Some Ethical Considerations Regarding Scholarly Communication

GORDON MORAN AND MICHAEL MALLORY

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES academic intolerance, peer review suppression, and resulting de facto academic library censorship. Included are some ethical considerations regarding scholarly communication (and scholarly excommunication), academic librarianship, and academic whistle-blowing. One of higher education's most deeply rooted ethical tenets is a commitment to the search for truth. However, the truth is often upsetting (to say the least) to powerful academic leaders, as the history of science, for example, has made obvious. Intolerance toward, and suppression of, truthful ideas of a scholarly nature, can lead to de facto academic library censorship, even though academic librarians may not be aware that they are involved. Historically, peer review authorities in academia have been the enemies in intellectual matters of academic whistle-blowers. Ethical conflicts arise when reliance and deference in regard to peer review authorities lead to suppression of ideas, unwittingly or otherwise, by academic librarians. To the extent that true ideas are suppressed and censored throughout the scholarly communication system, that system might also accurately be called a system of scholarly excommunication. Without compromising their neutrality, academic librarians, by giving access to ideas and information on all sides of academic questions and controversies, can serve as illuminators of the truth for scholars seeking the truth. A proposal is made for the institution of intellectual freedom (IF) committees and groups within academic libraries and academic

Gordon Moran, Via delle Terme, 3, Firenze, Italy
Michael Mallory, Department of Art History, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, Brooklyn, NY 11210

library associations in order to help these librarians detect academic and peer review suppression. The very existence of such IF groups might have a salutary effect on the quality of peer review in academia.

INTRODUCTION

There is a recent trend to regard academic libraries not only as separate entities serving specific institutions of higher education but also as mere links—and even subordinate links at that—within a larger system known as scholarly communication. This article is an introductory discussion of some of the ethical considerations and conflicts that might accompany the so-called information explosion and the enormous technological advances in the transmission of information among scholars.

ACADEMIC ETHICS AND ACADEMIC LIBRARY ETHICS

Following the upheavals on many campuses during the late 1960s and early 1970s, some recent literature on higher education has attempted to reaffirm, with ringing rhetoric, the principle that the search for the truth is the foundation of academic ethics. For example, Nolte (1983) asserts that the "first requirement of the academic ethic is the obligation of methodically striving for the truth" (p. 161). Likewise, in a discussion of "The Academic Ethics," Rüegg (1986) maintains that "the absolute commandment of respect for the truth is fundamental to the exercise of scientific and scholarly professions" (p. 408).

If the search for the truth in any given academic discipline is a basis or foundation of academic ethics, it would follow that a tenet of academic library ethics would be the attempt to provide the user/scholar with access to material containing the truth and to provide such access in the most effective manner possible. Along this line, Meador and Buthod (1982) cite the following from the American Library Association's (ALA) guidelines regarding reference service: "Information provided the user in response to an inquiry must be the most accurate possible" (p. 144). This common bond for scholars and librarians in regard to truth is expressed by Altick (1974) (a well-known English professor), in his work entitled "Librarianship and the Pursuit of Truth." Altick refers to himself as "a pursuer of truth" and to his audience of librarians as "the dedicated custodians of truth" (p. 4) and also as "curators and disseminators of truth" (p. 16). He also lumps himself and librarians together as "devoted and in some instances veteran pursuers, preservers, and disseminators of truth" (p. 5).

COMPUTER VIRUSES AND ACADEMIC LIBRARY VIRUSES

Scholars pursue the truth, and academic librarians collect, store, and disseminate the truth. Unfortunately, this description is not a complete one. The pursuit of truth is often a task that proves to be elusive, ambiguous, and very complicated. For one reason or another, scholars at times end up publishing false information, believing it to be true. Also, in the classroom, some false information is taught as if it were true. As a result, falsehoods, masquerading as truths, find their way onto academic library shelves and into library catalogs.

Altick (1974) believes that "most error" has its origins "in haste or misunderstanding" (p. 14). But whatever the cause of error, the resulting falsehoods that are masquerading as truths in academic libraries create obstacles to scholars who are searching for the truth. Some recent newspaper headlines have noted sensational cases of so-called "computer viruses" in which information systems have been changed by the suppression/destruction and alteration of intended information and by the insertion in its place of unwanted information. If the search for the truth is the basic tenet of academic ethics, and if providing scholars with access to the truth is a consequential tenet of academic library ethics, the *intended* scholarly material in the academic library would be that which contains the truth. It would follow, in such a case, that the presence of falsehood masquerading as truth in an academic library would amount to a form of academic library virus. And the greater the degree of such falsehood, the more severe the virus.

Although the cases of computer viruses that have made the headlines have apparently been, for the most part, carefully programmed events designed to have specific effects, academic library viruses of the sort just described are ongoing phenomena that are constantly changing as knowledge itself changes. In fact, Altick (1974) observes that "the progress of knowledge consists in large part of proving received statements faulty, exploding myths, reordering the sequence of events..." (p. 15). A possible cure for academic library viruses would include the library's own selection of material that corrects the errors and exposes the falsehoods. Presumably this selected material would already be included within the library's holdings. (As will be discussed, such selection does not mean that material that contains errors and falsehoods should be "weeded," although in some cases, as in medical libraries, "retractions" are sometimes issued which amount to a form of weeding.)

So far, so good. Academic librarians help correct error, explode myths, and reorder sequences by selecting the latest scholarly research results that set the scholarly record straight. However, often scholars

themselves do not agree with each other on given subjects, and academic debates and controversies develop, sometimes becoming bitter and long drawn out affairs. In addition, the subject matter of such controversies is sometimes very highly specialized and technical, for which the librarian might not have very much expertise. How can the librarian judge what is true and what is false? And where would librarians ordinarily find the time to do thorough research for such questions? Must the academic librarian look on helplessly as library viruses exist and possibly spread?

ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY

In cases of controversial issues, library ethics oblige librarians to make accessible all sides of a question. Davis (1982) proposes the following: "[I]t is our duty to provide more information...by promoting discussion and insuring that the widest range of information and ideas possible are available" (p. 40). The academic librarian, by remaining neutral, can stay above the fray and does not need to take sides in order to provide scholars with access to the truth. As a collector of information, rather than an arbiter and judge in academic controversies, the librarian provides the scholar with material on all sides of a controversy. Once again there might be reason to say, "So far, so good." If the librarian does not know the precise cure for an academic virus, he or she at least provides the medicine that allows the scholar to come up with a possible cure.

PEER REVIEW AND SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATION

It is, however, at this point that some real problems begin, and these are conflicts that no amount of rhetoric can hide or gloss over. In more general terms, Altick (1974) describes such conflicts as follows: "In effect, there is a sort of conflict between the persistence of the old and the demands of the new" (p. 13). More specifically, there are well-documented controversies among scholars about whether the truth should be accepted as truth and be disseminated and made widely known. There is also conflict, real and theoretical, between scholars and librarians, and among librarians themselves, about whether or not academic librarians should let the truth be known. Specific conflicts of such a nature often take place within the academic process known as peer review. These conflicts have a relationship, directly or indirectly, to academic library ethics. (For the purposes of this article, the term *peer review* is not considered only in its narrow definition of referee reports, but also in its broader definition of how scholars evaluate each others' works. In this broader definition, a published book review is as much a part of peer review as an

unpublished referee's rejection—carried out in secrecy—of a scholar's manuscript.)

As long as secrecy remains a cherished practice of so-called peer review authorities, accurate and reliable in-depth studies of peer review seem impossible. An attempt to make such a study would appear to be the equivalent of examining how successful or unsuccessful the operations of the CIA and KGB are without having access to the classified material relating to the actual operations of these organizations. Moreover, it seems that some recent examinations of peer review, such as those of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 1987-1988, the Institute of Medicine in 1987-1989, and the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1989 have been marred by conflict-of-interest situations of their own (a study that includes some analysis of these situations is underway and is planned as part of a larger discussion of academic ethics).

At any rate, it should seem obvious to everyone interested in, and concerned about, academic librarianship that peer review suppression can have a negative and stifling effect upon the academic librarian's attempts at "insuring that the widest range of information and ideas possible are available." To what extent does peer review suppression/censorship take place in academia, if at all, and if it does take place, what should academic librarians do when examples of it are brought to their attention?

Some scholars have written negatively about peer review in general terms. For instance, Leslie (1989) observes: "Almost everyone who has ever submitted anything to a journal has a horror story or two to tell" (p. 125). Armstrong (1982) is also highly critical: "Recent research shows that journal reviewing practices are neither objective nor fair.... Is 'peer review' simply a nice term for censorship? ....Major innovations tend to refute current wisdom. From the evidence above, we would suspect very innovative articles to have difficulty gaining acceptance from major journals, particularly if they came from low status sources and they challenged commonly held ideas.... Peer review is not as fair as it appears. Nor is it helpful to scientific achievements" (pp. 62-63, 65, 67). And Cude (1987) suggests that, "scholarly tolerance for innovation—for one reason, if not another—is actually rather low" (p. 51).

Recently, the Office of Scholarly Communication of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) conducted a survey of more than 5,000 scholars. A very large number (71 percent) of those surveyed replied. Morton and Price (1989) describe the results:

> About three out of four respondents think the editorial peer review system is biased.... About 40 percent think bias is so prevalent in their discipline that it merits reform.... The question is, therefore, not whether bias exists in the peer review system, but whether it is prevalent and whether it

> systematically interferes with the free exchange of information and ideas
> by discriminating against particular subjects, opinions, and classes of
> authors.... The survey shows that suspicions of bias appear to be held
> by scholars in all types of universities and among all the disciplines
> sampled.... The unease is pervasive, not an occasional outcropping of
> discontent. (pp. 7-9)

(There seems to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy to these
results, for soon after they were released and made known, the Office
of Scholarly Communication was closed down and its scholarly
journal, *Scholarly Communication*, was discontinued.) Cude
(personal communication, April 15, 1988) comments further about
what he perceives as the breadth and depth of peer review suppression:

> In the name of collegiality, students are victimized, considerable
> intellectual resources are being squandered, and the general public is
> deliberately misled. Worse yet, the free pursuit of knowledge is itself
> threatened: useful information is altered or nullified, valuable arguments
> are suppressed, and highly-respected institutions are manipulated to serve
> meanly personal ends. We cannot convincingly pretend this sort of thing
> isn't occurring on a dismaying scale, and we only harm ourselves
> professionally by refusing to address the difficulties openly and
> vigorously.

    More than a century ago, many women were killed by childbirth
fever soon after giving birth. According to Céline (1975), the death
rate at various times around 1846-47 ranged from about 18 percent
in Paris, 26 percent in Berlin, 32 percent in Turin, to about 40 percent
in Vienna (p. 57). A doctor named Semmelweis discovered the cause
of many of these deaths and also devised the means to prevent them.
But his discoveries were vehemently rejected by the peer review
authorities of the day on an international level. He was fired from
his job at the university, apparently as a direct result of the
embarrassment that his discoveries caused among the peer review
authorities. Many years and deaths later, it was finally recognized
that Semmelweis was right, and long after his death a monument
was dedicated to him in Budapest. Céline describes the opposition
to Semmelweis's discoveries by peer review authorities as intellectually
blind, mendacious, stupid, and evil (p. 74). How many women suffered
and died because of the nonscholarly suppressive reactions of these
peer review authorities?
    Suarez and Lemoine (1986) discuss a somewhat similar case of
academic and intellectual suppression, namely, the opposition of peer
review authorities to the findings of Beauperthuy that yellow fever
was spread by means of insectile transmission. Based on their account,
it seems obvious that Beauperthuy hit a raw nerve among some of
the medical research leaders of the day. Although Beauperthuy
managed to publish some of his findings, they were apparently
ignored during his lifetime and then attacked vigorously after his

death in 1871. Moreover, it seems that there is, in this case, a documented example of how such intellectual suppression on the part of peer review authorities can lead directly to de facto academic library censorship inasmuch as the 1895 bibliography of the medical school at the University of Caracas, according to Suarez and Lemoine, did not mention Beauperthuy nor his works. Around 1900, the United States Yellow Fever Commission validated Beauperthuy's findings. But how many people suffered and died in this case because peer review authorities of the day suppressed an innovative scholarly idea? Suarez and Lemoine describe their lengthy article as "an example of how the processes of academic resistance to new findings evolve" (pp. 383-410).

It is not necessary, however, to look back a century or so for examples of peer review suppression. In the by now infamous *Cell-Baltimore* case, Walter Stewart and Ned Feder, scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), wrote (personal communication, May 20, 1987) that senior officials at NIH had forbidden them to submit a rebuttal article to a scholarly journal. In a letter sent by Moran on June 9, 1987, the Director of NIH, James Wyngaarden was asked: "If scientists either within or outside NIH uncover inaccurate material in research supported by NIH funds, or if such scientists come up with hypotheses which contest the results of such research,...would NIH in any way stifle the publication of such opposing views?" In a letter of September 25, 1987, written on behalf of the director by another NIH official, Mary Miers, the following answer is tendered: "I cannot envison a situation in which NIH would seek to suppress a rebuttal article...." Yet Miers had received a copy of an NIH memorandum to Feder and Stewart on December 12, 1986 and signed by another NIH official, J. E. Rall, in which the following is written: "I am withholding approval of your manuscript for publication...." Moreover, in a letter of April 2, 1987, the same Rall wrote Baltimore, whose article was being rebutted by the Feder-Stewart piece: "Meanwhile, I have told Feder and Stewart that their manuscript cannot be submitted to a journal...." Rall also wrote to Moran on December 15, 1986: "It is clearly not NIH policy to discourage or indeed otherwise suppress publication of discussions and corrections of errors...." Apparently it took about a year, and help from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), to have this decision reversed. The article by Feder and Stewart was then finally submitted to several journals but was rejected by them. A Congressional investigation ensued, which turned out to be very embarrassing for the NIH leadership (Greenberg, 1988, pp. 1-6).

Recently, three scientists, Sprague (1987), Hollis (1987), and Jacobstein (1987), related how retaliation was launched against them

when they uncovered information of a scientific nature that upset academic authorities. At the University of Pittsburgh, Breuning engaged in erroneous research and was later charged with fraud (Greenberg, 1988, p. 5). After exposing Breuning's error, Sprague describes how his own research funding was "deferred" and "stopped for four months" (p. 12). Hollis (1987) recounts how "superiors" at Case Western Reserve University "made it clear" to him that he "would pay dearly" for his discoveries that had so upset academic authorities (p. 11). Jacobstein (1987) comments that his "own experience [at Cornell University] suggests that it is nearly impossible to get a fair investigation of the facts..." when a scholar comes up with unsettling findings (p. 11). Additionally, Martin (1989) has recently reported on three cases of suppression by peer review authorities in Australia. He describes the reactions against scholars who uncovered information that was upsetting to academic authorities: "Many colleagues who tried to present the allegations encountered difficulties. Jim Rossiter received hundreds of threatening phone calls after he persisted with his allegations in the Briggs case. The careers of Vardy and French at Foundation 41 suffered when they raised the issue of McBride's fraud" (p. 101).

In the wake of the Breuning scandal at the University of Pittsburgh, another scholar is apparently having a difficult time after he attempted to publish a "dissenting" article. Despite all the rhetoric about academic freedom that flows in speeches on campuses and throughout the literature of higher education, it seems that Cantekin's submission of a dissenting point of view to a journal was regarded by some academic authorities as "unauthorized" and, as such, was considered "improper and a source of grave academic concern." Randal (1989) comments on some peer review aspects of the case:

> At the same time, the university's actions have come under fire. At last fall's congressional hearing, for example, Weiss said of medical school officials, "They have now achieved what they want to do. They have shut up Dr. Cantekin. They've stopped him from doing any research, and he can't publish his information because they have intimidated the journals as to what they can or cannot print." (p. 9)

Peer review suppression occurs in reference works as well. One possible effect of such suppression is that scholarly errors are perpetuated. In turn, a consequential effect is that reference librarians and scholars might end up getting hoodwinked. Altick (1974) comments on this situation: "Unless the persons responsible for new editions of standard works are tenaciously abreast of developments in scholarship, there is always the danger that statements once accepted as truth, but now discredited, will persist without amendment" (p. 15). The *Lexicon of the Middle Ages* claims that: "Its primary aim is *absolutely reliable information....*" Further, its

promotional literature (or literature with information for scholars, whichever the case may be), clearly states: "In the case of controversial problems and theories the *Lexicon* also gives the protagonists of opposing positions a chance to express their views...." A controversy that has been called "the case of the century" has been going on for several years in studies of art of the Middle Ages. Over fifty specific issues have been raised by the present authors in the debate as evidence that the highly cherished and traditional views on the subject are clamorously wrong (as might be expected—in view of the examples of peer review suppression cited earlier—it has been difficult to get these fifty or so issues published in the so-called core literature). A request was made to some of the editorial leaders of the *Lexicon* to allow the protagonists to express their views in the journal's pages. Along with the request was included a reminder of the editors' claim that all sides of a controversy could be found in the pages. Nevertheless, the request was flatly denied, in large part on the basis that the journal does not have room for dissenting views on the subject and also on the basis that the knowledge of one of the editors indicates that the traditional view is the prevailing view in the scholarly literature (documentation and discussion for this case is scheduled for publication in a future issue of *The Reference Librarian*).

SCHOLARLY CONTROVERSIES AND SELECTION OF MATERIAL FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

By their very nature, scholarly controversies are often situations in which scholars disagree about what the truth is in a given subject or study. Sometimes the disagreements are narrowly defined by fine points that are comprehensible to, and considered significant by, a relatively small group of specialists. But other controversies, illustrated by the Semmelweis and Beauperthuy cases among others, involve wide disagreements about issues that are in fact matters of life and death.

It would seem that the very existence of scholarly controversies have created some ethical problems for academic libaries regarding the selection of materials for their collections. In general terms, it would seem logical that selection would be based on what the scholars at the university (college, research center) need and want, and also on an intrinsic priority of material that contains the truth over material that contains falsehoods masquerading as truths (if such distinctions can be detected at the time). But what if some scholars do not want the truth to be known regarding a specific subject? Such a situation is implicit in at least some, if not many, scholarly controversies, and it is also implicit in some of the peer review suppression cases cited earlier. And what should the academic

librarian select if some of these scholars who do not want some specific truths to be known have powerful positions in the university?

It seems that there are two likely responses to the question of what should be selected for the academic library in the case of controversies: either all sides of the question or only the information that the peer review authorities sanction. Davis (1982, p. 40) regards access to all sides of a question as a librarian's duty. Sanford Berman (personal communication to I. Hueck of the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Firenze, Italy, September 12, 1986) goes even further in his description of how the Guido Riccio controversy in art history should be handled by art research libraries specializing in Italian art:

> *Good* library procedure would dictate—with respect to a major intellectual and academic dispute like that surrounding Guido Riccio— that extra measures to be taken to IDENTIFY AND MAKE AVAILABLE THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF VIEWPOINTS AND DOCU- MENTATION....Beyond that, given the unquestionable interest in this particular matter, a proactive, truly helpful and alert librarian would also prepare—and possibly duplicate for broad distribution—a special bibliography on the case. Such a resource-list should be posted prominently in the library and updated frequently. In addition, it should be published in an appropriate art journal, in order that all interested scholars, historians, and others have the opportunity to fully and dispassionately investigate the dispute and reach their own, informed conclusions.

Berman also writes that he is "frankly appalled and disgusted—as a professional librarian committed to basic tenets of intellectual and academic freedom—by the transparent censorship conducted at the Institut Library..." (see the article by John Swan in this issue of *Library Trends*).

Sowards (personal communication, February 23, 1989) also believes that the goal of an academic library collection "is to present the fullest possible range of opinion and information," and he states there are two ways to attain this, "first, to tap the judgements of the recognized experts within a field as aids to selection, and second, to make a place for dissenters in the collection...." On the other hand, Osburn (1989) is of the opinion that academic librarians should follow, and carry out by means of selection, the wishes of the so-called peer review authorities. In any case, it would seem that the two responses are in conflict on ethical grounds.

PEER REVIEW AUTHORITIES AND
ACADEMIC WHISTLE-BLOWERS

Peer review authorities are generally regarded as members of the academic community who have the power to decide what gets published in the university presses (and other major scholarly publishing houses), what appears in the prestigious scholarly

journals, who receives grants for research, and who receives professional promotion. To some extent, they are also the authors of the texts that comprise the so-called core literature in their fields and also that comprise some of the ideas and material taught in classrooms. They are also often editors, authors, and members of advisory boards of specialized reference works in their academic disciplines. In short, peer review authorities are regarded as being the leading experts in their fields.

Academic whistle-blowers are commonly perceived as scholars who feel they have made discoveries, or come up with findings, that contradict and contest scholarly ideas, facts, and information that have been accepted as true, valid, and reliable. As scholars seeking the truth, whistle-blowers can feel obligated to make these new ideas known within the scholarly communication system (in this sense, Semmelweis and Beauperthuy were classic examples of academic whistle-blowers). It is obvious that the discoveries and findings of the whistle-blower might well contest some deeply ingrained and highly cherished traditional beliefs in academia, and also contradict— and prove wrong—some of the pet theories and ideas of the peer review authorities. Such a situation can obviously create tension and animosity to say the least. It seems natural that an adversarial situation might develop, with the peer review authorities possessing the power to suppress the new ideas insofar as the core literature is concerned. Peer review suppression can be vicious and determined, as illustrated by some of the cases cited earlier. Such suppression can also include the use of intimidation and retaliation as well as censorship of the ideas themselves. In a text entitled *Academia, Journalism and Politics* (in press), Lang writes:

> There are strong forces which inhibit criticism, from within or without. One of these forces is "collegiality"....There are other forces of intimidation, of various kinds....Some influential academics are giving priority to protecting their tribe; they close ranks behind each other...and they obstruct, in so far as they can, criticisms of "their own"....There are pressures to shut people up: social pressures, use of bylaws, use of the pecking order, intimidation, etc....

A recent example of censorship was that on January 29, 1990, the editor of a scholarly publication wrote the present authors: "I hope that I can tell you one day what happened to me, after I have published your article" (for the time being, it might be better not to reveal the identity of this person lest more retaliation take place). Some time ago, the managing editor of *Viator* (the scholarly journal of the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at UCLA), actually returned material to a scholar without even opening the envelope (the unopened envelope was enclosed by the managing editor inside a larger envelope and then sent back to the scholar).

ACADEMIC LIBRARIAN REACTIONS
TO ACADEMIC SUPPRESSION

What should academic librarians do in the face of academic suppression once the suppression is pointed out to them? As an ethical matter, potential answers to the question can create conflicts regarding the concepts of academic freedom and patrons who the academic library "serves" within the university, college, or research center. On the other hand, students and their families pay tuition and other fees to attend a university and to "get an education." There is no question that the library should serve them. If students go to a library in search of information, it is natural for them to assume that librarians are trying to help them find information that is true, reliable, and accurate (at least in nations that purport to have open democratic societies and governments). At the same time, faculty members enjoy academic freedom, which allows them to choose the subject matter for their courses.

Suppose, in a hypothetical situation, that a faculty member requests that the librarian set up a reserve shelf for a course. Then, while the course is in progress, the library receives a gift of a book, or an off-print that contests and disproves some of the material that the faculty member has chosen for the reserve shelf. In this case, should the librarian provide the students access to this relevant information? Or does the concept of academic freedom take precedence even to the extent that contested and possibly untrue information be allowed to reign in the library as well as in the classroom? Does academic freedom in a case such as this impede the academic librarian from giving students access to information and ideas of the widest range relating to all sides of an academic question?

It seems that similar ethical conflicts exist currently on a broader scale in relation to scholarly communication. On the one hand, the ethical principle that librarians should give access to the widest range of ideas and information would indicate that librarians should react negatively to academic suppression and censorship the way librarians react negatively with rhetorical word and zealous deed to censorship proposed (or actually instituted) by government leaders or agencies or by religious leaders (e.g., the Moral Majority). And, to be sure, who is in the position of power to, in a large part, effect suppression and censorship of academic material if not the peer review authorities?

The government has also been known to try to suppress "sensitive" scientific information. Nonetheless, Charles Osburn (1989) apparently firmly opposes having academic librarians make a place for academic whistle-blowers if peer review authorities do not include these whistle-blowers in the so-called core literature. Apparently speaking for some academic librarians, he writes, "we have discovered

our place in what is now called the scholarly communication system....The relative importance of a given output of scholarly communication is determined through its acceptance or rejection by the peer review authority in each field" (pp. 277, 281). Osburn also refers to an overloaded information system that contains "noise" (p. 285). If "noise" in this case refers in any way to the ideas that peer review authorities reject, perhaps the question can be raised about whether the "noise" created by Semmelweis and Beauperthuy drowned out, from academic librarian ears, the cries of pain and suffering of the victims of childbirth fever and yellow fever.

Osburn was questioned about his views, specifically those regarding whether or not errors made by peer review authorities should be corrected. In his reply (personal communication, October 31, 1989), he stated that errors should be corrected, but only by the peer review authorities themselves. Therefore, it would seem that, according to Osburn, if peer review authorities do not correct their own errors, or if their peer review colleagues do not correct their errors for them, the academic librarian should let the erroneous material (masquerading as truth) stand, even if more accurate (and therefore more truthful) material on the same subject arrives in the library but via nonpeer review authority channels. In his letter, he writes:

> For an item of communication to be entered into the formal system, it is reviewed first by disciplinary peers....The library does not and should not lead the system of scholarly communication....I believe that the flaws of the system should be corrected directly. Changing the role of the library in the scholarly communication system will not accomplish that at all: moreover, such actions would merely serve as another, larger corruption, rendering the system of scholarly communication incomprehensible and very incoherent.

In essence, Osburn states that since academic librarians cannot collect everything and therefore must be selective, their selections should be based on what the peer review authorities deem most important and significant. This view certainly has some useful and practical aspects to it, since the authorities usually have more expertise on specific subjects than librarians do. On the other hand, it is difficult to understand how, if an academic librarian at the University of Vienna a century or so ago had placed Semmelweis's findings on the shelves and in the bibliographies, or if academic librarians at Paris and Caracas had provided access to Beauperthuy's works, such actions could be part of "another larger corruption, rendering the system of scholarly communication incomprehensible and very incoherent." Nor is it easy to understand how Osburn's views apply to an academic librarian who has recently requested a large amount

of nonpeer review material relating to the Guido Riccio controversy for the library collection.

A defect in Osburn's proposed scholarly communication system might be that it does not sufficiently acknowledge that the history of science and other fields, to a large degree, constitute a history of academic whistle-blowing. Schneider (1989) writes: "If the knowledge expounded by recognized scholars to their students should prove to be of dubious reliability, then their authority is open to question. Thus, scientific progress and changing theories are natural enemies of authoritarian tradition" (p. 137). Schneider's observations place in sharp relief what is perhaps the biggest flaw in Osburn's "system," namely, that he is proposing that academic librarians select materials more on the basis of authority than on the truth that the material contains. Insofar as librarians follow the advice of authorities to make selection in the first place, Osburn's views have merit. But when he insists that academic librarians should exclude the works of academic whistle-blowers from their collections until the authorities themselves allow such works into the core literature on the subject, then Osburn's system seems more appropriate for totalitarianism. Along this line of reasoning, Swan and Peattie (1989) write: "access to the broadest range of ideas and information is conducive to the practice of democracy. This means that denying such access is an action that should be sharply questioned" (p. 120).

Religious authorities punished Galileo and other scientists whose ideas did not jibe with authoritative doctrine, and they went on to suppress their ideas. What academic peer review authorities did to Semmelweis, Beauperthuy, and other whistle-blowers might be considered an academic's form of similar punishment and suppression. And if academic librarians carry out the peer review authorities' suppression on library shelves and bibliographies, then it seems that Osburn's system might be more accurately defined as a "system of scholarly excommunication," with "out-of-cite, out-of-mind" procedures that suppress ideas that are "excommunicated" in terms of the peer review authority dogma.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS AND ACADEMIC WHISTLE-BLOWERS

Without giving up their neutrality, academic librarians can consider both whistle-blowers and peer review authorities as their allies. Academic authorities are allies by providing expertise as a guide for selection. Whistle-blowers are natural allies to the extent that they provide material that makes corrections and provides new ideas that the authorities overlooked or tried to suppress.

In any case, the attitude of the academic librarian toward the

whistle-blower reflects to a large extent the librarian's attitude toward truth and censorship. Oboler (1982) takes a firm stand against censorship: "Among the many important tasks to be performed by the librarian—by the professon of librarianship—not the least is that of perpetual, unceasing awareness of and combat against censorship on every level, of every type, whenever and wherever it occurs" (p. 99). He does not seem to be the kind of person who would censor the works of Semmelweis, Beauperthuy, or other academic whistleblowers. Not all academic librarians take so strong a stand, however. In requests for information that dealt with gifts that contained material upsetting to authorities in academia, Margreet Wijnstroom (at that time the secretary general of IFLA) wrote: "I would suggest you let the matter rest, and in any case cease to bother the members of my Executive Board and my staff with matters beyond their control" (personal communication, December 10, 1986).

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES, LIBRARIANS, LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS, AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM COMMITTEES: A PROPOSAL

If a government official (Meese for one and Joseph McCarthy for another) issues a call for a clean-up against pornography, immoral literature, or subversive material, there is a natural feeling among librarians that they are being asked to do things that run counter to their professional ethics, as a sampling of the rhetoric against the Meese Report at ALA meetings confirms. Although there was effective suppression during the so-called McCarthy era, nowadays intellectual freedom groups and associations at various professional levels can be quick in cranking up their rhetoric and activity to protest such suppressive moves as part of the librarian's anti-censorship ethic. Rightly so, at least for librarians who believe in fighting censorship "on every level, of every type, whenever and wherever it occurs." On the other hand, it seems that if peer review authorities suppress material that purports to correct error in the core literature, some academic librarians apparently regard the suppressed material as "noise" that does not belong in the library in the first place. Swan (personal communication, December 12, 1989) writes, "it may be significant that the ACRL has no Division IFC, and there is nothing explicitly related to ethics or intellectual freedom in its goals." This situation seems to indicate that there might be something amiss, or misdirected, about the word *intellectual*, as used by some librarians or in the use of the term "intellectual freedom." In other words, there are IF groups set up and established for various library associations at various levels, but apparently not specifically for academic library groups. Smut peddlers can turn to specific IF library

groups for assistance when their wares are censored, but what special committees can scholars turn to when their discoveries, findings, and ideas are censored?

A proposal for academic library groups to establish IF committees is not necessarily a question of trying to second guess the peer review authorities about what the truth of the subject matter is in specific cases. Rather, it is more a question of whether academic librarians are really committed to providing accurate information, to fighting censorship, to "insuring that the widest range of information and ideas possible are available." It also involves the question of whether or not academic librarians will look the other way when bona fide scholars, after a long time of routinely using a library, are suddenly denied permission to study there solely because the scholars published articles of which peer review authorities do not approve. (If a person were denied permission to use a library based on race, religious, or sexual preferences, what would the IF reactions of various anticensorship librarians be?) IF groups for academic library committees would be a part of the academic librarian's effort to help scholars attempt to determine what the truth is in their given studies. Neither would there be a need for academic librarians to suddenly become experts and specialists in academic disciplines, nor would it mean that peer review rejections are the equivalent of censorship.

In some cases, if not many, librarians themselves can detect academic and intellectual suppression and censorship of a blatant sort by the very nature of the peer review rejections and by the attitudes of some peer review authorities toward the truth. A few examples can help illustrate the point. In a rejection letter (December 9, 1987), Ethan Shevrach, editor in chief of the *Journal of Immunology*, wrote: "Whether or not your interpretation of the data is correct or not is irrelevant." The article in question was a rebuttal that purported to expose, if not correct, an alleged serious error in the core literature recently published in the field. If the correctness of the interpretation of the data is "irrelevant," it would logically follow that Shevrach does not really feel too strongly about whether the interpretation in the published article is correct either. Moreover, the rejected article was one that NIH authorities had originally denied permission to be submitted for publication, though subsequently the American Civil Liberties Union finally intervened. But that is not all. The same rebuttal article provoked the following negative reaction from Patricia Woolf (personal communication, July 23, 1987): "It is uncomfortable to live with error but important to remember that correcting a specific error at the expense of collegial trust will not and cannot restore that comfort." (Woolf's ideas certainly would have brought comfort and joy to the peer review authorities who did not

wish to have their errors corrected, with ensuing loss of collegial trust, by Semmelweis and Beauperthuy. But what is more "uncomfortable" to Woolf, the discomfort of scholars who have to bear the pain of having their scholarly mistakes corrected or the intense pain of the many persons who suffered and died because scholarly error was not corrected?) It would seem that rejections based on reasoning that accuracy is irrelevant or that collegial trust should take priority over correction of error, can serve as warning signs to academic librarians that academic censorship might be taking place.

In addition, there may be other telling signals. Suppose peer review authorities return material without opening it or refuse to acknowledge receipt of a manuscript submitted for publication? Likewise, Catch 22 type rejections might raise an eyebrow among anticensorship minded librarians, as well as rejections listed by Remus (1980) such as the following: "The referee criticizes the paper for vices it does not have, and suggests it not be published" (p. 88). There are also evasive and stonewalling tactics of peer review authorities that can be telling. For example, in a situation paralleling one experienced by the present authors, a paper is submitted. A reviewer requests some changes, but neither the editor nor the reviewer tell the authors precisely what changes are required. The authors write asking for clarification, but neither the editor nor the reviewer nor even the President/Chancellor of the university who is on the editorial board ex officio, answer these repeated requests. Finally, after the stonewalling becomes glaringly obvious, an assistant to the President/Chancellor informs the authors that *they* are responsible for the delays because they did not make the required corrections in the manuscript. Once again, there is no indication of what these corrections should be. In the face of this situation, Serebnick's opinion comes to mind: "I do not feel that the editor has an ethical duty to tell the authors what the referee recommended" (personal communication, August 20, 1989). (The original context of the quote by Serebnick was a case in which the referee suggested publication of the article, but the editor turned around and rejected it outright without informing the authors of the referee's judgment. At any rate, it is obvious that if authors are not informed of corrections that they should make in the text, an article can be suppressed *forever* without the editor ever having to write a rejection letter.)

None of this discussion about shady peer review tactics means that academic librarians should intervene or try to overturn unfair and suppressive peer review decisions. But knowledge of such situations might help the librarian realize that the ideas and information rejected by peer review leaders might be more than mere "noise" if such ideas show up eventually in noncore publications.

It is difficult to imagine, on ethical grounds, objections and opposition to the establishment of IF groups for the ACRL and other academic library associations. To the contrary, such IF committees would reinforce and enhance the academic librarian's commitment to truth and to providing access to the widest range of ideas, especially in the case of controversies. While not setting themselves up as arbiters of the truth, librarians can serve more effectively as illuminators of the truth in service of scholars seeking the truth. Besides, the very establishment of such IF committees, with their statements of anticensorship goals, principles, and objectives, might have a salutary effect on the quality of peer review in academia. Such IF groups might also have a positive effect on tolerance for new and truthful ideas in academia that are in contrast to older and false, but highly cherished, ideas.

REFERENCES

Altick, R. (1974). *Librarianship and the pursuit of truth* (Second Annual Richard H. Shoemaker Lecture, 1972). Rutgers University Graduate School of Library Services.

Armstrong, J. S. (1982). The ombudsman: Is review by peers as fair as it appears? *Interfaces*, (October), 62-74).

Céline, L. (1975). *II Dottor Semmelweis*. Milano, Italy: Adelphi.

Cude, W. (1987). *The Ph.D. trap*. West Bay, Nova Scotia: Medicine Label Press.

Davis, E. (1982). The ethics of information serving homo sapiens vs. homo biblios. *The Reference Librarian*, 4(Summer), 31-43.

Greenberg, D. S. (1988). Fraud inquiry: Harsh treatment for NIH on Capitol Hill. *Science and Government Report*, XVIII, 7(April 15), 1-6.

Hollis, B. (1987). I turned in mu mentor. *The Scientist*, 1(27), 11-12.

Jacobstein, J. (1987). I am not optimistic. *The Scientist*, 1(27), 11-12.

Lang, S. *Academia, journalism and politics*. Unpublished manuscript.

Leslie, L. Z. (1989). Manuscript review: A view from below. *Scholarly Publishing*, 20(2), 123-128.

Martin, B. (1989). Fraud and Australian academics. *Thought and Action*, 5(2), 95-102.

Meador, J., & Buthod, C. (1982). Triage. *The Reference Librarian*, 4(Summer), 143-146.

Morton, H. C., & Price, A. J. (1989). *The ACLS survey of scholars—Final report of views on publications, computers and libraries*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Nolte, E. (1983). Thoughts on the state and prospects of the academic ethic in the universities of the Federal Republic of Germany. *Minerva*, (Summer-Autumn), 161-171.

Oboler, E. M. (1982). International aspects of intellectual freedom. *Drexel Library Quarterly*, 18(1), 95-100.

Osburn, C. (1989). The structuring of the scholarly communication system. *College & Research Libraries*, 50(3), 277-287.

Randal, J. (1989). Congress probes research funding. *Washington Post*, June 13, p. 9.

Remus, W. (1980). Why academic journals are unreadable: The referees' crucial role. *Interfaces*, 10(2), 87-90.

Rüegg, W. (1986). The academic ethos. *Minerva*, (Winter), 393-412.

Schneider, H. (1989). The threat to authority in the revolution of chemistry. *History of Universities VIII*, 137-150.

Sprague, R. (1987). I trusted the research system. *The Scientist*, 1(27), 11-12.

Suarez, M., & Lemoine, W. (1986). From internalism to externalism: A study of academic resistance to new scientific findings. *History of Science*, (December), 383-410.
Swan, J., & Peattie, N. (1989). *The freedom to lie: A debate about democracy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc.