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Steal these words, copy the ideas and pilfer any profit they provide: the debate has reached a conclusion and the floor has sided in favour of the motion. Around three-quarters of the participants support Professor William Fisher, and believe that existing copyright laws do more harm than good.

Throughout the debate, the margins were largely constant, though support for Professor Justin Hughes, who argued ably against the motion, increased to almost one-third of participants between the opening statements and the rebuttals.

Professor Fisher stressed throughout the debate that the expansion of copyright curtails recombinant creativity: a system designed to encourage expression was captured by a handful of corporate interests and now holds it back. Among his recommendations are reintroducing a registration requirement for copyrighted works, a form of compulsory licensing and differential pricing. Cleverly, he raised these ideas as the debate drew to a close, thereby escaping scrutiny.

Professor Hughes maintained throughout the debate that the production of content was not the crux of copyright's purpose, but the production of high-quality content, and that existing laws do more good than harm in sparking quality with the filament of incentive. Changes in copyright laws are certainly needed, he acknowledged, yet this hardly condemns the system entirely. Rather, it is hard to look at the explosion of free content on the web and conclude that copyright hampers it.

Meanwhile, in her expert commentary, Jessica Litman of the University of Michigan noted that copyright "intermediaries" like publishers and distributors were needed when the cost of production and distribution was high, but this is no longer so. David Lammy, a British MP who serves as the Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property (a telling title in itself), believes that "copyright needs to confront these challenges and evolve".

Even if the debate did not compel participants to overturn their convictions, it is fair to say that we have all been forced to reexamine our positions, based on the sharp arguments of the debaters, the wise words from guest contributors and the floor's thoughtful comments. *The Economist* joins the floor in thanking all the participants.

Many commentators from the floor wanted copyright scrapped altogether. Often, the argument hinged on the idea that, in practice, it is the distributors of content, not its creators, who profit most from the

current set-up. Yet the majority of the floor, regardless of which side one voted for, simply want copyright laws reformed, by striking a new balance between the interests of content owners and the public.

Specifically, the duration of copyright is considered too long; the scope of protections too broad; the legal penalties too dear. How to make these changes in practice has not been fully aired. It is left to be debated, but in another forum.