**Nathaniel Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, 214pp., \$25.00.**

David Purdy

Canadian Research Knowledge Network

In *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*, Nathaniel Tkacz identifies and interrogates the political underpinnings of openness as it has come to be expressed in the twenty-first century. This pioneering critique is primarily a response to proponents of openness who commonly either ignore its political dimensions or claim it to be apolitical. Tkacz's primary goal is not to denounce openness but rather to demonstrate that "openness is politically fraught" (175) and to develop a theoretically rigorous vocabulary with which to address its politics. To expose the intrinsically political nature of openness, he selects the various elements that are most often considered integral to open projects and points out the politics of each in corresponding real-world examples, most being drawn from the early history of Wikipedia. The book's short conclusion asserts a connection between openness and neoliberalism, an ideology that Tkacz opposes but considers important to take seriously.

While "Wikipedia" is the first word in the title of this scholarly publication, Tkacz does not focus on this online encyclopedia *per se* but rather explores its politics as a means of understanding the politics of openness in general. He suggests that many of his observations are applicable not only to Wikipedia and similar projects but also to other bodies that have adopted the language of openness, such as open-access publishers and even governments. Nonetheless, Tkacz's detailing of the politics of Wikipedia is core to his analysis. He generally develops his conceptual framework for discussing the politics of openness apart from direct discussion of Wikipedia, but Wikipedia is his test case: he consistently demonstrates the utility of his framework by applying his assertions to Wikipedia. He justifies his choice of this specific open project by arguing that Wikipedia is widely considered the most prominent and most successful example of openness in action.

Because Tkacz is an associate professor at the University of Warwick's Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, it is perhaps not surprising that this book reads like an interdisciplinary PhD dissertation, densely packed with theories, historical precedents, and terminology drawn from a wide range of academic disciplines

and schools of thought. He assumes that his readers are academics who have a background in political philosophy, and so he frequently refers to ideas as being well known that are only well known among such academics. A substantial proportion of the book is devoted to summarizing various influential academics' writings, which Tkacz then adapts and applies to his exploration of openness. These applications often dwell on micro-complexities of very specialized interest.

To the extent that *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness* is an investigation of the politics of Wikipedia, success is limited. Tkacz applies his conceptual framework to Wikipedia as his main method of substantiating his claims about openness, and he explicitly chooses Wikipedia because of its singular achievements. Unfortunately, the explanatory power of his Wikipedia examples is weakened because Tkacz chooses events in Wikipedia's history that are mostly drawn from its earliest years, generally from before Wikipedia made the notable achievements for which Tkacz chose Wikipedia as his exemplar. The four events that he examines in detail are the 2009 Wikipedia Art controversy, the 2006 debate about depictions of Muhammad, the 2006 introduction of HagermanBot, and the 2002 fork of the Spanish Wikipedia. Wikipedia first came into existence in 2001, and it was barely recognizable as the project it was to become until several years later. Basic structure was still coming into place in 2005 and 2006, and the editor community didn't stabilize until a year or two after that. Consequently, the book's analysis of the politics of Wikipedia's early years should not be taken as representative of the current state of Wikipedia's politics.

In analyzing the politics of Wikipedia, Tkacz chooses to exclusively analyze events that took place at least five years before the publication of his book, which would not be a problem except that he does not mention to his readers that he has made this choice. This oversight is odd, as Tkacz is otherwise meticulous in his intentionality and self-awareness. Controversy about depictions of Muhammad on Wikipedia has continued to the present day, and significant events have occurred in this controversy since 2006, including the 2008 online petition and the 2011 image filter referendum, but Tkacz restricts his analysis to 2006 without clarifying to his readers that he is doing so. Similarly, the introduction of HagermanBot has many more recent analogues that would have served Tkacz's purposes while also giving readers a more current understanding of the politics of Wikipedia. Furthermore, the book cites basic, easily accessible statistics about Wikipedia as of 2011 or 2012, while the book was published in 2014. Fortunately, the datedness of Tkacz's references to Wikipedia does not impinge significantly upon his development of a framework for philosophically engaging with the politics of openness, but rather upon his development of an account of Wikipedia's politics specifically.

Tkacz succeeds admirably in demonstrating that openness is inherently political, and his synthesis of a multitude of established theories does well in laying the groundwork for further interrogation of the politics of openness. The vocabulary he develops for discourse on openness is a valuable antidote to the deterministic language that commonly dominates discussions of open projects. If Tkacz's vocabulary manages to diffuse into these discussions more broadly, it is likely that significant changes will arise in free culture and open movements. His extended critique of project forking as a tool of legitimization could have important ramifications for these movements. One particularly valuable passage is the one in which Tkacz argues that Wikipedia's gender gap exists because of, rather than despite, the project's openness. Although he devotes only a few paragraphs to addressing the gender gap, this passage makes it clear that openness can and does conflict with other values. Tkacz does well in noting the extent to which the language of openness has pervaded many disparate areas of society, a pervasion that has been aided significantly by the obfuscation of the relevant politics. Librarians have been some of the most ardent supporters of openness, which makes it especially important for us to listen to Tkacz's warning that openness has political limitations just like all ideologies, and openness therefore must be treated as a more nuanced entity than the uniform positive it is often thought to be.