

Re: Unacceptably provocative/beyond the point of acceptable debate

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.bio.evolution/2007-10/msg00203.html>

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"Tim Tyler" <seemysig@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message [news:ffhdlc\\$2feh\\$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:news:ffhdlc$2feh$1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)

"Following James Watson's comments at the weekend, and the public concern that this has caused in Bristol, the event on 24 October 2007 with James Watson has been cancelled. While we are a festival that encourages debate, it is clear that James Watson's opinions were unacceptably provocative."

– <http://www.ideasfestival.co.uk/>

"We know that eminent scientists can sometimes say things that cause controversy and the Science Museum does not shy away from debating controversial topics.

"However, we feel Dr Watson has gone beyond the point of acceptable debate and we are, as a result, cancelling his talk."

– <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7050020.stm>

Neither organisation offers the slightest factual criticism of Watson's comments. They have none.

Nor do they need one. Read the statement closely. They are not criticizing Watson for being wrong nor for being controversial. (In fact, they claim to welcome controversy.) They say that they cancelled because he has been "unacceptably provocative". Carefully chosen words, those.

They canceled because they are unwilling to accept the kinds of things that they fear that Watson's appearance at the event might provoke. What kinds of things do they fear? Use your imagination. They certainly have.

Being wrong occasionally is the scientist's prerogative. Being

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controversial is sometimes part of a scientist's job description. But being provocative is not part of the scientist's responsibility. It is more the job of educators, political activists, and activists – people who want to grab your attention and get you to do something. Watson wears some of those 'hats' in addition to his scientist hat – true. But when he wears those other hats, he is supposed to be being provocative in a way that furthers the interests of the institutions that gave him the hats. He didn't further those interests.

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