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## The Antiphysical Review

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Founded and Edited by M. Apostol

90 (2004)

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ISSN 1453-4436

### A painful mistake

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Recently, an author speaks mistakenly about "**Publish or Perish-An Ailing Enterprise**" in *Physics Today*, **57** (3) 61 (2003). Though perceiving pointedly the garbage in the scientific publications of nowadays, and the merit of the pp-slogan in this respect, this author fails to see the issue.

As long as the incriminated magic formula is accepted, the quality of the scientific publications will decay even more. As long as the scientific journals will be assigned "impact factors" the science will continue to be falsified. As long as the scientific papers will be published by "peer" review these publications will be discredited. This author accepts all these practices, but fails to see that these are precisely the cause and the origin of the evil he himself complains of. In addition, he suggests a misleading "cure", whose main requirement would be to offer only a few publications for being judged for tenure and promotion, and not the whole list of publications, as well as some abstention and refraining from publishing immoderately. An author with a long list of publications is very likely a mediocre scientist, if not a non-professional straightforwardly, so his/her choice will be the bad lot. The judges may help him/her to make a better choice, had they the chance. The solution offered by this author is therefore improper. If the judges accept and obey such a misguided procedure, their judgment would be falsified, and a good author will consequently be misjudged. Both ways, the solution is improper. The core of the issue resides in using numbers when judging science, and this main origin of the issue fails to be seen by many, including the author I am talking about herein.

The "publish or perish" slogan does not stress quality, it emphasizes numbers only, simply and precisely; that's all; this is why it leads to worthless publications. Many is different from good, simply. The "impact factors" falsify science, because they mistake publicity for scientific value. The two are distinct, simply again. Publicity means again numbers, noteworthy. "Peers" do not exist, so there is nothing in fact as "peer" review. It is an empty word, without any contents. Again, equality means numbers, this time undefined either. The scientific publications should be judged and reviewed by people who are slightly different from the authors. Only quality may lead to quality.

The whole issue is misleadingly tackled by this author. Perhaps we are complaining about the poor quality of the scientific papers, the large numbers they appear in, and the impostors pervading massively the scientific research and universities. Noteworthy, they will never get into science, in fact. However, all these evils will increasingly continue, because technological democracy opens wide access to such habits: writing, publishing, and mimicking science, research, professorship, etc. This is a social phenomenon, it is both necessary, unavoidable, natural, and, in fact, not disturbing. Troublingly is to mistaking impostors for scientists. It might be that all such impostors will be

able in the end, or more quickly, to destroy the genuine scientists and science, at least some of both. Caution must be exercised with respect to their aggressive behaviour. Anyway, however, as long as we see correctly the issue, and say clearly the distinction, we still hold a chance of surviving.

What I dislike is mistaking things. This is painfully confusing.