

EDITORIAL

Who would have thought that innovation would be such a contentious subject? Motherhood and apple pie surely, certainly compared with the debate on the use of libel laws and academic expression in our March issue. Preparations for that debate kept our publisher's lawyers busy for weeks: it has not been necessary to bother them at all for this issue's debate on innovation. Tim Kastelle and John Steen present the proposition that innovation is a pretty gritty sort of thing, far removed from the niceties of its understanding in academic journals. They are particularly scathing of patents as an indicator of success in innovation. Innovation has to be managed, they argue, and so managers must treat innovation as a process, no matter how much this smacks of the unreality of linear models. To this end, they see some value in a stage model of innovation.

Well, this has provoked no little protest, understandably from the academic community. Kevin Scally, from University College in Cork, mauls Kastelle and Steen's opposition to patents as an indicator of anything anyone would want to know. Great care must be taken in their use, but patents can indicate something. But Scally's main opposition is to what he sees as Kastelle and Steen accommodating managers with a value chain model simply to make the management of innovation easier for managers. Innovation, according to Scally, is not meant to be easy; it emerges from an inherently chaotic process which is dependent on creativity and ideas if it is ever to produce anything worth having. Managers simply have to cope and it is not the academic's job to make the manager's life more comfortable by distorting reality. John Rainford is as much consultant as academic. He gives some support to Kastelle and Steen, but would help managers by portraying innovation as something exciting, rather than something routine. Ideas should not stop at invention, but should permeate all of innovation.

Both Ray Lambert and Graham Vickery are administrators of innovation policy rather than academics, the former at the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills in London, and the latter (until very recently) at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris. Like John Rainford, Ray Lambert is tired of dull innovation systems and would have innovation seen as a creative process, bursting with ideas. Graham Vickery, echoing Scally in his conviction that innovation is demanding, finds no reason to simplify so that innovation can be readily understood by busy businessmen. And there we have it; a lively debate has been stimulated in an area where debate is too often smothered by ready consensus that information is worthy. Though innovation is the core interest of this journal, this centrality should never be confused with consensus. The chorus must never be allowed to drown out the soloists.

The research papers in this issue also deal directly with innovation, but less directly with its perception. Nearest to the theme of the debate is the paper from Olivia Harvey on managing innovation in stem cell research. She has talked to

those at the coalface of this research in Australia, and finds that their perception of what they are doing differs from that of the policymakers who support the research. Beth Kewell and Matthias Beck look at innovation in the same field and reach a similar conclusion: what policymakers have in mind for innovation can be very different from what businessmen can realise. In a sense, Mario Coccia addresses this problem too. He examines the relationship between innovation in the public and private sectors in Italy. His research indicates that when private sector spending on research and development exceeds public sector expenditure, there is a positive effect on productivity and competitiveness. Of course, this rather begs a significant question arising from this issue's debate: if perceptions of innovation are so different in the two sectors, are they really funding the same thing?

George Chorafakis and Dimitrios Pontikakis explore the tension in the European Union over whether it should fund research to help bind together its member nations, or to help them become more competitive. The time has come, they argue, for something more sophisticated than such a mechanistic and instrumental approach to innovation. And it is against the mechanistic that the author of our last paper rails. John Elliott draws from American experience to consider the situation in which academics find themselves in the UK and in Europe more generally. He questions the validity of the assumption that the academic has a right to express his ideas freely. The academic may have a contractual obligation to say what he knows, but whatever moral duty he once had has been overtaken by the need to do and say what he is told. It is a point that might have been made in this issue's debate: if what academics have to say about innovation is deficient, perhaps the fault lies in the innovations that have taken place in an institutional system that now tells academics what to say.

We have some administrative changes. Variations in the number of book reviews appearing in each issue have suggested the need for a single person to take overall charge of book reviews, a task previously devolved to several people. John Elliott - the same John Elliott who wrote this issue's paper on academic freedom - has been kind and rash enough to volunteer. I wish him good fortune in a job made the more difficult by the reluctance of academics to undertake work that makes no impression on academic performance indicators. And I am grateful to Hazel Moir for her determination that *Prometheus* should carry book reviews; without her efforts to date, there would have been precious few.

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