

Expert credibility and truth

Anderegg et al. (1) state that 97–98% of climate researchers most actively publishing in the field “support the tenets of [anthropogenic climate change] ACC . . . the relative climate expertise and scientific prominence of the researchers unconvinced of ACC are substantially below that of convinced researchers” (1). The contribution illustrates the predominating paradigm in climate research today. However, whereas expert credibility and prominence may dominate the opinion of what is true, it can never alter truth itself.

Young et al. (2) argue that publications in highly cited journals are relatively prone to be incorrect, and a young frustrated researcher wrote the following: “Very little creativity can be expected from scientists living in an atmosphere where you cannot ‘waste’ time on thinking about the science you are doing, but must rather spend time thinking where to get the next grant money from. In the research grant game, and thereby the papers game, you can’t displease your colleagues.” The addressee was Storetvedt, who has openly challenged the established theory of continental drift. Storetvedt (3) argues that “the history of science demonstrates that the acceptance of proposals . . . implying that a ‘world view’ everyone has embraced should be given up—has always been met by massive resistance” (p. 397 in ref. 3). Classical research, moreover, shows that people are willing to accept obvious untruths in the presence of strong group pressure (4). A climate researcher has to decide which paradigm to pursue; will he get the same number of grants,

publications, or citations by embracing the minority view among his peers? I believe not.

I do not claim that the ACC hypothesis is incorrect, but history has shown that predominating paradigms can be proven wrong. Thor Heyerdahl—the Kon-Tiki Man—was strongly opposed for his controversial theories, but sailing on a wooden raft from Peru to Polynesia in 1947, he showed that it was possible for the pre-Incan people to have colonized the South Pacific islands. Helge and Anne Stine Ingstad were also strongly criticized for their belief that the Vikings reached the American continent, but in 1960, they documented a Norse settlement at Newfoundland dating back to the 11th century. The works by Heyerdahl and the Ingstads were endorsed by *Time* to be among the most influential scientific achievements in the past century (5). Could it be that some of the researchers questioning the ACC hypothesis will be endorsed as the greatest scientists of the 21st century?

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