
The South Shore

Skeptic

Volume 13, No. 5

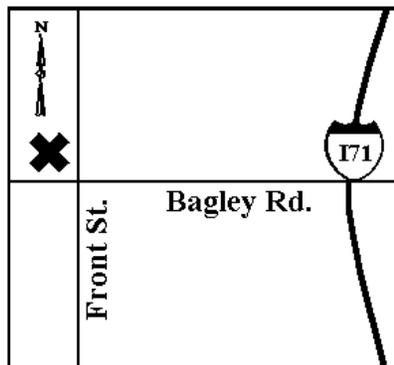
May/June, 1997

<p>The Best Documented UFO Case of All Time Friday, May 16</p> <p>a</p>

Date: Friday, May 16
Time: 7:30 PM
Place: Room 18
The Life Sciences
Building
Baldwin Wallace
College

The May meeting of The South Shore Skeptics will feature a presentation by Dr. Joe Bauer entitled "The Best Documented UFO Case of All Time - Photographic Evidence for UFOs".

For more information telephone Page Stephens at 676-4859



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The South Shore Skeptic is the newsletter of The South Shore Skeptics, a non-profit organization with aims similar to those of CSICOP: The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

We are located in northeast Ohio and dedicated to science education and the investigation of paranormal and pseudoscientific claims.

Our activities include investigating pseudoscientific claims, presenting lectures, publishing *The South Shore Skeptic* six times a year, and maintaining the Skepticism SIG on the Cleveland Free-Net, a free access community based computer bulletin board.

We also provide the public and news media of Northeast Ohio with scientific perspectives on pseudoscientific topics.

Membership in *The South Shore Skeptics* costs \$15.00 a year. The money is used to pay for the publication and distribution of *The South Shore Skeptic* both to members and to the media. We also send two free copies to everyone who asks for information about our activities.

If you would like to receive two free copies of *The South Shore Skeptic*, care to take part in our efforts by joining us as a member, or submit an article for publication in *The South Shore Skeptic*, write us at:

The South Shore Skeptics
P.O. Box 5083
Cleveland, Ohio 44101

If you would like to take part in our activities on The Cleveland Free-Net, dial 1-216-368-3888, with your computer modem, and take part in our discussions.

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Journalistic Contributions to *The South Shore Skeptic* are Welcome

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For Cleveland Free-Net users, my local address is: aa470

You can send me files or ASCII text on line to my Internet address:

aa470@cleveland.freenet.edu

Skeptic at Large

by Jim Kutz

The Perils of Getting a Science Education

Why are so many intelligent people flakes? Why are so many reporters unable to tell the difference?

Part of the problem may be obstacles which drive young people away from science, in addition to the high cost of feeding an inquiring mind.

Hale's Agenda

On March 25, the Skeptics received a disturbing letter from astronomer Alan Hale, co-discoverer of the Hale-Bopp Comet. Hale states:

"...Like I'm sure is true for many of you, I was inspired to pursue a career in science only to find, after completing the rigors of undergraduate and graduate school, that the opportunities for us to have a career in science are limited at best and are which I usually describe as "abysmal." ... My personal feeling is that, unless there are some pretty drastic changes in the way that our society approaches science and treats those of us who have devoted our lives to making some of our own contributions, there is no way that I can, with a clear conscience, encourage present-day stu-

dents to pursue a career in science.

"So far, I'm sensing a certain reluctance among the media to discuss this issue, as they seem far more interested in items which I consider to be irrelevant and unimportant. I know that I'm not alone in being frustrated about the current prospects for pursuing any kind of decent career within science... I'd especially like to hear from those of you who are on your second or third or fourth post-doc, or who have left the field as a result of the employment situation, or who have experienced severe personal difficulties (e.g., break-up of a marriage, etc.)."

"I realize that some of these might be painful to discuss, but I'd like to show that we are not a bunch of impersonal statistics, but that we're human beings trying to make an honest living and perhaps make a contribution or two to society while we're at it." Speaking of statistics, though, if you received any information about the numbers of applicants to some of the positions you applied to --

which was often a 3-digit number in my case -- I'd like to hear that, too.

"Please e-mail your stories to me at ahale@nmsu.edu, with a subject line of 'horror stories' or something like that. Please let me know if you would prefer to remain anonymous when I share these stories with the press and the government ... please pass this message on to any of your friends and colleagues who might be interested in sharing their stories with me, and keep in mind that I would like to receive stories from as many scientific disciplines as possible. (Because of the amount of e-mail traffic I'm receiving these days, along with everything else that's going on, I probably won't be able to acknowledge each message individually.)"

How successful was Hale in airing his views? Not very.

Two and a half weeks later, I posted the above quote to the general campus bulletin-board at CWRU, to get their reaction. They hadn't seen it. A reporter from the CWRU *Observer* expressed skepticism about the letter's authenticity, skeptical that a

scientist would risk being widely flamed for heresy. Then one reader recalled seeing Hale's letter in the New York Times. Another reader had received it from CSICOP and Randi via their electronic mailing lists.

Are Alan Hale's views too extreme?

Graduate Students Seek to Unionize Against Exploitation

An even more disturbing story by George Will in the Washington Post was entitled "On the Tenure Track and Getting No-Where" (Cleveland Plain Dealer, Sun. 4/20 p. E1).

It explains how Yale graduate teaching assistants went on strike last year protesting "exploitation", and petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for the right to unionize. Graduate students are, of course, a major source of cheap labor for universities.

Yale claims grad students have no right to unionize, calling them "apprentice educators", even though many grad students have no intention of becoming educators. Yale also claimed that educational values would suffer from the adversarial nature of a union. In other words "educational values" require that grad students have **no** rights, other than having their degrees conditional upon slave labor. Yale claims they get the equivalent of \$131,000 in waived fees and stipends, but

that's a phantom figure -- no one actually pays that much.

"There is a crisis of overproduction of doctorates, and under-consumption of scholarship", notes Will. "To save money, schools rely increasingly on "gypsy scholars ... unemployed doctorates ... hired on short-term contracts to teach ... often on several campuses in the same semester ... not on the tenure track ... denied health care and other benefits. According to the Chronicle on Higher Education, 42 percent of all faculty are now in that situation, up from 25 percent 20 years ago.

The abolition of mandatory retirement ages for tenured professors, coupled with a dry-up of federal funds, have left universities short of cash, and graduate degree students holding the short end, says Will.

These problems aren't just a "short term glitch."

Alumni donations have shrunk in many cases due to corporate downsizing.

Universities can't even count on departmental consulting, because the "reserve army of PhDs" are undercutting university consulting via the Net. Industry need no longer come to a university to find science consultants, which has ominous implications.

Universities can, to some extent find themselves "out of the loop" on providing freshly trained experts, as industry

finds the necessary technical expertise already in the job market.

Head-hunters are having a field day ... they can solicit a company's best people right through the office e-mail. Anyone who posts on scientific newsgroups is a potential recruiting target. The university is no longer the default matchmaker.

The other main product of a university is career training. Here too, industries can often bypass universities and train their own people from within, simply by hiring former graduate instructors.

The bottom line is, the problems of universities aren't going away soon.

Golden Age Mythos

We tend to think of the present as a 'golden age' of scientific by-products. Actually it's a golden age of engineering and applied science. There's a lot of information being widely circulated for the first time, but that doesn't necessarily translate to more room in the sun for more people.

What does this imply for young people?

It implies, obviously, that a young person seeking a career in science needs to carefully pick the field.

But what about the high-school teacher who more or less 'automatically' urged inquiring young minds to seek careers in science, but like

Alan Hale, can no longer do so in good conscience?

Well one could minor in science. But here too there's a problem, if the goal is to expose a person to the wonder and the scope of science, and to the methods of science.

Einstein said he didn't even want to look at an equation for a year after he graduated, because his training had been so intensive. I understood how he felt, after dreaming of the wonders of science all through high school. When I got to college, they tried to turn me into a human calculating machine. Like Einstein, I almost developed an aversion to science -- almost, but not quite.

The Uses of Education

The super-specialized hot-house career training we have today was spurred largely by Cold War funding, as universities sought to position themselves and their students for federal research grants with very narrow goals, such as faster chips.

Career training is not the same as a university education. Many universities have abandoned most of their liberal arts devoted to human perception, and are essentially 'stripped down racers' on career tracks, essentially clusters of colleges which still like to call themselves universities.

Today there's the added element of supremely arrogant students running around with

Ayn Rand attitudes, thinking that science should be a rat race, and that any student not hell-bent on scoring one point higher should be left in the dust.

That's fine for certain ultra-competitive career tracks, if the jobs are there, which in many cases they're not.

But it does little for the student seeking to understand the nature of the universe. If a broader education is what you want, for yourself or your youngster, then be aware that there's more than one kind of excellence in education.

Or consider college graduates who did get a good grounding in science, but were not able to maintain it. Consider reporters who, while knowing a lot about general science, were never able to find a decent layman's explanation of quantum mechanics, so they happily sing the praises of quantum flakery, illustrated with drawings of pyramids with all-seeing eyes.

Ask your library to carry *Physical Review Letters*, and see what they tell you. It's priced out of their reach, because almost everything in science is geared to raising money.

There are alternative ways to spark interest in science. For example, the American Institute of Physics sends out weekly plain-English bulletins detailing the latest discoveries (physnews-mailing@aip.org).

Then there's the Society of Amateur Scientists, (www.thesphere.com/sas/), which has amassed vast collections of free or nearly free learning resources. Their activities include real science, such as wide-area sky-watches carried out with networks of computer-controlled amateur telescopes, which can spot major astronomical events (such as supernovas) where the big telescopes aren't looking.

An "amateur scientist" is basically anyone who does something else for a living, to make enough money to do science - just as many of the pioneers of science have always done. The idea that "real science has to be big and profitable" has little basis in the scientific method or the spirit of inquiry.

Seeing the Forest For The Trees

The important thing is to feed a young person's mind and aptitudes during the critical years of early synaptic growth which shape later abilities. Use the Net. Use whatever you can. But don't assume that you can just ship a young mind off to a university to be poured full of scientific knowledge and placed in a firmament of great minds. Be alert to changes affecting universities, even if they are not. Be aware of the difference between a high-end trade school and a broad-based

academic community. And be aware that arrogance does not necessarily equate with excellence of the best sort.

The idea is to develop minds -- not just skills, not just membership in an elite class, particularly "on a tenure track going nowhere."

DEFENDING REASON IN AN IRRATIONAL WORLD

Review by Bill Bazik

Talks by Tim Madigan and Joe Nickell were given at the Independence Library, Independence, Ohio, April 9, 1997 at a joint meeting of the South Shore Skeptics and The Free Inquirers of Northeastern Ohio.

Tim Madigan is the Executive Editor of Free Inquiry magazine. Joe Nickell is the Senior Research Fellow for The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

Tim Madigan reviewed the growth history of The Center for Inquiry in Buffalo, New York. He humorously noted it started out, 10 years ago, in an old hardware store building next to an old building housing the ACLU which in turn was located next to a porno theater. Some local residents probably viewed all three buildings with equal scorn.

Today the Center, in Amherst, New York, has a brand

new building. Its library holds 20,000 volumes and has room for 30,000 more. Other centers are located in Los Angeles, Kansas City, Boulder (Colorado), Oxford (England), and in Moscow.

He described their Campus Freethought Alliance project which is now promoting freethought, skepticism, secularism, atheism, and humanism on campuses worldwide.

Joe Nickell, who has authored 16 books, reviewed some of the many "miracles" he has investigated. His prior experiences as a professional magician and as a detective have been immensely helpful in solving "mysteries" and downright frauds.

Joe's talk and slide presentation started with the Roswell, New Mexico, flying saucer "mystery." He has detailed this investigation in his book *The UFO Invasion*. He said the military cover-up" was simply to keep Project Mogul secret. This was a military project which sent sound sensing equipment, by balloons, into a high altitude. It was an attempt to detect certain types of sonic waves that would indicate atomic bomb testing was taking place in Russia. The method failed and was replaced by the U-2 high altitude aircraft overflights. The fragments of the balloon lofted equipment resembled kite construction. Why anyone would deduce such flimsy fragments were

parts of an alien space ship is probably the true mystery in the whole UFO story.

He then reviewed how mishandling Polaroid film packs and cameras has produced pictures of angels and the like. He and others have duplicated the results by allowing light to leak into the film packs. This can result in "flames" surrounding the "holy visitor."

Similarly, when sub-compact cameras are poorly operated, a finger over a part of the lens may appear in the print as a "mysterious ghost." He noted the general public seems convinced cameras can "see things the human eye cannot see."

His investigation of a weeping icon in Canada was typical of such "miracle" phenomena.

You are not permitted a close examination, but if you can get close, you find the non-evaporating tears are nothing but oil or Vaseline.

He demonstrated, on a TV news program, how you can shed small quartz crystal tears such as produced by a child in Lebanon.

He investigated the Hindu statues that reputedly drank milk. They turned out to be made of a porous ceramic material which absorbed the milk. In the case of white glazed statues the milk simply runs down to the base as a white film on the white glaze and, unless you are very close to it, it will not be readily visible.

The classic "Devils Footprints" in the snow in 1850 Devonshire, England, is a classic example of the "contagion factor." Even today, if an animal is reported to have escaped from a zoo, police will shortly receive calls of the animal being cited all over the county. In one case the poor animal was soon killed crossing railroad tracks near the zoo, but sightings were reported for days thereafter. Every stray dog or cat was suddenly seen as the wild animal that had escaped from the zoo.

Joe Nickell thanked Dr. Bauer for his help in analyzing the famous (infamous?) alien autopsy film. Among the many errors made by the actors were their handling of surgical instruments.

Joe has produced an "Alien Time Line" chart which shows how the reporting of aliens has evolved into the present day big-head big-eyed version.

He noted many of the psychics (Dixson, Casey, Allison) seem to fit the fantasy-prone personality profile. Where to draw the line between these and psychotic types is debatable.

INTERIM REPORT ON INCORPORATION

by Elaine and Steve Hilliard

At the March meeting we decided to contact other groups to learn if they were incorporated under Internal Revenue Code Section 501c3 and, if so, whether they needed lawyers, whether it was expensive, and whether there were distinct advantages/disadvantages. Out of twenty groups contacted, fifteen have responded thus far.

Eight of the fifteen are incorporated under 501c3. They all used lawyers. In fact, The Skeptics Society advised: "The process is complex enough that I got a lawyer, as did Randi for his group, and I suggest you do the same. Why take chances?" Hired lawyers charged \$300-500 twelve to fifteen years ago. Member lawyers donated their time, but some charged for filing fees which exceeded \$100.00.

Reported advantages were (1) donors could deduct contributions, (2) members could deduct dues, (3) Board members were protected from civil lawsuits, (4) increased credibility, (5) possible state tax benefits, and (6) use of public facilities at no cost.

Reported disadvantages were (1) the keeping of books and records, (2) articles of incorporation, (3) formal by-laws, (4) recording minutes of board meetings, (5) financial reporting, (6) possible state fees, and (7) the filing of federal, state and/or local forms or reports.

We will give an updated full report at our next meeting.



Above is a copy of a suggested new masthead, contributed by William Cohen-Kiraly of Cohen-Kiraly Design of Solon. I think it's gorgeous, myself. I'm just wondering about that "teardrop" logo. Perhaps a skeptical question mark?

Please let us know what you think of Mr. Cohen-Kiraly's generous offer.

If you get a chance, visit his portfolio web page at: <http://junior.apk.net/~wkiraly>

Cynthia Bell-Moores