

CSICOP + equ p. 2 computer in iB service  
John, good editorial about your visit to CSICOP.  
Some good quotes fr- MS here! C14 - my CSICOP study

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See p. 2  
C15 anomalies

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HEADLINE: Truth can be selective for the skeptics who probe the paranormal

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BODY:

Seattle was host recently to the annual conference of CSICOP (pronounced psi-cop), the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. A large, influential skeptic's group, CSICOP chose Seattle for this year's conference in acknowledgement of the 47th anniversary of pilot Kenneth Arnold's report of UFOs in the Cascades.

Among the speakers at the conference were astronomer Carl Sagan, who believes all UFO reports are reducible to mundane causes, and Harvard professor of psychiatry John Mack, who was there to defend his view that alien abductions constitute a genuine phenomenon. The theme of the conference was The Psychology of Belief. CSICOP takes as its mandate the weeding out of pseudoscience and bunk from the garden of science. Many of CSICOP's targets, such as Uri Geller and spoon-bending, pretty much wither under their gaze.

Other targets -- notably UFO reports -- keep multiplying like toadstools, keeping the CSICOPers busy with their trowels. This is principally done through the organization's quarterly magazine, The Skeptical Inquirer, a kind of Consumer Reports of the mind.

The average CSICOP member is a professional in a science, or a science-related field: a pilot, an electrical engineer. The vast majority are older white males. In an audience of over 500, I could see very few ethnic faces, and fewer still that appeared under 40. There are some women in the ranks of CSICOP, but its pretty much an Old White Guys club.

And it's some club. V.S. Naipaul once wrote a book called Among the Believers. Well, I was among the disbelievers, big time. Whether it's the Kennedy Conspiracy, the Loch Ness monster or dowsing, CSICOP doesn't buy it. In fact, one of the group's co-founders left because he found more reflex naysaying among the members than actual skepticism.

who?

What kind of person puts such an emotional premium on disbelief? CSICOPers often comment on people's misguided need to believe, whether its in elves or Elvis. However, in their distaste for psychoanalysis (that's bunk too), CSICOP members seem somewhat blind to their own motivations.

At one point in the conference, a woman claiming UFO experiences was at the

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podium. One of Dr. John Mack's patients, she began by asking for a show of hands from the audience. "How many people here believe in God?" she asked. To gradually building laughter, the CSICOP audience realized how homogenous its thinking was: among over 500 people no one raised their hands.

The woman's point, I think, was that there's as much a belief system among the so-called skeptics as there is among the "believers."

Atheism has no more a logical foundation than blind faith.

The response from the audience to her question strengthened an interpretation of my own about "skeptics." The idea of UFOs as physically real craft not from earth is particular anathema to CSICOP.

Any compelling physical evidence for UFOs, studied by competent scientists such as Pierre Guerin or Jacques Vallee, has never been adequately addressed by CSICOP. The reason, I believe, is that the idea of a superior intelligence from the skies harkens back to the very thing that CSICOPers find most repellent: the concept of God.

) ! Good line!

The very reason some people uncritically accept UFOs is essentially the same reason others so uncritically reject them: for their archetypal, mythic baggage. God is dead, CSICOP has decided, and UFOs aren't doing so well either.

Are these mostly people who replaced one religion with another – science – and turned disbelief into a belief system in itself?

Worthwhile work is done by CSICOP. There are pseudo-sciences. And yes, science is under attack these days from these pseudosciences, and various ethereal, feel-good, New Age philosophies.

But the ground has been gained by these beliefs by default: people see science in retreat from genuine anomalies that need study. And here's where CSICOP has done the most damage, in promoting this retreat.

We all have our cliques, our in-groups, both professionally and privately. But it is dangerous when any group is convinced it has The Truth.

The conference in Seattle lasted four days, and I have never attended any event where I heard as much smug, self-satisfied laughter. The laughter seemed more in the service of the egos gathered than of any actual science. If there was an official candy bar for the conference, it would have been Snickers.

In weeding out the garden of science, CSICOP may only end up digging rational inquiry into a deeper hole.

GRAPHIC: FORGET IT: UFOs don't figure at CSIOP

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