not be monetary capital; however, when the goal of other forms of capital follows the same logic of greed, it undermines writing and publishing as scholarly, ethical, and virtuous practices for creating, sharing, and circulating human knowledge.

This "love" for generating an overwhelming volume of information and circulating it reinforces a widely spread claim: that more information is a pathway toward establishing truth. This phenomenon gives rise to what Yuval Noah Harari, in his recent book *Nexus,* calls the naïve view of information. The naïve view offers "an overly optimistic view of large-scale networks" (xv). It bestows composers with a sense of augmented agency, a plethora of choices, and unlimited access to information. The naïve view argues that information is "essentially a good thing, the more we have of it, the better" and that by gathering and processing more information, one can

achieve a better understanding of a phenomenon (xvii). While we can make "honest mistakes" in accumulating and processing information, as Harari calls out, "malicious actors motivated by greed or hate might hide important facts and deceive us," in which case information sometimes leads to "error rather than truth" (xvi). Moreover, this model also reinforces the idea that with more information and enough time, "we are bound to discover the truth about things . . . thereby developing not only our power but also the wisdom necessary to use that power well (xvii). Earlier, Vaidhyanathan (2018) cautions that although Google organizing the world's information is important, the commercial nature of *googlization* commodifies knowledge and thrives on a "trust bias" (p. 11), whereby users assume Google serves their interests. Moreover, embracing a rosy view of information technology runs counter to writing and publishing as a typical scholarly practice, in which making sense out of the information matters more than merely compiling it. These admonishments probably ask we review the fundamentals: virtues and ethics in relation to writing and publishing (discussed later).

Publish-or-Perish Imperatives to Rubbish

We would like to reflect upon, yet another factor. With the submissions, we also received impressive bios and affiliations, but in sharp contrast. Contribution to human knowledge, intellectual and academic conversations can be performed in various ways—with empirical studies, theoretical insights, short texts, and fully argued write-ups, textual submissions, and multimodal compositions. Beyond this, we cannot deny the work teachers do in classrooms to support student learning. While this labor contributes significantly to scholarly practices—ranging from assisting students to compose a sentence and researching and refining ideas to sharing knowledge and fostering policy developments through lived and ground experiences—the dominant, text-centered view of scholarship, which prioritizes the production of published documents, has largely eclipsed this intellectual labor as a form of scholarly practice. Instead, scholarly practice skewed by neoliberal logics as a matrices-driven activity has shifted to focus on publish-or-perish imperatives.

This pressure is made stronger by the fact that workplaces, including higher education institutions, have become increasingly technocratic. This shift has reshaped how academic work is organized and experienced. Over time, higher education institutions have become faster-paced, and those

who work in them are expected to keep up. As a result, academics face strong pressure to publish in order to stay current, secure jobs, and gain promotion while doing so may not be feasible and possible for some people unless institutional structures and culture empower them. Our national context is illustrative to some extent. While there has been an issue of quality of higher education, many private, public and community-based higher education institutions (HEIs) are seeking quality accreditation from the University Grants Commission, an umbrella institution for quality assurance of HEIs in Nepal (UGC, 2018, 2019). While the commission in good faith wants HEIs to standardize their research and teaching programs, the institutions, directly or indirectly, have to ask teachers to do research and publish. There is a paucity of evidence that HEIs providing sources and platforms to involve in scholarly practices; there are just quite a few who intentionally manage to do so. Without adequate quality control and sufficient institutional support, such imperatives can go astray. Paudel et al. (2020) found even the grants provided UGC were not used to produce quality publication. Such a gap between imperative and material condition may give rise to products neither intellectually sound nor meaningful as a scholarly contribution, rather pushing writers to surrender to predatory publications and unscholarly habits (Xia et al., 2014; Shrestha et al., 2018; Kisely, 2019). Moreover, Rhodes and Linnenluecke (2025) describe the consequences of such imperatives as what they term "junkification" of academic publishing. Their analysis attributes to a consortium of factors such as the rise of neoliberal logics, entrenched journal and instructional ranking systems, matrices-driven culture, publish or perish mandates, coloniality of knowledge, and AI content production (p. 3).

It insinuates a danger of fast-paced publication desire while it risks the importance of pause and reflection, which is a virtue of human knowledge and communication (Daniels et al., 2023). Such absence of pauses and reflection also echoes the neoliberal transformation of higher education in the age of AI. Watermeyer et al. (2024) argue that while generative AI appears to offer efficiency and relief from academic labor, AI "no more alleviates than extends the dysfunctions of neoliberal logic," a logic that puts pressures on overwork, precarity, and metric-driven productivity (p. 446). The importance of pause and reflection, at least to some extent, seems to be eroded by an infatuation with the seemingly impressive qualities of technological innovation. At least the submission we received shows that the virtue of academic writing as a scholarly practice has faced the risk of

losing its virtuous spirit, as it seems to be threatened by the uncritical and personally unregulated use. In a context marked by both excess and easy access to content, the naïve model of information Harari critiques calls for renewed attention to virtues and ethics in academic writing and publishing, grounded in more engaged and situated practices.

Writerly Virtues and Ethics of Writing and Publishing

Cases such as ours recall Aristotle, who centuries ago wrote extensively on virtues, ethics and happiness. In inquiring into the "chief good" for human beings, which for him is happiness, Aristotle reminds us extensively of ethics as the pathway to it. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle clarifies that ethics is not merely a theoretical pursuit driven solely by the desire for abstract knowledge. Rather, ethical inquiry is oriented toward achieving the human good through a deeper understanding of what constitutes genuine happiness. For Aristotle, this understanding requires the active, sustained exercise of the rational soul in accordance with virtue or excellence (Kraut, 2022). Aristotle suggests that "intellectual achievement 'produces' happiness, since it forms part of human excellence, and putting it also into practice make a person happy. The road to happiness is "virtue of a person's having wisdom and excellence of character; for excellence makes the goal correct, while wisdom makes what leads to it correct" (1144a5–10).

If we follow Aristotle, writer happiness emerges from the cultivation of writerly virtues, where excellence guides the proper ends of action—sharing knowledge, communicating the research and insights—and practical wisdom to distill information that serves human good/happiness. To denote happiness, Aristotle uses the word *eudaimonia*, which, alternatively and helpfully, translates as "human flourishing," "well-being," or "living well" rather than just temporary happiness/pleasure. This term carries a connotative, resounding tenor for writing as a scholarly practice. In this sense, writing as a scholarly practice represents the highest human good, at least for the writer, a lifelong state of acting in accordance with a rationale and virtue or fulfilling one's potential through excellence. Furthermore, eudaimonia—the sense of fulfillment—is secured not as the result of exercising haphazard, raw character but as the result of the exercise of our distinctly humane and cognitive aspects (Fisher and Mark Dimmock, 2022). Case and VanderWeele (2025), similarly, note other seminal components, such as patience, honesty, and studiousness, useful for

"academic flourishing" (p. 639). In this regard, writing and publishing is a sustained journey of knowing, intellectually flourishing while remaining grounded with ethics and virtues.

Moreover, for Aristotle, virtues are character dispositions and personality traits. Cultivating a virtuous character is something that happens by practice. This makes Aristotelian virtue ethics an agent-centered moral theory rather than an act-centered moral theory (Fisher and Mark Dimmock, Eudaimonia and virtue, para. 2). This delineation of agent-centered virtue ethics is important for writers in this current situation. Uncritical reliance and infatuation with writing-assisting "technologized" tools risks the benefits of practice necessary to cultivate the writerly traits and agency. In that sense, writing for scholarly communication demands the cultivation of character, rather than an isolated content generation.

One caveat: Aristotle's proposition on ethical virtue as a condition intermediate (popularly known as "golden mean") between two other states, one involving excess, and the other deficiency, could be misunderstood (1106a26–b28). It is likely to fault that writing in the age of AI is an intermediate, averaging output resulting from human writing and text generated by AI tools. Aristotle, however, is careful to add that the mean is not to be determined as simplistically as the universal arithmetic mean 3 as the mean of 4 and 2. He asks us to determine in a way that considers the particular circumstances of the individual (1106a36–b7). The intermediate point that is chosen by an expert in any of the crafts will vary from one situation to another. This means for a scholarly person would mean crafting their writing in consideration of the issues they are dealing with, the audience they imagine, and the implications they potentially harvest as a result of that publication. In that sense, finding the mean in any given situation is not a mechanical or thoughtless procedure but requires a full and detailed acquaintance with the circumstances. Daniel et al. (2023) further clarify:

> As a person develops their writing to communicate meaningful messages to others, they aim to show clear reasoning centered on a topic or theme that sparks curiosity, hold compassion for their readers, recognize, respond to, and build community, and persevere in the many tasks of writing, such as building logical arguments that will speak to their intended audiences. (p. 32)

Yet another useful term for the writer Aristotle has is *kalon*, which, of course, is related to his discussion regarding when the good person chooses to act virtuously. For him, a person acts virtuously for the sake of *kalon.* This can mean "beautiful," "noble," "useful," or "fine" (1155b18–149). This term indicates that Aristotle sees in ethical activity an attraction that is comparable to the beauty of well-crafted artifacts, including such artifacts as poetry, music, and drama. He makes this analogy in his discussion of the mean, noting that every craft seeks to produce a work from which nothing should be removed and to which nothing should be added (1106b5–14), a view that also resonates with his theory of organic plot construction in tragedy. By the same token, the chief good for a writer is to flourish through taking writing as a process of discovery to learn the balance of every chunk of thoughts into the process. Cultivating writerly character, for example, establishing an argumentative stance by learning the rhetorical moves (GC & Baral, 2024), is crucial to practice.

Way Forward

The conversations throughout history on technology vis-à-vis writing and publishing remind us of both its ability to foster accessible beyond elite circles to the public and the same potential available to malicious actors to use against the very emancipation it seeks to open up. This ambivalence remains instructive for contemporary discussions of generative AI, which similarly oscillate between revolutionary promise and dystopian danger. What distinguishes the current moment with regard to writing and publishing is the apparent autonomy with which generative systems can participate in acts traditionally understood as human intellectual labor. This condition forces renewed attention to the human dimensions of writing, judgment, and responsibility within academic publishing.

The uncritical embrace of technological efficiency—particularly when coupled with institutional imperatives for speed and output—risks further marginalizing the human dimensions of scholarly communication. The conditions described above point to the need for a more reflective, relational, and ethically grounded approach to academic writing and publishing. It is impossible to argue for the rejection of technology, but a recalibration of how it is integrated into scholarly practice—with renewed attention to judgment, responsibility, and wisdom—is necessary.

One possible way forward lies in emphasizing more relational and networked approaches to academic publishing, particularly those grounded

in local contexts. Locally based journals, such as *The Spectrum*, are often better positioned to engage closely with authors and to attend carefully to the cultural, historical, and material conditions shaping scholarly work. Localized editorial and review processes can make it easier to evaluate whether submissions represent transparent, ethically grounded engagements with the issues they address, rather than merely apparently polished textual outputs. Also, keeping review processes closer to local cultural logics and practical reasoning informed by lived histories and contexts can also foster forms of accountability that are difficult to sustain within distant, metric-oriented publication systems. Such approaches do not reject global scholarly conversations; rather, they insist that these conversations be rooted in situated knowledge and ethical deliberation. In this sense, relational publishing practices closely reflect Aristotelian virtue ethics, which emphasizes judgment, habituation, and responsiveness to particular circumstances.

Our experience in managing this issue suggests that meaningful scholarly practice in the age of generative AI depends on emphasizing pauses as much as inclination toward productivity, reflection as much as efficiency, and wisdom as much as information. Writing and publishing remain central to the production of human knowledge, but their value lies not solely in output, visibility, or compliance with institutional metrics. Instead, their ethical promise resides in sustained engagement, careful judgment, and the cultivation of writerly virtues that support intellectual flourishing. Rather than asking whether generative technologies should be simply adopted or rejected, our experience from managing this issue suggests we place ethics, virtue, and human judgment at the center of scholarly communication. Such an orientation does not deny the realities of contemporary academic life; it seeks instead to reassert the human values that give scholarly work its meaning and purpose.

A Word about This Issue

This issue of *The Spectrum* brings together a diverse set of contributions that engage questions of democracy, social issues, media, and digital culture within Nepali but also attempt to respond to broader contexts. Two articles examine contemporary issues—one local and another global. Purna Chandra Bhusal and Ananta Khanal examine a recent youth-led movement through a close reading of media discourse and representation. Their analysis demonstrates that the movement emerged

from decades of unfulfilled democratic promises and highlights how the movement offers an important opportunity for political renewal. The second deals with a recent avatar of modern technology. Renuka Khatiwada and Ambir Khadka critically examine two important discourses— plagiarism and creativity—in the contemporary higher education context. They argue that the emergence of generative AI challenges traditional understandings of authorship and originality, and they propose reconceptualizing plagiarism and creativity in the context where GenAI has already permeated the learning and teaching context.

The next sets of articles interrogate the cultural, rhetorical, and aesthetic construction of gender and sexuality across classical, modern, and contemporary literary and cultural texts. Menuka Gurung offers a comparative rhetorical analysis of Helen of Troy and Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*. She argues that these figures function less as stable mythic women and more as rhetorical pretexts through which male authors negotiate blame, agency, and the legitimacy of war. By placing these figures in dialogue, the article illuminates how ancient literary traditions construct women as symbolic sites for patriarchal ideological work. Similarly, Mahesh Paudyal examines alpine-style mountaineering as a gendered performance. Drawing on theories of masculinity, he analyzes how solo, minimalist mountaineering perpetuates Western essentialist constructions of masculinity, particularly those associated with risk-taking, endurance, and the romanticization of liminal spaces between life and death. Finally, Shiva Rijal, Arvind Dahal, and Sumitra Bogati, in their reading of three modern Nepali plays, explore the aesthetic and significance of cross-dressing vis-à-vis modernity in literary and social milieu of the 1930s and 1940s. The authors argue that cross-dressing should be understood as a dynamic artistic force that shaped the formation of modern Nepali theatre rather than as a marginal or merely comic device.

The remaining two articles deal with entrenched social issues in the Nepali context. Gehendra R. Koirala analyzes a popular YouTube-based storytelling series in the Nepali context. Koirala argues that the accessible and multimodal nature of the platform enables marginalized voices to be amplified, positioning *Herne Katha* as an important intervention in shaping public perception and advocating for social justice. Chaturbhuj Kewrat explores caste-based discrimination embedded within Hindu caste hierarchies. Focusing on representations of the Dalit Damai community (so-called lower-caste), he shows through the analysis of a poem practices of

oppression, untouchability, and exploitation in hill society, while critically examining the feudal dominance of the upper-caste.

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