

Peer review

Arguments against the system of anonymity in peer review of manuscripts submitted for publication have been eloquently presented by Gangan Prathap¹, and I have also seen similar letters in the correspondence columns of another learned journal recently²⁻⁶. What I have not read anywhere are the counterarguments *against* open review and in favour of the existing system, and I present some of them below.

Prathap¹ assumes that there are two distinct categories of people: *we*, the authors, sinned against but never ourselves sinners, who wish to see our work and our ideas—many marginal, a few revolutionary—in print; and *they*, the group of anonymous peer reviewers, who sit in—occasionally biased—judgment over us. In reality, these two groups are but one, consisting of individuals called upon to wear the cloak of author or that of reviewer on different occasions; and the person who is judge is actually the editor, who is certainly not anonymous.

Three corollaries follow from this: (i) Just as there can be a partisan reviewer attempting to undo the efforts of revolutionary workmanship, so too does the situation often arise of a reviewer's objective and unpalatable comments inviting the ire of an author (whose opinion is, by definition, biased), accompanied by unjust accusations of malice; if the reviewer were to be openly identified, one can imagine the un-savoury direct correspondence between author and reviewer and the strains in interpersonal relationships that this might lead to, in anticipation of which itself the reviewer might opt to suppress his original honest response.

(ii) Since the reviewers are in fact identifiable by the editor (who presumably is a wise and learned man, and powerful too!), this in itself should serve as sufficient check against malicious reviewing, or at least to being recognized as such when it is received.

(iii) When an author disagrees with a reviewer's comments, he should and does argue his case with the editor; if he

does not succeed, and then wishes to lay the blame upon the bias of someone for his failure, then obviously such blame should fall not on the poor anonymous reviewer but on the editor himself who has been arbitrator in the argument. Perhaps, then, the author should seek to offer his ideas and findings to some other journal whose editor, in turn, might be more receptive to them. I do not doubt that it is the collective of such experiences over a period of time that determines any particular journal's evolution in terms of subject coverage, readership and the quality of papers submitted to and published in its pages.

In conclusion, I appreciate Prathap's contention that there might in fact be ten Galileos in the world today whose work has not been published or recognized because of the existing system of anonymous peer review. What I am unable to see is that open review as an alternative is the solution to the problem; it might instead lead to a situation where the works of these ten indeed see the light of day, but are then drowned in the publications of ten thousand others who also believe themselves to be Galileos, but sadly are not.

1. Prathap, G., *Curr. Sci.*, 1989, **58**, 1114.
2. Thyagaraja, A., *Nature*, 1988, **335**, 391.
3. Wright, J. B., *Nature*, 1988, **336**, 10.
4. Berezin, A. A., *Nature*, 1989, **337**, 202.
5. Fletcher, G. C., *ibid.*
6. Roth, S., *ibid.*

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Low-priced reprint volumes

Regarding the questionnaire published recently (*Curr. Sci.*, **58**, 948), one is reminded of an earlier occasion when a similar survey resulted in a momentous event, namely the establishment of our Academies. One hopes the present exercise will produce a similar landmark.

In my perception, there is a greater need for source books/reprint volumes

than for Indian editions of foreign journals. By a reprint volume, I mean a volume containing reprints of about a dozen or so benchmark papers in an area of intense current activity (with of course a sizeable following in India). The compilation should be made by an expert, who, if possible, should contribute a lead article providing a global survey as well as a connecting thread.

For years, the Japanese Physical Society was active in producing such reprint volumes. These were available at an affordable price but only inside Japan, which is perfectly understandable. The effort was a tremendous success, and a repeat of that here is very desirable. I should think it is well within the means of this country to produce at least six such volumes per year in each major discipline, like mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc. Such volumes would be of immense value to young researchers, especially those in not-so-well-endowed institutions. I do not foresee major copyright problems, especially if the venture is non-profit-making (as is desirable). One presumes that, if needed, the good offices of a body like the UNESCO or the Third World Academy could be sought. Indeed, if countries of the Third World all decide to pitch in, then one can visualize a tremendous snowballing effect.

It is not out of place to mention that quite a large number of summer schools and the like are held every year in the country. The nation bears the expenses, including, often, that of travel by the foreign lecturers. However, most of the proceedings find their way into the hands of foreign publishers and immediately get priced out of our reach. We are thus unable to buy back the information we generate! This matter too needs attention.

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This issue contains the results of our analysis of the completed DST questionnaires and some comments (see following pages).
—Ed.