editorial

This issue marks a partial change in editorship of the journal with Martin Bull replacing Martin Rhodes as the co-editor alongside James Newell. We should like to take this opportunity to thank Martin for his tremendous contribution to the journal over several years, as well as the administrative support he brought to the journal from the European University Institute in Florence. The journal has undergone a veritable transformation during his period as a co-editor, and it has been in no small measure due to his dynamism and initiatives.

As regular readers of *European Political Science* know well, the journal's mission is to act as a vehicle for reflection, and a forum for the exchange of ideas, on the practice of the discipline in Europe. This is of far more than 'mere' intellectual significance. Any statement one cares to make about the world implies a commitment, acknowledged or otherwise, to some theoretical perspective or other: there are no such things as theory-neutral facts. The irreducibly normative element in every concept referring to the human world implies that – claims to 'scientific neutrality' notwithstanding – political theorising is itself a political act with real political consequences. These in turn influence, often directly, the production of knowledge itself. This being the case, not only does it argue that as political scientists we should be more open about the, sometimes hidden, political goals driving the work of each of us, but it also invites us – and here is the connection with the journal's mission – to reflect frankly on what, as a community of scholars, we think our relationship with the surrounding world is, and ought to be. This is of special relevance to those who lead Europe's political science associations and the principal research funding bodies, and we look forward to their offers of articles setting out their views on these matters.

In this issue, Brian Barry offers an excellent example of the stance we are arguing for here – both in his unapologetic reflection that some, if not much, of what he has written has been prompted by the desire to advance a political agenda (in his case, a left-wing agenda) and in his insistence on the importance of probity – addressing oneself solely to the quality of the arguments regardless of the status of the person making them; under no circumstances saying anything that one does not think. Such probity is, we believe, sadly lacking in the profession today – how many of us have been to conferences and noted the exaggerated deference often accorded by more 'junior' to more 'senior' colleagues? But this is no doubt an inevitable consequence of the relationships of power that pervade ours as any other community. But precisely because we are a community of *scholars*, committed to intellectual integrity and the advancement of understanding, the influence of relationships of power should be constantly resisted. It is precisely for this reason, in turn, that the whole thrust of change in higher education over the past decade and a half – with its managerialism, regulation, performance indicators and the growing drive to get 'bums on seats' – is so thoroughly to be deplored. And no wonder that Barry's response to those seeking advice on how to embark on a career as a political scientist is, 'Don't, if what you are looking

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for is to be a free spirit living the life of the mind!' (p. 34)

The growing significance of journal rankings, of the kind discussed by Thomas Plümper in his contribution to this issue, is, we believe, symptomatic of these trends and of the demoralising state of academia to which Barry rightly calls attention. Thankfully, these conditions have not yet stifled all audacity or the capacity for striking initiatives – as the piece by Lehrer and his colleagues demonstrates well on negative results in the social sciences.

Like Barry, Lehrer *et al*. draw attention to issues that chime closely with what was one of our starting points: the social construction of what passes for knowledge. 'Do academic publication standards', they ask, 'reflect or determine research results?' (p. 51) Pressured to 'publish or perish' we are unwilling to spend time on results that are contradictory, support the Null hypothesis, that are apparently inexplicable and so forth, and we toss them in the bin. What a waste! Were these results published they would be available to inform the work of other researchers – including those, in other subfields, who might, possibly, not have dismissed them in the first place. The problem is that the conditions under which our intellectual activity takes place subject us to what Lehrer *et al.* point to as the significance, confirmatory and publication biases. That is, under pressure from research assessment exercises, we confound statistical with substantive significance giving priority to statistically significant findings; we give priority to findings that confirm our own hypotheses; as journal editors, reviewers and therefore authors, we have strong preferences for pieces that clearly 'say' something. The result is that we end up closing our minds to research that fails to chime with established frameworks – a tendency that peer review does little to counter, as some of the contributors to our symposium on editing a journal explicitly acknowledge.

For this reason, we welcome the *Journal of Spurious Correlations* and wish its editors and contributors the very best of luck. This initiative seems to us to represent a valuable act of resistance to the tyranny of managerial criteria and the growing commodification of academic life – holding out the prospect of increasing transparency in research; the enhancement of quality control and community building; a greater appreciation 'that negative results are not so 'negative' after all; perhaps that 'positive' results are not so positive'.

The importance of these issues becomes apparent when one reflects on the ongoing expansion of political science. In Romania, for example, faced with the task of building a new discipline after 1989 while having a very limited institutional base at their disposal, political scientists have, as Cristina Chiva points out, witnessed a three-fold increase in the number of students studying the discipline since 1999 alone. Having emerged from a pre-1989 situation in which the one political science faculty functioned mainly as a legitimating tool for the then regime's most unpopular policies, Romanian political science now joins the political science communities of the rest of Europe before the challenge of considering the conditions in which it is best able to speak truth to power.

We come back, then, to the issue of what, as a community, we want the nature of our relationship with the surrounding world to be – an issue to which the reflections contained in Palonen's article are also directly relevant. Given that almost by definition of the term 'politics', the environment we seek to study is, to use Palonen's words 'a highly competitive and contested' one (p. 69); and given that we are ourselves a part of it, it behoves us as academics to devote at least some part of our activity to honest

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discussion of what is required to enable us to engage with it in conditions of maximum autonomy. To do everything possible to facilitate such discussion remains the central task of this journal and of everyone associated with it.

James L. Newell and *Martin J. Bull*

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