

# **Breaking the socialist chains: on publishing scientific articles and a proposal for a new system**

**Tommi A. Vuorenmaa, 2011**

E-mail: [tvuorenm@gmail.com](mailto:tvuorenm@gmail.com)

It is almost sacred in science to have articles be "peer reviewed" before their acceptance for publication. In economics, for example, and especially in its highest ranking journals, the review process can take years. This process leads to the painful fact that the published papers are quite old when and if they are finally published.

This article proposes a new way of judging scientific articles which, although it maybe not be the optimum straight from the box, should prove much more efficient for the scientific community than the old system. In particular, the authors of the articles should find it appealing. In this article, I refer to the prevailing referee system as the old system and the proposed system as the new system. These could also be called a socialist and competitive systems, respectively, so effectively I am going to describe a proposal how to break socialist chains in science and economics in particular.

The solution is basically simple: instead of having to go through a long and possibly tedious referee process, which can easily do injustice to the article, we let the public opinion to decide which ones are worth of publication. How would this work in principle? Think of internet shops, for example Amazon.com: every product and seller there can be rated – in the case of Amazon.com from one star to five stars. Now, replace the product by the article, which in this case would be the possibly unpolished working paper version. A scale from, say, one to one hundred could be used for rating it.

The basic premise in this idea is that people would be able to vote for the quality of article, and as more and more vote for the same article, the laws of statistics should work its way to the general consensus of the quality of article. After all, it is them, the readers, who eventually evaluate the article anyhow. The missing link is the exclusion of the anonymous referees; they would be replaced by people who could either stay anonymous or reveal their true names to the public.

The best article would most likely get the highest points. Naturally, there could be some bias, which is inevitable in a simple system like this, but this would still mark a great improvement over the old system in which the referees chosen by the editor are they key to the destiny of the article, and sometimes even the destiny of the author. The voluntary writers of the new system could be given prizes, even money, for extraordinary reviews of papers. A lottery could also be imagined in order to make sure that more people would seriously read and rate the article and suggest improvements to it.

This process would also have the added benefit that the referees who write the reviews would be immediately identifiable and become of larger value to the scientific community. In fact, even the reviews could be rated. Now, in the old system, this perspective is almost totally missing, except behind closed curtains in a kind of secret brotherhood. The power available to this brotherhood is easily imagined to lead to bias and misuse. One can only guess how many important articles are left unpublished every year, or of which at least the publication is postponed by years, by the old system.

The new system would presumably greatly enhance the productivity of the scientific community because authors would not spend so much revising the papers according to the somewhat flimsy wishes of the anonymous referees. In the new system, the writer would get feedback from several people in an open forum, which he could then reject or approve, and the editor would in the end choose if the journal in question would like to publish the piece or not. There would naturally be a strong tendency to approve papers with high scores. In order to minimize the effect of the name and status of the author, the article should be written and uploaded to the forum without a cover page.

This principle could be easily improved in many respects. It is not the goal of this article to go into the details of how to deal with different kind of situations that may arise. Experience from internet shops could be used as a starting point for an efficient review and publishing process. This article is merely written to lay out the basic idea. Publishing in science is regarded of such high value that it really should not be left to darkness as it is mostly done in the old (prevailing) system.