

## Editorial

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### Any data will do?

The persistence of our book review editor, Steven Umbrello, has at last resulted in the inclusion of *Prometheus* in the Italian government's ANVUR list of approved scientific journals. Since 2010, Italian academics have received no institutional credit for publishing in journals not on the list, a policy which has much distorted academic publication in the country.

*Prometheus* has also recently been approved by DOAJ, the Directory of Open Access Journals. Listing is worth having in that the open access publishing model has often been regarded as synonymous with predatory publishing because both charge authors to publish their works. Pluto Journals, of course, operates an alternative open access model and authors do not pay to be published in its journals. That said, those who keep an eye on these things regularly find that varying understandings of what is meant by 'predatory' result in journals acceptable to DOAJ not always being acceptable to Scopus, and vice versa (e.g., Mills *et al.*, 2021).

For some years now, *Prometheus* has been listed by Scopus, the largest database of academic publishing. Scopus is run by Elsevier and is the pre-eminent means of checking out a journal. World of Science, run by Thomson, is the other major database. Scopus is reckoned to be the less unreliable (van Eck and Waltman, 2019). There is not much in the Scopus listing of *Prometheus* that is correct and every year your general editor writes to Scopus to request that changes be made. One of the FAQs on the automated email from Scopus Support is 'What can I expect after submitting a data correction request?' Bugger all is the answer. Year after year, Scopus is asked to change its *Prometheus* entry. Year after year, promises are made, and year after year changes are not (see Verkhatsky and Petersen, 2023).

Scopus has long listed *Prometheus* as a Geography journal, which it certainly is not and never has been. According to SCImago (a Spanish outfit which uses Scopus data to rank journals, institutions and countries), our subject areas are:

- Earth and Planetary Sciences
  - Earth-Surface Processes
- Nursing
  - Research and Theory
- Social Sciences
  - Geography, Planning and Development

*Prometheus* has no particular interest in any of these subject areas. To be fair, years of badgering have led, not to the removal of inaccurate subject areas, but to the addition of the subject areas in which *Prometheus* does have an interest:

- Business, Management and Accounting
  - Management of Technology and Innovation
  - Strategy and Management

A step forward, but hardly a leap: according to SCImago (which gets its data from Scopus), *Prometheus* has never, in all its 40 years, published a single paper in Business, Management and

Accounting, or Management of Technology and Innovation, or Strategy and Management. Other users of Scopus data are no more accurate than SCImago: ISSN (the International Standard Serial Number) gives the subject interests of *Prometheus* as simply Sociology.

Scopus guards its data and its methodology carefully; not surprising, given the commercial value of academic metrics. SCImago explains that no changes can be made to Scopus data by those who use Scopus data without the express permission of Scopus and then, it seems, only once a year:

As you know, following our previous email exchanges, all the metadata (such as *Title* and *Subject Areas/Categories* classification) have been provided by Scopus /Elsevier in their last update sent to SCImago in April 2023. As we mentioned earlier, SCImago doesn't have the authority over these data which are property of Scopus/Elsevier and we are not allowed to do any changes of the metadata unless Scopus authorizes it expressly. Since this problem persists, we have also informed Scopus so that they can make the necessary changes in their platform and authorise us to proceed further.

Now, *Prometheus* cannot be unique. The data associated with other journals are likely to be just as nonsensical. And they are; the Scopus classification of the interests of the following journals is very odd:

*Accountability in Research* – Law

*Research Evaluation* – Education

*Scientometrics* – Law

*World Patent Information* – Bioengineering

Wang and Waltman (2016) have used citation analysis to search for some justification for these errant subject classifications. They find none. But then it would be hard to explain why Scopus has separate categories for Linguistics & Language and for Language & Linguistics; for Information Systems & Management and for Management Information Systems (Wang and Waltman, 2016).

This matters – and not just because the metrics of research performance play such a crucial role in academic life. Academic publishing has come to be an industry in which publishing academic papers is an inferior function to creating, collecting and selling the data that this publishing generates. The large academic publishers, the ones that dominate the academic journals market, tend to be owned by huge data organisations, perhaps more concerned with metadata than with the accuracy of data for individual journals. Perhaps the secrecy that surrounds academic publishing data both safeguards the commercial product and obscures its accuracy. A point made by some observers (e.g., Verkhatsky and Petersen, 2023) may also be relevant: Scopus and similar organizations have every incentive to process and package data in a form that can be readily sold, but very little incentive to check and correct the data and thereby admit that the product has been wanting all along (Franceschini *et al.*, 2016). COBISS.SI is a Slovenian library system, and who knows whence its data come, but it lists *Prometheus* as being published by the University of Queensland. It was – 40 years ago.

Quan Liu, from the Department of Music at the University of Liverpool, writes with us again. His interests, as before, lie in the vast open-air music and dance extravaganzas beloved by the Chinese. The performances use natural scenery in open-air theatres, coupled with spectacular visual and audio effect employing the latest stage technologies. They employ hundreds of local amateur performers who display their traditional culture through music and dance. Landscape performances highlight the Chinese traditional philosophy of harmony between humans and nature; they are quintessentially Chinese. They are tourist attractions, of course, but much else as well. Many of the tourists are Chinese and the culture they are absorbing is political. Chinese media present landscape performances as a Chinese invention. This paper examines how the power of the Chinese landscape has been exploited by the party-state to propagate this notion of Chinese

invention in order to cultivate belief in the inventiveness of the nation. The paper deconstructs the notion of Chinese invention to expose the discourse and nationalistic propaganda at the heart of landscape performances.

William Kingston has also published in *Prometheus* before. His theme in this issue is the patent system. Despite all the promotional efforts of national patent offices and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the patent system is broken. The problem that Kingston explores arises from the patent system having been so broken for so long that users have learnt to adapt. The domination of the system by the pharmaceutical industry has seen the patent system shaped to that industry's requirements. These are for patents that do not require an inventive step, a spark of creativity, but will still provide monopoly over a product and deter others from invention. It was hard to discern any spark of creativity in large R&D labs engaged in the tedious task of exploring chemical formulae and the pharmaceutical industry lobbied hard to change the fundamental qualification of a patent. The qualification was reduced to 'not obvious to one skilled in the Art' in the US Patents Act of 1952 and other countries soon followed the US lead. Few now expect much inventiveness in a patent. Kingston explores how this sad situation came to pass, and considers the cost the patent system imposes by discouraging innovation. What to do about the situation? Kingston offers suggestions, but these are, as his title makes clear, sticking plasters rather than the radical change the patent system really requires.

There follow four book reviews and one review essay. So substantial have our book reviews become that they now differ little from our review essays – a case of levelling up, if you like.

## References

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