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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Failure Of The 'Science' Of Obergian Debunking

From: Ed Stewart <ufoindex@jps.net>
Date: Mon, 12 Oct 1998 09:03:51 -0700
Fwd Date: Mon, 12 Oct 1998 17:51:30 -0400
Subject: Re: Failure Of The 'Science' Of Obergian Debunking

>From: Greg St. Pierre <StrmNut@aol.com>
>Date: Sat, 10 Oct 1998 23:01:51 EDT
>To: updates@globalserve.net
>Subject: Re: Failure Of The 'Science' Of Obergian Debunking

>>Date: Sat, 10 Oct 1998 16:45:17 -0700
>>From: Ed Stewart <ufoindex@jps.net>
>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>Subject: Re: Failure Of The 'Science' Of Obergian Debunking

>>Has anybody ever noticed how often Klass and CSICOP are attacked in
>>Jerome Clark's commentary? Are they that powerful that their
>>image needs to be tarnished continuously? Actually, they are not
>>even relevant to this or any discussion involving the state of
>>ufology because they are not responsible for ufology's woes.

>Whoa, stop tape.....

>Mr Stuart, you can't possibly believe that the aforementioned
>debunkers aren't relevant to your discussion.

It is not a question of belief. It is a question of whether
ufology will ever be mature enough of a discipline to take
responsibility for its own or not. As long as the prevalent
attitude and state of mind within ufology is to find demons,
dead or alive, to blame for their present status, ufology will
never be able to grow into a mature discipline.

>You know perfectly
>well how UFO witnesses, no matter their background or
>credibility, are treated by these purveyors of
>explanations-that-defy-rationality. Might not ufology have more
>of the necessary people at it's disposal if not for the public
>floggings given on so regular a basis by those who know more
>about the sighting than the witness?

I don't really know where the basis of your critique is coming
from. On one hand Klass has been criticized for not even
speaking to witnesses and Sagan for not investigating UFO cases.
In Klass's Skeptics UFO Newsletter he seldoms address witnesses
unless they have already reached public status usually by having
written a book or having appeared and made statements in a mass
media like a TV show. Critiquers like to have it both ways at
their convenience, but it makes for faulty logic.

>Case in point: Mr. Sagan (who by now probably believes
>wholeheartedly in the Devil) loved to pontificate about the ever
>present human need to believe in the supernatural, hence UFOs

>are the modern day equivalent to goblins and leprechauns and the
>like. He referred to all UFO sightings as "nonsense", most of
>the time not even bothering to revert to the old "misidentified
>natural phenomena" line.

Your perception of Sagan is not based on fact. Sagan was critical that aliens were sharing time and space with us and that there was any linkage between UFOs and alien cruisers. He did not deny that UFO reports should be investigated. He is on the written record that

"there isn't enough data...and that an open mind should be kept."

Carl Sagan in UFOs: A Scientific Debate, 1972

What a dastardly position to take!

>"Anecdotal stories are absolutely worthless", he would say.

Anecdotal stories are absolutely worthless in the context of scientific proof. They are important in the right context of supporting evidence if ufology ever is able to show linkage between allegedly supporting data points. A paper by a colleague of Sagan, Phillip Morrison in Sagan's and Page's UFOs: A SCIENTIFIC DEBATE, "The Nature of Scientific Evidence: A Summary" addresses this issue and outlines why ufological evidence has always fallen short of the standard of scientific proof, but on the positive side it outlines what ufology needs to do to strengthen their contentions - but almost thirty years later, ufology still hasn't listened.

>Besides stretching his obvious
>distrust for his fellow man to an absurd and unreasonable level,
>he provided more than enough incentive for many people not to
>join ufology who otherwise might have proved invaluable, and
>thus the field has not progressed to it's potential.

Again, your perception of Sagan is not based on fact. It is true that he was not involved with the UFO community or involved in investigations of actual cases, but he helped ufology in many ways.

1) Sagan advocated declassification of relevant UFO information from decades ago (Demon-Haunted World, pp. 89).

2) He edited, with Thornton Page, one of the most important UFO books produced: UFOs: A SCIENTIFIC DEBATE. Important for many reasons, notwithstanding the fact that it is one of the few books available to the mass public which includes a paper by Dr. James Macdonald, as well as other pro-ufo advocates. As a popularizer of science, this book carrying Sagan's name still receives wide distribution.

3) The above book was a record of the American Association for the Advancement of Science UFO debate in 1969. A debate that Sagan was an advocate for inspite of high-level government criticism and personal threat of criticism for advocating such a debate before such an institution and helping to organize it to its success. The UFO problem has never received such favorable exposure before or since.

>Given the way the subject is treated by Phil Klass and his ilk,
>is it any wonder ufology is still struggling?

If only Phil Klass and his ilk would stop criticising, ufology would move forward. Yup, that is taking responsibility for ufology's woes.

>Talk about an
>uphill battle. Now, if they were to fight fairly, ufology might
>be doing a bit better, but the concocted and far fetched
>explanations used by debunkers to dispose of sightings certainly
>makes the PR job of ufologists a hell of a lot tougher, wouldn't
>you say?

Let me see. Critical analysis, discernment, logic, strict interpretation of data, linkage and independent verification are all weapons used by Phil Klass and his ilk. Those guys just don't fight fairly. Be serious! Who really cares what cases Phil Klass and his ilk "dispose of"? If a case is valid, ufologists will still pursue the evidence and build a stronger case

regardless of Phil Klass. If the case his weak and susceptible to debunking, and investigators can't find evidence to strenghten the case, Phil Klass and his ilk have done ufology a favor by removing clutter from the table top. Of course, there is one way to defeat those dastardly villains keeping ufology from its right place in the sun. Ufology needs to come up with compelling evidence to support its extraordinary claims. All is really needed is one case that stands up to critical analysis, discernment, logic, linkage of data and independent verification. Only ONE CASE! In the meantime let's keep blaming a dead exobiologist and popularizer of science and a seventy-year-old man for ufology's woes and inability to raise itself from its self-created hole.

>Unless of course you believe the explanations, in which
>case you are as guilty of being a won't-believer as much as you
>accuse Mr. Clark of being a "believer".

People can believe anything they want and most are independent in their belief systems. But if ufology is to be dominated by beliefs, then it needs to reside in the domain of beliefs and admit to itself that it is a religion, an area that science has no jurisdiction.

>Mr. Stuart, the debunkers are part of the problem.

For fifty years now, the above analysis of the situation seems to be the prevalent analysis. Greg, I am sorry to say that I suspect that yours is the prevalent opinion in the circles of ufological wisdom much to the consternation for any hope that ufology will ever mature.

Ed Stewart

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Ed Stewart ufoindex@jps.net | So Man, who here seems principal alone,  
There Is Something          | Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown.  
Going On!                   | Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal,  
Salvador Freixedo ( O O ) | 'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.  
-----ooOO-()-OOoo----- Alexander Pope, Essay on Man -----
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