

Comparing The Pleasure of A Great Physicist Making A Discovery To The Pleasure of A Lion Eating A Lamb

Post by "Martin" of September 4, 2025 at 5:31 AM

There is not necessarily great pleasure over time for a scientist. Paul Ehrenfest contributed to quantum theory but felt that peers made greater discoveries around the same time and committed suicide.

In other cases, peers have dismissed a revolutionary new theory, even with ad-hominem. Accolades which come in only posthumously are too late. Examples of this are Ludwig Boltzmann and Alfred Wegener (geologist, but close enough). In Boltzmann's case, the hostility by peers probably contributed to his suicide. Dan Shechtman's discovery of quasicrystals was initially rejected, even by his boss, such that Dan Shechtman had to leave his research group and was the target of ridicule, e.g. Linus Pauling's infamous ad-hominem "There are no quasicrystals, only quasi-scientists". Luckily, Dan Shechtman is not a "snowflake" like Boltzmann and Ehrenfest may appear to have been and got eventually the accolades, including the 2011 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.