

Épreuve de Langue vivante B

Durée : 3 heures

Contraction

Can one be a committed scientist?

Over the past few years, various scientists with different motives have turned militant. This creates conflicts as some scientists are opposed to this on principle.

The latter's first argument is that a scientist's task is to give information, not inflict opinions and that such commitment, often based on hasty findings, puts the scientific community at risk of becoming inaudible. The threat is real, techniques of scientific demonstration being often used in various campaigns.

But science cannot be sheltered from opinion, as shown by a whole range of committed scientists from Benjamin Franklin to Einstein.

The second argument that one man's commitment commits the whole scientific community doesn't hold either, since mutual criticism is a basic practice of the scientific world.

A good idea would be to invite the public to join into such a practice in order to gain their confidence.

(141 words)

Essai

It is true that so-called scientific arguments are often bandied about over the heads of the public in order to manipulate them. An excellent example is that of GMOs, where no experiment is possible, which makes it difficult indeed to assess either their noxious effects or their usefulness. Another is that of vaccines, against which scaremongers have so much frightened the public that virtually eradicated diseases such as the measles or the whooping cough are causing new ravages.

The role of scientists is to give information by analysing facts and to leave politicians make the decisions. The real problem is that of the independence of the experts that any government needs to make their decisions. This of course means their possible connections with firms or lobbies, but also their ideological dependence on fashionable theories, in fact their intellectual honesty. They should bear in mind that a theory is only valid as long as it has not been proven wrong, an idea that should help them shed any dogmatism.

In their role as providers of information, scientists would also probably gain by being more pedagogical by insisting on the issues at stake and the reasoning followed instead of leaving the field to journalists who will necessarily jump to conclusions and focus public attention merely on the consequences.

(216 words)