

Editorial

Over the years, many a *Prometheus* paper has referred to the Matthew Effect, the observation from the Bible's Book of Matthew that the rich tend to get richer and the poor poorer, not a tendency to which Matthew himself seems to have objected.

For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

Prometheus authors, as befits those who publish in a critical journal concerned with innovation, follow the lead given by Robert Merton, the eminent sociologist, who related the principle to the ability of prominent authors to find publishing in academic journals much easier than their less prominent peers (Merton, 1968). The orthodox thinking of the Establishment wins out just about every time. Academics have tested for this particular aspect of the effect for years, often using a variant of the spoof author technique: a paper already published by a somebody is submitted to other journals in the name of a nobody and is summarily rejected (e.g., Armstrong, 1982). The ethics of the methodology are questionable, but its application makes the Matthew Effect pretty clear in academic publishing.

Science magazine (Brainard, 2022a) has just reported on the results of research testing this dimension of the Matthew Effect in academic publishing in a rather different way (Huber *et al.*, 2022). Its authors, all from the University of Innsbruck, the University of Graz or Chapman University in Maryland, find overwhelming evidence that the effect persists. But the Austrian research claims to be testing something a little different, and perhaps more significant. The Austrians find their evidence of the Matthew Effect in peer review and it is this influence that *Science* reports as distorting academic publication in favour of the prominent.

Hundreds of regular referees for a score or more of Elsevier finance journals were sent an invitation to review a genuine paper submitted to one of these journals, the *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Finance*. Fair enough, but some invitations to potential referees identified a Nobel prizewinner from Chapman University as the paper's corresponding author, and others named a Chapman nobody. The Austrian working paper finds the methodology acceptable because this is apparently the practice of a couple of German journals. The Austrians discover that referees are much more favourably disposed towards the submission when the corresponding author is the Nobel prizewinner rather than the nobody.

But Merton had very little to say about the influence of the Matthew Effect on peer review, which has never been very good at identifying the best submissions anyway (Gans and Shepherd, 1994). Merton was thinking about the effect in terms of the overall advantage it gave to the Nobel prizewinners he and his assistant, Harriet Zukerman, were studying. Ironically, as the years passed following the publication of Merton's 1968 paper, Merton felt increasingly guilty about excluding Zukerman from authorship as she had undertaken most of the legwork for the research project. Merton eventually conceded that, as she had interviewed the Nobel prizewinners, she should have had co-authorship. In later work she did, though a paper with an authorship order of Merton and Zukerman was always much easier to publish than one of Zukerman and Merton. The problem might have been solved in 1993, when Harriet Zukerman married Robert Merton, but she continued to publish under her Zukerman name.

The important point is not that referees undermine what remains of the peer review system by giving preferential treatment to prominent authors. Referees are not routinely told who are the authors of papers they are asked to assess, nor can they always and easily discover the authors' identity for themselves. But editors and their editorial teams always know the identity of authors submitting papers, and it is in their assessment – not that of referees – that the Matthew Effect should

be anticipated. Indeed, most papers submitted to top journals never go anywhere near a referee. Peer review is now in crisis, with few academics seeing why they should volunteer their labour to make academic publishers even more profitable, and few universities keen to encourage them (Hill, 2016).

The solution to this shortage problem is to desk reject nearly all submissions to top journals – a procedure which has grown by an order of magnitude in the 21st century (Merriman, 2021) – judging paper quality by the reputation of authors and the institutions to which they are affiliated. Submissions are rejected out of hand if they seem to offer nothing that will increase the journal impact factor and thus the prestige and ranking of the journal, and the value of the publisher's property. Of the minority of submissions sent to referees, some 30–50% are eventually accepted (Lawrence, 2007), which rather gives the lie to the claims of top journals to have 95% rejection rates so rigorous is their peer review.

The Austrian research measured the Matthew Effect in terms of how much more potential referees were impressed when the manuscript's corresponding author was a Nobel prizewinner rather than a novice, but this is misleading. The position of an individual in the list of authors is much more likely to determine the fate of a paper. A thriving market charges higher prices for some author slots than for others and the rank of corresponding author does not seem to command a premium (Chawla, 2022). Increasingly, the value of lesser slots is being increased by inclusion in the overall lineup of honorary authors from prestigious-sounding institutions. Honorary and ghost authors abound (especially in the most prestigious journals) (Mowatt *et al.*, 2002; Brainard, 2022b), many long-dead or never having lived at all. In that it confounds confirmation by editorial staff, the extinct author only increases the prospects of a paper's publication and hence its value to living authors and publishers (Biagioli, 2022). Labbé (2020) gives the example of Ike Antkare, recently ranked the sixth most-cited academic in the world (ahead of both Anthony Giddens and Karl Marx). Ike Antkare is not alive and never has been, though he continues to publish (e.g., Antkare, 2020). That some of the most prolific academic authors are quite fictional, created only to facilitate publication, would seem to cast the Matthew Effect in a new light, and to suggest that the efforts of the Austrian researchers, and the interest in them of *Science* magazine, may be misplaced.

Gilles Grolleau and Naoufel Mzoughi, from the ESSCA School of Management in Lyon and INRAE in Avignon respectively, examine a related area. They are into scandals. There have been no shortages of scandals in the academic world of late, most (it would seem) to do with doubts about academic integrity, the pressure to publish and the metrics of academic performance and reputation. Scandals are nearly always regarded as undesirable and much effort goes into trying to hush up even the most egregious. Politicians are awarded doctorates for theses they did not write, papers known to be wrong are submitted for publication because popular papers are welcomed by editors, authorship of academic papers is openly bought and sold, and academic institutions cover up even the worst behaviour when it is in their interest to do so. But Grolleau and Mzoughi argue that research institutions and scientific communities should be taking advantage of scandals rather than trying to cover them up. Among the ways in which this might be accomplished, such as learning from the experience and changing the measures of achievement, is using the opportunity scandal presents to disempower high-status individuals, such as Nobel prizewinners. As such people are likely to be found in high-status institutions, the scandal offers challenge as well as opportunity.

Daša Farčnik, Tjaša Redek and Sonja Šlander, from the University of Ljubljana, write about open innovation in Slovenia. They question the usual observation that innovation is simply a good thing. Using a combination of survey data and official registry financial data, the authors find that open innovation is more important in less productive firms. This may well be consistent with theoretical ideas that stress the role of learning, capacity building and knowledge transfer in innovation, but these firms actually invest less than others in open innovation activities. Such a paradox poses questions for both managers and policy-makers to answer.

Metaphors enable the understanding of one thing in terms of another. This role receives little attention in the study of innovation. Tonci Grubic, from Liverpool John Moores University, does something to redress this situation by examining the role of metaphor in understanding change in astronomy. Grubic finds that metaphors create reality, which is why their reality-creating side

cannot be separated from their creative side. The metaphor provides a compressed interpretation of the world, but it can do this only through discarding information. Given that metaphors are central to reasoning and theorizing, it is surprising that getting rid information seems to be essential for the construction of theory.

This issue also contains a review essay of the second edition of William Kingston's work on how capitalism has been destroyed by allowing technological innovation to be undermined by financial innovation. Peter Senker begs to differ. Capitalism is far from destroyed and is now doing more damage than ever to what is really valuable. This is followed by half a dozen book reviews, now an essential part of *Prometheus's* quarterly offering to the world.

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