

31 Dec. 1995 / Dear Ivor, if you can force Attiyah at Trinity to respond to the criticisms contained in this document, please try. Also please let me have the address of (and any news from) our friends the Adsheads (?) of Derbyshire.
Happy new year, Theo.

Mall for Dr Michalis Psimop

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From daemon Tue Dec 19 22:49:36 1995

From: m.psimopoulos@ic.ac.uk

To: letters.editor@ft.com

Subject: Re:FT 19/12/95 page 12 Science must recover the moral high ground by

Date: Tue, 19 Dec 95 22:49:30 GMT

Re:FT 19/12/95 page 12 Science must recover the moral high ground by
Sir Michael Attiyah

To the Editor of the Financial Times
(for publication)

HOW SCIENCE WILL BEST REGAIN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Sir, In his final address as President of the Royal Society ("Science must recover the moral high ground", December 19), Sir Michael Attiyah said: "Here we need some humility. ... We have to examine our own position and see whether any of the criticisms levelled against us are valid." The criticisms levelled in this letter are intended to be a test of these assertions. We ask Sir Michael to practice what he has preached.

Sir Michael also spoke of the need "to criticise the [political] establishment when necessary and to demonstrate that independence of thought really is the hallmark of a scientist". When the pop star Cat Stevens converted to Islam as an adult, he incontrovertibly demonstrated independence of thought. Did that make him a scientist? Certainly not! The true hallmark of a scientist is correct (epistemo-)logical thought.

Sir Michael is the latest in a fast growing list of eminent members of the [science] establishment who, in the last three or so years, have finally discovered the powerful influence and the consequent dangers posed by the anti-science movement, and are now busy trying to regain the confidence of the public. (We began pointing out the dire dangers of anti-science some ten years earlier.)

Sir Michael named the atomic bomb and environmental worries as the only sources of anti-science feelings. But the industrial pollution of the environment is more than a century old; and only two atomic bombs were used in war and that was in 1945; whereas no significant anti-science (to be carefully distinguished from the anti-bomb and anti-pollution) movement existed in Britain until the 1980s; and the science establishment did not notice it until the 1990s.

The causes of anti-science are many. In "Where science has gone wrong" (Nature, Vol. 329, No. 6140, pp. 595-598, 15 October, 1987), we explained that the most dangerous cause (because it is the most fundamental and least recognised) is to be found within the current thinking and practice of the science establishment itself. This is the rejection or subversion of the basic concepts of scientific objectivity, truth, logic, and method; ie what previously made science unique, productive, and effective. While this fundamental error remains uncorrected, the public esteem of science is unlikely to recover.

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