

Editorial ethics

When an author submits his (or her) work to a journal, he commits an act of trust. He trusts that his article will be treated with respect and care and in a manner that is conducive to a free and open discussion of scientific issues. In processing the paper, the journal assumes that the author has exerted all reasonable care in the execution and presentation of his work and that he will respond in good faith to the review process.

Implicit in this process is that every journal must handle its papers independently. This has been the declared policy of *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* since 1992 and maybe earlier. In 1992, I proposed to the editorial board of *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* that we have a policy of rejecting papers that we know to have been rejected by other journals. This was supposed to ensure that our journal quickly reached a level of excellence as great, or greater, than our competitors. The board displayed one of its few bouts of impatience: "No way!" "What if the other journals were wrong!" "That is unfair!" "That is stupid!" Five years later, I am embarrassed to have made the suggestion. Five years later, I realize just how essential it is that every paper is viewed independently in a free and unbiased way. Five years later, I see the danger of an elitist band of editors perturbing the system to a degree that novel ideas are beaten-off and the *status quo* protected at all costs. I see the danger of believing in "good" reputations—a danger that afflicts editors more than authors and reviewers—so that bad or ill-considered ideas from the obvious quarters are propagated, while excellent ideas from unusual quarters are extinguished before they see the light of day. Five years later, I see a real danger of good papers being rejected and bad papers being accepted because the system is not perfect.

The editorial board was right in 1992, and I was wrong. *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* will evaluate every paper on its own merits regardless of previous decisions by other journals. In fact, we prefer not to know about a paper's history. Similarly, the interactions between an author and *Meteoritics & Planetary Science* are confidential, and the editors will not discuss these matters with the editors of other journals or anyone else who is attempting to evaluate an author's work or ideas. It is not just a matter of trust, or what is best for our Science or our journal, it is a matter of editorial ethics.

Derek Sears
Editor
