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The 'Society For Scientific Exploration' On

From: [Stig Agermose@online.pol.dk](mailto:Stig.Agermose@online.pol.dk)
Date: Fri, 17 Jul 1998 03:31:43 +0200
Fwd Date: Fri, 17 Jul 1998 09:15:40 -0400
Subject: The 'Society For Scientific Exploration' On

URL:

<http://www.jse.com/skeptics.html>

The Journal for Scientific Exploration is published by the Society for Scientific Exploration which recently argued that some UFO phenomena need to be taken seriously by scientists.

Stig

BE SKEPTICAL OF THE "SKEPTICS"

(A commentary by Bernhard Haisch, Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Scientific Exploration)

If seeking publicity for the Society had been the purpose of publishing the Sturrock-Rockefeller UFO Report, one could take comfort in the observation of Oscar Wilde: "The only thing worse than being talked about... is not being talked about." Let the critics and self-proclaimed skeptics scoff and ridicule... just so long as they manage to get the SSE website straight. But publicity was never the purpose. The real purposes were advancing science and serving a public eager for credible information.

The San Francisco Chronicle summarized the situation well in an editorial: "The panel chided fellow scientists for shying away from UFOlogy, fearing the ridicule of their colleagues. As a result, 'the problem is in a very unsatisfactory state of ignorance and confusion' the panel said. With more than 60 percent of the American public open-minded and curious about UFO's and space aliens, scientists may never have a better chance to get funding for such research. They should go for it."

The Sturrock-Rockefeller UFO Report is marked by restraint and conservatism. It makes no claims other than that science owes it to itself and the public to not simply dismiss UFO reports out of hand. It concludes without pretense by stating: "The UFO problem is very complex and it is quite impossible to predict what might emerge from research into this area." It states explicitly that the scientists on the panel found no evidence for the involvement of extraterrestrial intelligence in the reports presented to them. It urges further scientific investigation.

A skeptic is one who adheres to the conviction that true knowledge may be uncertain, who suspends judgement, and who is willing to examine new evidence. By this definition, the Report is one of true skepticism.

On the other hand the self-proclaimed skeptics attempting to discredit the Report and the Society are not skeptics by this dictionary definition. Their critiques virtually all consist of scoffing, ridicule, ad hominem attacks, and the amazing claim that their dogmatic beliefs that certain things are impossible necessarily constitute laws of nature. It is a modern replay of the cardinals refusing to look through Galileo's telescope because truth has already been revealed to them. Interestingly many of the vocal skeptics are not themselves practicing scientists.

The ridiculing posture of the skeptical comments is self-evident. Consider the embarrassingly crude New York Post caricature of the Report: "And the case for little green men making landings all over the farm belt in order to kidnap and then have unusual sex with random hicks in pickup trucks is even more ridiculous."

Ad hominem attacks are cropping up. One magazine somehow twisted serious work --published in prestigious physics journals -- on the quantum vacuum by one physicist involved in the workshop into the absurd claim that he "designs perpetual motion machines." In fact, this scientist has actually tested and debunked a dozen of the "free energy" devices widely touted on the internet.

The "nutty professor" innuendo has been directed at the panel director. Never mind that he won the 1986 Hale Prize in Solar Physics from the American Astronomical Society, the Arctowski medal in 1990 from the National Academy of Sciences, and the 1992 Space Sciences Award from the 40000 member American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics for his "major contribution to the fields of geophysics, solar physics and astrophysics, leadership in the space science community, and dedication to the pursuit of knowledge."

Moving beyond ridicule and innuendo, some of the following seemingly serious arguments have also been advanced.

* According to CSICOP "The release of the report appears well-timed to gain publicity for the SSE and their claims. It occurs a week after the release of the X-Files movie and during the week of Fourth of July when news is slow." But in fact the timing of the release simply followed the standard Journal publication schedule. The Report appeared in the first available issue following its completion. This was the same as the previous several years' publication schedule for the June issue of the Journal.

* Funding UFO research is predicted to damage mainstream science. Hardly. The total federal civilian research budget is approximately \$35 billion. A mere 0.01 percent of that amount would be more than enough to begin to make progress.

* The Journal is said to advocate such New Age concepts as reincarnation. In reality the articles published on such topics are not New Age speculation and metaphysics. Rather they have been scientific detective work involving such hard evidence as searching medical records of death wounds on one individual for possible correlation with birthmarks on an individual claiming to remember that previous life. The data are presented and analyzed in scientific fashion without claiming any proof of reincarnation. Similar treatment is given to other topics whose titles are sometimes given a giggle spin by the "skeptics." (Interestingly this same sort of ridiculing of topics used to infuriate the scientific community when Sen. Proxmire used these tactics in his "Golden Fleece Awards" to attack the National Science Foundation.)

The most frequent "skeptical" argument, of course, is that there is "not a shred of evidence" and that UFO claims were long ago carefully and open-mindedly examined and rejected in the Condon Report. What the "skeptics" either never bothered to read or choose to ignore is that there is substantial evidence in the

roughly 1000-page body of that report itself and Condon's dismissive summary bears hardly any relation to what the rest of the report says. Condon's aim was to put an end to serious UFO investigation, and that is how he slanted his summary, never mind what was in the actual report. Indeed the rest of the Condon report contains substantial "shreds of evidence." An analysis of the Condon Report by Sturrock was published in Vol. 1. of JSE and will be posted on the web shortly.

Cut through the ridicule and search for factual information in most of the skeptical commentary and one is usually left with nothing. This is not surprising. After all, how can one rationally object to a call for scientific examination of evidence?

Be skeptical of the "skeptics."

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