

## REFEREEING IN THE AGE OF SCIENTIFIC COMMODITIZATION

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There was a time when the friendly editor of one of the few journals in a field such as tourism sent a manuscript to one of us, to ask for a review. Over the years this became more formally institutionalized as the “peer refereeing system”. We generally responded willingly, whether in the name of the ideal of scientific progress or of the solidarity of our scientific community. Refereeing was a voluntary activity, and no reward was expected.

This system is still maintained, though from a few journals in the field, the numbers rose enormously. Presently there are a few hundred in the field of tourism and travel alone. With expansion, great differences in quality between journals emerged. Editors, seeking to improve the quality of their publication, intensified and formalized the refereeing process. Some demand three referee reports before deciding to accept, reject, or ask for revisions of a paper’s. Many journals developed detailed questionnaires for grading papers by referees. The load became sometimes onerous, but it still works. We basically still identify with the values of scientific progress and collegiality.

But the circumstances of publication of scientific papers underwent a vast change. There are two aspects to that change: on the one hand the system has become quantified. Journals became categorized into A,B,C...for purposes of academic promotion, articles became appraised by number of citations, or even of hits on the Internet. Referees became evaluated by editors. Academics began to put the journals for which they referee on their CV.

But the other change was structural. The field of publication of scientific periodicals is presently dominated by a small number of big publishing houses. They increasingly make their money from selling individual articles in e-form (rather than from subscriptions). Scientific publication has become commoditized. The profit of the publishers depend increasingly on the attractiveness of their individual ‘products’, which in turn depends on the originality, importance, validity of methods etc. as evaluated by referees. In other words, the referees became an important input factor in the production process of scientific publication; they are a crucial factor in enhancing the publisher’s products. But they are not rewarded in any commensurable form for their contribution to that production, free access to data bases and reduction in the publisher’s book publications notwithstanding. They thus give their services to help the publishers increase the value of their products and hence their revenue, without any commensurate reward. The reviewers constitute, so to speak, a huge, unorganized scientific labor force, working virtually for free for the publishers. But some people’s patience is wearing thin, and it becomes increasingly difficult to find willing reviewers.

How did this happen? In my view this is a peculiar case of “false consciousness,” we being committed to values of scientific progress and collegiality, the publishers exploiting that commitment for their economic purposes.

What should be done? The simplest solution seems to be to establish a system of honoraria per review to be paid out annually to reviewers. The details will have to be discussed between the editors-in-Chief and the publishers.