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Software is like any other inventive activity

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From Dr Meir Perez Pugatch.

Sir, Patti Waldmeir argues that when it comes to software, "each inventor must build on what went before" and that "sharing may well be more productive than hoarding" ("Why IBM is giving away something for nothing", February 3) This assumes that there is a difference between "regular" technologies, which should be patented, and software technologies, which should not.

This argument is hardly new and by no means can be applied only to software patents. In the late 19th century Joseph Lewis Ricardo, founder of the Electric Telegraph Co, argued that since "nearly all useful inventions depend less on any individual than on the progress of society" there is no need for it to "reward him who might be lucky enough to be the first on the thing [invention] required". The test of time proved this argument wrong.

Maintaining a balance between incentives to invent and the distribution of inventions (which is at the core of the patent system) applies to all inventive activities. Software patents are no exception.

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