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Krista Berglund

The Vexing Case of Igor Shafarevich, a Russian Political Thinker

- In the 1990s “the Shafarevich case” stirred a heated discussion in the mathematics community about a fundamental ethical principle: Can scientific honorary societies make demands to their members concerning their non-scientific views? Another obvious problem becomes topical with the present study and concerns the ethical repercussions of the fact that Shafarevich was demonized without reasonable justification
- This study, written by a historian of ideas and a specialist of Russian studies, also introduces Shafarevich’s companionships with some of the most interesting cultural figures of the Soviet Union in his youth, his extensive activities for defense of human rights and struggle against communist propaganda in

This is the first comprehensive study about the non-mathematical writings and activities of the Russian algebraic geometer and number theorist Igor Shafarevich (b. 1923). In the 1970s Shafarevich was a prominent member of the dissidents’ human rights movement and a noted author of clandestine anti-communist literature in the Soviet Union. Shafarevich’s public image suffered a terrible blow around 1989 when he was decried as a dangerous ideologue of anti-Semitism due to his newly-surfaced old manuscript Russophobia. The scandal culminated when the President of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States suggested that Shafarevich, an honorary member, resign. The present study establishes that the allegations about anti-Semitism in Shafarevich’s texts were unfounded and that Shafarevich’s terrible reputation was cemented on a false basis.

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