

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ?

Most readers of "De Geostatisticis" will remember the paper by Philip & Watson that appeared in the journal "Mathematical Geology" criticizing geostatistics – the snappy prose of the article, and the witty reply by Mo Srivastava. There would be no point in reminding readers of this except that another article in a similar vein appeared recently in the Canadian journal "Northern Miner" in its edition of 18 May 1992. The article and the reply by Normand Champigny are reprinted, with the permission of the editors.

Like Philip & Watson, the author disagrees violently with geostatistics. In many ways the two articles are similar –they're high on journalistic style and low on scientific content. Not surprisingly, neither set of authors succeeded in getting their ideas published in the usual way in a technical journal. The peer review process rejected them. And this raises a fundamental question: Does the peer review process effectively deprive these people of their freedom of speech by denying them the chance to express opinions that run against the popular view? Or is the peer review system just doing its job of rejecting papers that do not back up their opinions with scientific fact?

Your opinion on the questions would be appreciated.

A preliminary straw poll of some members brought forward differing points of view. The first, perhaps rather superficial one was:

"I really enjoyed reading P & W's article and I loved Mo's reply. The Alice in Wonderland quotes were perfect. He, he, he..."

To which an avid Alice fan added: *"I roared laughing at the Lewis Carroll quotes, but they're too good to be true. Sometimes I wonder whether they're real or made up"*.

Be that as it may.

A more thoughtful comment came from a geostatistician working in a large mining company:

"Every time I run into resistance and rearguard action from people opposed to the use of geostats on the mines (because they are frightened of seeing their influence diminished), they quote that P & W article to senior management. It is a confounded nuisance having unscientific rubbish published in supposedly reputable journals."

Academic institutions like Fontainebleau and Stanford should write replies shooting down that sort of rot. I haven't got time to do it".

This raises a second important question of how to react to those sort of articles when they do appear. Is it really the role of universities to play policeman laying down the law and generally moralising? In my view, no. If not, who is responsible for replying? Or should we just play dead and hope that conveniently disappear?

We look forward to hearing readers' points of view on these prickly pear problems.

M. Armstrong