

Editorial

Our website is at prometheusjournal.co.uk and it has been at this address for many years. A very similar web address – prometheusjournal.org – has just appeared. Not quite the same, but certainly very similar. For the last couple of years it has been used by a trade union group based in Coventry in the UK for *Prometheus. A Journal for Socialism and Democracy*. It's a blog really rather than a journal and should not be confused with *Prometheus. Critical Studies in Innovation*. But it will be, certainly by Google.

So, a note to the principals of this upstart *Prometheus* seemed in order to see how confusion might be avoided. But emails to its individual editors, who are often its authors, go unanswered, as does an email sent to someone who seems to be the journal's lawyer. Surely this upstart is not a clone from the world of predatory publishers. But why does it call itself a journal at all, and in the same manner as the incumbent *Prometheus*? And why do its founders not respond to our overtures? It's all a bit unnerving. The upstart would seem to be far to the left on the political spectrum, its first editorial declaring in late 2020 that:

Prometheus will be an unashamed advocate for socialist change. By that we mean a fundamental breach with capitalism; the abolition of the profit system; an end to the exploitation of labour by capital; and the creation of a new, classless society based on the common ownership of the means of production ...

Such a *credo* is in direct conflict with capitalism's intellectual property rights system, on which *Prometheus the Incumbent* publishes a good deal. Just what is afoot? The world of academic publishing is not a peaceful place these days.

To be generous for a moment, it could be that those responsible for *Prometheus the Upstart* see copying as the sincerest form of flattery and the intellectual property rights system of capitalism as nothing less than theft from the community. Yet the system was established to have the opposite effect, to help the weak protect their ideas from being stolen by the strong. In this, IPR largely fails, allowing the powerful to exploit what they like at the expense of society, all the while pretending that IPR prevents such behaviour.

This self-declared journal might do well to consider that journals these days must defend themselves and not simply announce their position. *Prometheus the Incumbent* bears the scars of many battles, especially with its publishers. It has always been our practice to check every submission for duplication and then to ask listed authors of suspicious submissions for an explanation. Where no satisfactory explanation is forthcoming, we report the plagiarism to university employers and to the academic publishers of the works that seem to have been plagiarized; only one publisher – Edward Elgar – has taken any action against a plagiarist we have reported and universities have shown absolutely no interest.

Those who control the means of production in the higher education industry have no ethical objection to plagiarism. Their own strictures to students about the evils of plagiarism are especially likely to have been plagiarized from other universities. The senior managers of universities are as unscrupulous as German politicians and Bulgarian businessmen about attaching their own names to material written by others. In 2016, the UK Quality Assurance Agency published *Plagiarism in Higher Education, Custom Essay Writing Services: An Exploration and Next Steps for the UK Higher Education Sector*. Its report on the evils of plagiarism is – though only in small part – itself plagiarised. University objection to plagiarism is entirely pragmatic: plagiarism is bad simply because it undermines the marking of student work that serves as the industry's quality control. How to grade students when they may never have written a word of what is being graded? Enter

Turnitin to assess the originality of student essays – and add them to its vast database of essays against which it will check future essays submitted by future students. Some students have had the temerity to protest that they did not enrol at university to have their creative property stolen to serve the commercial requirements of a capitalist Turnitin. *Prometheus the Upstart* may be hard put to explain how its *credo* accommodates the theft of student property to prevent plagiarism in universities that are all too willing to tolerate plagiarism when it supports their own business interests.

The lot of academics is not so very different from that of students. They, too, are exploited labour, untrusted by their masters. Capitalist, business school logic is that they must be managed and their performance measured. It is, generally in terms of citations of their journal publications. As careers hang in the balance, competition is fierce. There is no collegiality here, no unity of the working classes and very little interest in public benefit arising from intellectual endeavour. Publication is but a means to an end and the end is citations, not knowledge for the masses. To garner citations competitively, academics must game the metrics – meaning that they work the system – and are encouraged to do so by employers and academic publishers, who also have much to gain from inflated metrics. The most cited papers are, by definition, the best papers, but the best papers for gaming the metrics are banal things, papers that can be cited anywhere in support of anything and are therefore the easiest to cite. Readable papers and the latest research are especially difficult to cite and are discouraged. The scientific archive that this is producing may be in public ownership, but the public is now faced with the problem of disposing of worthless but readily cited scientific rubbish. *Prometheus the Upstart* might struggle with this conundrum.

All of academic publishing is complicit in this academic swindle that generates ever higher metrics and ever greater private rewards. Editors increase their journal impact factor by coercive citation (forcing authors to cite their journal's papers on pain of rejection). Academic publishers act increasingly like predatory journals, publishing the submissions of anyone who pays. The listed author, rather than the public, is now the customer of academic publishing. And universities bribe academics with hefty bonuses to publish where citations will contribute most to university ranking.

Authorship has become an entitlement to cite a paper. The more authors a paper has (and some have hundreds) the more self-citation will boost its citation and therefore quality. Many of those claiming authorship of academic papers have never even read them much less written them. That chore is left to lesser beings, sometimes working for essay mills, sometimes for specialist companies, anonymous and with no ownership of what they have written. Some of the most cited authors do not exist at all, truly a triumph of gaming. Ike Antkare was recently elevated to sixth most-cited academic in the world (cited more than Karl Marx). There is no Ike Antkare and there never has been, though he continues to publish.

Universities are now multinational enterprises and show little enthusiasm for the 'fundamental breach with capitalism' *Prometheus the Upstart* sees on the horizon. Academic publishing is dominated by a small oligopoly of entrenched and highly profitable firms – hardly good examples of 'the abolition of the profit system' envisaged by the *Upstart*. Neither students nor academics have done much to shake off their chains. Too often, they have compromised and capitulated, collaborators in the pretence that all is well in higher education, that there is no 'exploitation of labour by capital'. The labouring classes are the academics who work for free churning out papers and editing journals to feed the publication mill. Gaming has divorced metrics from pride in performance and fraternal loyalty has been abandoned in the rush to compete. If *Prometheus the Upstart* is to change anything, at least in higher education, it must find its way through the pseudo scholarship, cut-throat collegiality and pointless peer review that hide the reality of academic publishing.

There are only two research papers in this issue of *Prometheus*, but both are substantial pieces. The first, by Karen Yeung from the Law School and the School of Computer Science at Birmingham University, explores a fairy tale or rather the consequences of believing that a particular fairy tale is real. The tale in question is Digital Enchantment: only believe in the magic of Digital Enchantment and dreams will come true. Many from the digital industry are sufficiently enchanted to cast reality aside, and many from other industries which might use new digital products are also

captivated. But most captured of all by the magic are policy-makers and particularly politicians who need to convince the electorate that life can only get better. The internet showed the world the power of the digital, and subsequent digital innovation is society's reward for leaving the market free and unencumbered, for leaving innovation unfettered. There is no downside to this dream, no bad fairy: digital will solve all problems and have no ill effects. Nighty-night, children.

Our second paper is by Matthew Regele from the Williams College of Business at Xavier University in Cincinnati. The paper deals with innovation in EduTec, a company providing educational services for schools and colleges in the United States. Two aspects of the paper are unusual: the first is that the author has spent a long, long time interviewing EduTec managers about their innovation experiences, and the second is that he has persuaded these managers to talk about failed innovation. So many papers on innovation are based on what the boss says about how wonderful the company's innovations are. Persuading people to talk about what went wrong is no easy matter, especially in companies where responsibility is accompanied by blame. But knowing what went wrong is surely essential to making failure less likely in future.

There are five book reviews in this issue. Three books are on artificial intelligence, a subject we have covered extensively in the book reviews of recent issues, rather pre-empting the current popular and political interest in the subject. Two of the AI books are handbooks, both from Cambridge University Press, one on responsible artificial intelligence and the other on legal and ethical aspects of artificial intelligence. No doubt there are many more AI handbooks in the making – especially if they write themselves.

Stuart Macdonald
General editor