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One problem that I think is there in social science is that sometimes we are, social scientists are too slow. They don't realise how quickly the world moves. I can remember some years ago being called in by a social science research body who said to me we want to look at the importance of mobile phones in business, we want to see what difference mobile phones are making to business, and I said well you're a bit late. I mean what is being transformed by mobile phones is not business but sociality. It is people going out at night, people talking to each other; it's the intimacy of people's lives. I mean business, okay, that's not particularly interesting, but how it's transforming say young people's lives to have mobile phones, how they get together of an evening, how they mix, how they socialise, how they talk to each other. It was as though everything was too slow. And of course into that gap have come the think tanks.

I mean in the recent election, people were saying ah, this think tank says this, here is the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies, here is the so and so group. Think tanks rather cleverly some years ago, I mean they proliferated since, but think tanks recognised there was a bit of a gap here that politicians might be thinking about doing something and they might want some research to show whether they should do it or not, but by the time the research had been done, they'd be out of office, or they'd be very close to the end of their office. Think tanks came in because think tanks went to government in many cases and said what are you thinking of doing? Are you thinking of having an extra airport here, are you thinking of having a new rail link to the north, are you thinking about devolving various functions to local councils, are you thinking of having elected, whatever, they would go, and the government would say yes, we're interested in that, we'll give you some money to do a piece of research. And they would come back in nine months with that piece of research, provide the answers.

Now I think social scientists were missing a trick here, and although this is, even as I say it almost I can hear the reservations crowding in, but I do think that the one aspect of the new research excellence framework by which academics are enjoined to submit pieces of research in order that money will flow through to their departments, I do think the one thing there, the new emphasis that is placed upon impact. They'll always think that impact works, I think in some subject areas they say nonsense, how do you talk about impact in philosophy for goodness' sake, but I do think in the area of social science it may concentrate

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people's minds a little bit more upon doing that research which is more immediately geared to possible government initiatives and objectives.