

PEDAGOGIES

UFOS, SUFFICIENCY, AND SCEPTICAL MATERIALISM IN A CRITICAL THINKING MANUAL

MATTHEW A. FIKE

Nothing is too wonderful to be true, if it be consistent
with the laws of nature.

Michael Faraday (qtd. in Greer, *Disclosure* 543)

I wouldn't believe it even if it was real.

Anon. NASA scientist (qtd. in Greer, *Disclosure* 557)

William Blake writes, 'You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough', and 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom' (plates 9 and 5). Excess, it seems, is the key to moderation and insight in personal experience. When enough appears not to be enough, the excess of 'more than enough' can be an important heuristic because it helps fine tune our perception by drawing attention to degrees such as the adequate, the satisfactory, and the conclusive—terms used by Linda Elder and Richard Paul in *The Thinker's Guide to Intellectual Standards* (20). Other terminology is possible, and the impact of context on sufficiency can complicate evaluation. As Gerald M. Nosich writes in *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum* (the manual used at my university), there are distinctions, for example, among a preponderance of evidence in civil cases, proof beyond reasonable doubt in criminal cases, and in formal logic the 'more stringent concept' of 'deductive validity', which means proof 'beyond any possible doubt', as in the famous syllogism involving the mortality of Socrates (144–45).

One should not assume, however, that statements are sufficient and bias-free by virtue of appearing in a critical thinking manual. An example from *Learning to Think Things Through* is Nosich's dismissals of UFOs and interstellar space travel—statements that are themselves so problematic that they ironically illustrate the uncritical thinking that he is attempting to criticise. In response, this essay uses his statements as a

focal point in order to discuss the sufficiency of evidence and to present evidence that may be sufficient. Under consideration in the first section are relevant theories from critical thinking, psychology, and parapsychology. Section two analyses the logic and illogic of Nosich's triadic denial of all things extraterrestrial. Section three explores an opposite conclusion proposed by Steven M. Greer, a medical doctor turned UFO expert, and his organisation The Disclosure Project. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of logical fallacies. Here is the main question at issue: 'Regarding denial and acceptance of the extraordinary, what intellectual impediments (section one) keep Nosich and many others (section two) from considering the available historical evidence of extraterrestrial visitation (section three)?'

The answers below, which invite readers to consider their own sense of sufficiency in relation to the evidence, come through the filter of a professor of English for whom the UFO issue is both an academic interest and a pedagogical tool. The Works Cited list includes my two previously published explorations of Greer's work: a review of two of his books and chapter 5 of my book *The One Mind*. The Appendix includes an exercise that provokes self-reflection and lively discussion among students in my critical thinking course. Whether one sides with Nosich in considering UFOs and space travel a false conclusion, aligns with Greer in believing that Earth is currently being visited by extraterrestrials, or prefers to wait and see somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, this essay will help educators who wish to develop a lesson or unit on a timely issue in popular culture and beyond.

Perspectives on Sufficiency

Critical thinking manuals consider sufficiency primarily in terms of the overall reasoning process, as Nosich's definition suggests. He writes: 'Your thinking about a question or an issue is sufficient when you've reasoned it out thoroughly enough for the purpose at hand, when it is adequate for what is needed, when you've taken account of all necessary factors. Related terms: adequate, enough, complete, comprehensive, thorough' (143–44). In other words, sufficient reasoning means properly applying all the elements of critical thinking.¹ In *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*, Paul and Elder mention a related term, 'completeness', and diminish its importance. Linking completeness with credibility, predictability, and feasibility, they write that these are standards 'that we don't use routinely in assessing reasoning' (88). In *assessing reasoning* suggests, again, that

sufficiency pertains to the overall thinking process. The sufficiency of *information* is taken for granted, as in Nosich's statement that 'it's unreasonable to require too much evidence before drawing a conclusion'. In identifying deductive validity as 'an important concept for those dealing with formal logic', he implies that overwhelming information—'proof' or 'complete evidence'—is not necessary to meet the standard of sufficiency (144–45). When context and point of view determine the threshold of sufficiency, enough can simply be enough.

What happens, though, when a person—especially an authority like Nosich, who is a philosopher by training—disbelieves even evidence that is more than enough? Here are some preliminary possibilities. The first is innocent ignorance: one is uninformed but open-minded and therefore capable of believing and acting on accurate information once it is received. A scientist of my acquaintance was in this category when he asserted that there is no scientific evidence for psychic functioning. He had no idea that physicist Dean Radin, in *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality*, synthesises hundreds of parapsychological research experiments in order to demonstrate a statistically significant case for psi. A second possibility, belief perseverance, involves more active resistance. A biased person acknowledges the weight of evidence but chooses not to believe or act: compatible information is allowed in, no matter how flimsy; contrary information is excluded, denied, or discredited, no matter how substantial. Belief perseverance is thus akin to what researchers call the 'file drawer error', which keeps information contrary to the hypothesis out of the statistical calculation. A student illustrated such disregard for evidence at the end of a discussion that centred on a chapter from Loren Eiseley's *The Immense Journey*, a book whose organisation parallels the development of life on Earth. 'It's probably right', he said of evolution, 'but I'm going to believe the biblical account of Creation anyway'. A third possibility is what Paul and Elder call 'activated ignorance'. They write, 'By *activated ignorance*, we mean *taking into the mind, and actively using, information that is false, though we mistakenly think it to be true*' (69; emphasis in the original). Descartes's idea that animals lacked feelings and the Nazis' belief that Jews were an inferior race are given as examples of activated ignorance, in which people *act on* these wrong ideas. More precisely, each example constitutes a false assumption masquerading as objective information—that is, as information free of context and point of view. In Nosich's case, activated ignorance, far from involving the torture of animals or genocide, means assuming expertise on a subject that he has not investigated and then

authoritatively making false statements that deepen the public's misconceptions.

Scientism. In *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together*, Charles T. Tart, a parapsychologist and the founder of transpersonal psychology, addresses Nosich's type of activated ignorance:

There's a lot of understandable antisience [*sic*] feeling and anti-intellectualism in our times. Many people thus tend to think that science is the enemy! But it's not the essential method of science that has hurt us; rather it's scientism, a materialistic and arrogantly expressed philosophy of life that pretends to be the same as essential science but isn't. Until we learn to distinguish essential science from scientism, we remain vulnerable to false invalidation, which seems to have the full power and prestige of science behind it but is really an arbitrary, philosophical opinion. (38)

The scientism that Tart criticises may also be called 'skeptical materialism' or 'scientific fundamentalism' and constitutes a devotion to outmoded or discredited theories. One fails to distinguish context, assumptions, and point of view from reliable information and accurate conclusions. Obviously, the scientific method that Tart favors is in sync with the stance that Elder and Paul call 'activated knowledge', which means '*taking into the mind, and actively using, information that is true and also, when understood insightfully, leads us by implication to more and more knowledge*' (*The Thinker's Guide* 70; emphasis in the original).

Systems. In Nosich's terminology, the problem Tart describes is the state of being firmly entrenched in a 'system' (181–82). No definition is offered, other than 'a way of thinking' characterised by flexibility. 'The word "system" is a good one because it is so flexible', he states, though perhaps 'inclusive' would be more accurate. A system can be a general ethical imperative such as 'the importance of honesty'; but the term may expand to include a vast penumbra such as the Renaissance, which, like Romanticism (mentioned in Nosich's third chapter), is a 'fundamental and powerful concept' (102). As these examples suggest, rather than being a separate tool, a system encompasses multiple elements such as assumptions, context, concepts, conclusions, and strategies for interpretation.

The term ‘system’ may seem fuzzy, but the greater problem is that systems can be anti-heuristic when one’s paradigm preserves ignorance, reinforces belief perseverance, or fuels the anti-intellectualism of activated ignorance. For example, a system may hold that human consciousness is insular (the mind is its own place), whereas another assumes the entanglement of consciousness with physical matter (the mind is every place). In one case, psi is impossible or at least scientifically unverifiable because assumption plus inaccurate or missing information yields a false conclusion. In the other, psi arises naturally from quantum connectedness (the mind’s entanglement with matter) because assumption plus accurate information yields an accurate conclusion. Here is a second example. One system may hold that life on Earth corresponds to a divine design—either God created the planet and its biosphere in six days, as my student believed, or nature somehow follows a divine blueprint. Another system maintains that life evolved over millions of years: nature developed on its own, which cuts God out of the picture. Eiseley wrestles with this false dichotomy; and he ultimately, though reluctantly and obliquely, affirms the likelihood that God and nature work together.² As his conclusion implies, a much better question is ‘To what extent?’

Impediments. In a final example of two systems there is no possibility of any middle ground: either Earth is being visited by extraterrestrials, or it is not. One system’s inaccuracy must be anti-heuristic and probably involves impediments to critical thinking, which Nosich summarises in his first chapter. He mentions the media’s impact, black-and-white thinking, fears, faulty educational practices, egocentrism, one’s upbringing, and personal experience. The list, which combines social factors and the mechanisms that fire when information challenges an existing system, offers little on the psychology of belief perseverance. Nor does he go deep in his list of impediments to ‘Reasoning Something Through Sufficiently’ (145). These impediments include jumping to conclusions, stressing the unimportant, ignoring the important, adhering to pre-established views, failing to examine alternatives, applying unreasonable standards, lacking relevant background knowledge, and disregarding sufficiency. Although Paul and Elder go somewhat deeper by identifying types of egocentrism (memory, myopia, righteousness, hypocrisy, oversimplification, blindness, immediacy, and absurdity [*Critical Thinking* 235–36]), one must look elsewhere in order to penetrate more deeply into the enigma of belief perseverance and activated ignorance.

Mainstream psychology. It is not just that the term ‘system’ is flexible in the sense that it is inclusive; because systems themselves are

flexible, they are also *resilient*. That is the thesis that Maarten Boudry and Johan Braeckman develop in their helpful survey of belief perseverance, ‘How convenient! The epistemic rationale of self-validating belief systems’. In their words, ‘*the human mind is particularly susceptible to belief systems that are structurally self-validating*’ (341; emphasis in the original). The belief systems mentioned include alien abductions, astrology, cold fusion, conspiracy theories, creationism, doomsday predictions, eternal damnation, healing crystals, homeopathy, magic, magic healing, the paranormal, parapsychology, psychic functioning (mediumship, telepathy), superstition, witchcraft, shamanic powers, ufology, and UFOs. The authors write, in particular, that ‘UFO believers have proclaimed for over several decades that there is a vast government conspiracy to obscure the real evidence for extraterrestrial visits to the earth’ (354). They also identify a distinction between science and pseudoscience by considering belief in any of the listed areas to be as unfounded as ‘continuing scientific resistance to theories of anthropogenic climate change’ (354). The psychological defense mechanisms that enable adherence to ‘weird belief systems’ (353) include ad hoc reasoning, confirmation bias (avoidance of contrary evidence), maintaining the appearance of objectivity, motivation to reduce cognitive dissonance, motivated reasoning (justifying a desired conclusion), and rationalisation.

Parapsychology. By inveighing against belief perseverance, however, Boudry and Braeckman illustrate the resilience of the belief system that is mainstream psychology itself. Their discussion of weird belief systems fails to distinguish objects of belief (astrology, creationism, magic, etc.) from fields of inquiry (parapsychology, ufology). In their view, there is no distinction between faulty beliefs and the pseudoscience that supports them—between belief in a phenomenon and confidence in a methodology whose goal is to investigate it. Although parapsychology and ufology may have their charlatans, it is inappropriate to discredit emerging fields because they are out of sync with the methodology and assumptions of a discipline already in the mainstream. This limitation of the authors’ approach comes into better focus in light of Tart’s chapter, ‘Ways of Not Knowing: Distortions of Science and Intelligence’ (53–73). Although he is writing about impediments to belief in psi, many of them are relevant to contemporary responses to UFOs. A subset of Tart’s list includes compulsive need for certainty, premature generalisation, compulsive attachment to a generalisation, denial of ignorance, denial of doubt, inflexible need to seem hard-nosed, the need to control, rationalisation masquerading as

reason, intolerance of ambiguity, the need to conform or win approval, arrogance, over- (or under-) respect for authority, compulsive rationality, blindness to the nonintellectual aspects of reality, fear of the truth, and stereotyping. Adherents to a belief system that dismisses psi and UFOs as figments of a pseudoscientific imagination may be guilty of denial of ignorance, blindness to the nonintellectual aspects of reality, and misuse of authority (over-respect for their own, under-respect for their opposition's). So whereas Boudry and Braeckman identify mechanisms that cause adherence to beliefs that the authors consider weirdly inaccurate, Tart's list of pathologies is helpful in understanding why belief systems produce inertia that motivates the declaration of dependable evidence to be insufficient or nonexistent.

Three Denials

Thus far, it is clear that a way of thinking does not have to be accurate to be a system. Even those who embrace impediments rather than cultivating intellectual traits like humility, integrity, and fair-mindedness think in systems. We tend to assume, however, that the system presented in a critical thinking manual is a model of fair-mindedness and ideological neutrality. What if such a manual betrayed philosophic scepticism and scientific materialism buttressed by the mechanisms presented above? That may be the case with three statements that Nosich makes on the subject of extraterrestrial visitation and interplanetary space travel. First, he asserts a supposed fact: 'there is no reason to believe that there are aliens among us' (19). This statement, which conflates assumption and conclusion, reflects an uninformed point of view. UFO researchers' chiasmic response would be that *absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*, but it would be more accurate to say that ignorance of evidence proves only that one is uninformed. The second statement, in a section titled 'Previous Commitments, Previous Personal Experience', is a more complicated formulation:

We can also think in a biased way with respect to evidence. If I lean toward a certain belief, then just a small amount of evidence weighs heavily in its favor for me. If I believe in aliens visiting earth, or herbal remedies for cancer, or homeopathic cures, or predestination, then even the negative fact that such views have not been absolutely disproven counts heavily in their favor in my eyes. (24)

Nosich rightly calls attention to the fallacy involving appeal to lack of evidence, which says that a lack of negative evidence equals positive support. If no one can prove that ETs are not visiting Earth, then they must be here—obviously this is illogical. But whereas it is a good thing to identify fallacy-laden thinking, criticising a hollow simulacrum of the truth is not a fair-minded act of intellectual integrity. By lumping extraterrestrials' visitation of Earth together with healing and theology, as if to imply that they are of feeble reasoning all compact, he reveals his belief perseverance in the form of scientific fundamentalism, a point of view that resists new discoveries. Perhaps the second passage illustrates thinking in the 'biased way with respect to evidence' that it criticises.

A third statement in a section called 'Impediments to Thinking Critically within a Discipline' comments on space travel and the media:

Space travel is presented matter-of-factly in fictionalized accounts (often at 'warp speed', with stars streaking by, and the 'noise' of booster rockets firing). We also see news reports of space-craft sending incredibly precise data back from Mars or Jupiter. We also hear reputable scientists talk about black holes and the consequent possibility of wormholes through space-time. These are three separate sources of information that really have almost nothing to do with one another: fiction, news bites, [and] scientific reports. But many people put them together uncritically and assume that space travel to other planetary systems is just around the corner. They form an unrealistic picture, one that can easily be an impediment to learning about science. Space travel beyond our tiny system of planets is unlikely ever to happen. Distances are simply too great, our highest speeds are infinitesimally small, and there are physical limits (not just practical limits) to what objects with mass can do. Human space travel beyond the solar system cannot be proved impossible, of course, but it's only a fantasy, probably no more likely than finding out leprechauns actually exist. (114–15)

This is a fair-minded statement with respect to the assumption that the speed of light is an inviolable speed limit. It also reflects Nosich's

confidence in scientific empiricism and logic. Whereas the second statement is critical of the appeal to lack of evidence, the third identifies the problem of basing an unrealistic conclusion on a combination of false authorities. Specifically, Nosich shuts down an alternative system by stating that belief in interstellar travel is an example of uncritical thinking because it conflates ‘fiction, news bites, [and] scientific reports’. It is ‘only a fantasy’ that arises from impediments to critical thinking. In other words, Nosich is as sceptical of space travel as he is of leprechauns because he believes that neither can withstand a standards check.

Not everyone would agree. Special Relativity holds that it is impossible to accelerate an object up to or through the speed of light because, if mass increases with speed, travelling 186,000 miles per second would require an infinite amount of energy. However, as physicist Hal Puthoff observes, General Relativity suggests that the speed of light is not an absolute boundary because the acceleration process could be sidestepped via the manipulation of gravity and space-time.³ In other words, a spacecraft with transluminal capacity would be a time machine, not the kind of conventional rocket that the official space program uses to boost people and satellites into Earth orbit. In extremely advanced systems, such as those that some extraterrestrial species may have, electronics might even enable the conversion of solid energy (matter) into nonphysical energy (thought), which can be anywhere instantaneously. However their propulsive systems may work, extraterrestrial people, if they are visiting Earth, have figured out how to surpass the speed of light by altering, or temporarily dropping out of, the physical universe. If this new system is true, then it follows that Nosich’s advocacy of the scientific status quo is like using Newtonian physics to deny quantum physics. It is not that his view is inaccurate within the parameters of its own system. The problem is rather that it no longer rises to the standard of sufficiency because it overlooks advances in science. By assuming an absence of information that would counter his view that humans will never leave the solar system, Nosich transforms his limited assumptions into a definitive conclusion for all science now and in the future. His conclusion is inaccurate because he is not sufficiently aware of relevant information. Therefore, in his comments on ETs and space travel, he succumbs to the error he identifies in stating that ‘we slant the amount of evidence to fit in with our predispositions’ (25).

Historical Evidence

Of course, the statements in the previous paragraph are not self-validating. Assumptions without information are still assumptions, not conclusions. Evidence is needed, and as Radin points out in *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena*, new beliefs take time to achieve mainstream acceptance. This process includes the stages of sceptical denial, admission of possibility, acceptance, and full-blown paradigm shift in which it becomes heretical *not* to embrace the new belief (1). As these stages suggest, the ‘philosophy’ of one historical moment may be the common sense of the next. What if UFOs are not the false conclusion of wishful thinkers but instead sober reality? Now that we have considered the theory of sufficiency and a detractor’s statements, let us now consider the work of a UFO expert.

Steven M. Greer grew up in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was educated at Appalachian State University (B.S., 1982) and East Tennessee State University (M.D., 1987). After interning at the Mountain Area Health Education Center in Asheville, North Carolina, he worked in the Department of Emergency Medicine at the Caldwell Memorial Hospital in Lenoir, North Carolina, until 1998 (‘Steven M. Greer, MD—Credentials’). His transition from medicine to disclosure work is a convincing credential in itself. A right-minded, scientifically oriented person like Greer would have been unlikely to quit a lucrative job when his children’s college tuition loomed large on the horizon unless he had the truth on his side. As he writes in his memoir, *Hidden Truth—Forbidden Knowledge*, ‘I’m very troubled with knowing this information [about ETs] and not sharing it. So now I speak the truth, even if it discredits me’ (232).

Greer summarises his research as follows: ‘UFOs are real; they are of extraterrestrial origin; they have been around for decades (if not centuries); there is no evidence that they are hostile; there is probably more than one type of life form visiting us; and aspects of the “government” have known this for 50 years, at least’ (*Disclosure* 21). If one follows this line of reasoning, the question at issue is no longer ‘Are ETs visiting Earth?’ but rather ‘When will a national government confirm the fact that they are, and what happens then in technology and “exo-politics” (the branch of political science dealing with human-ET interaction)?’ From Greer’s point of view, the latter questions are important and relevant for the following reason. ‘There is no question’, he writes, ‘that these [covert] projects [in the CIA and the military] are

deliberately, with malice aforethought, withholding those earth-saving energy technologies [especially zero-point energy and anti-gravity] that could prevent the melting of the polar ice caps, and other catastrophic changes in the environment' (*Hidden* 291).⁴ With so much at stake, in 1998 Greer quit his \$250,000-a-year medical job to become the world's physician by devoting himself full-time to The Disclosure Project. Here is a summary of that organisation's activities:

The Disclosure Project is a research project working to fully disclose the facts about UFOs, extraterrestrial intelligence, and classified advanced energy and propulsion systems. We have over 500 government, military, and intelligence community witnesses testifying to their direct, personal, first hand [*sic*] experience with UFOs, ETs, ET technology, and the cover-up that keeps this information secret. ('The Disclosure Project')

Although these conclusions have not received widespread acceptance, we might well consider the evidence that Greer has amassed, particularly in his books. *Extraterrestrial Contact: The Evidence and Implications* (1999) is an anthology of his essays on ET-related issues such as how alien visitors exceed what he elegantly calls 'the crossing point of light'. There are sections on implications, evidence, disclosure, and documents. The book offers a frank assessment of the ET presence as it was understood about fifteen years ago. *Disclosure: Military and Government Witnesses Reveal the Greatest Secrets in History* (2001) includes both eyewitnesses and a variety of government documents to support claims of ETs' presence. Greer states that the book, which is over 500 pages long, includes 'less than one-half of one percent of the total testimony we have' (49). How much testimony is that? In 2013 Greer stated that The Disclosure Project has over 4,000 landing cases with accompanying documentation from government scientists, over 3,500 pilot and radar cases, and a huge number of photos and videos ('How Much Evidence do you Need?'). Sections in *Disclosure* include radar/pilot cases, SAC/NUKE facilities, government insiders like NASA officials, and testimony regarding new technologies. Greer's memoir, *Hidden Truth—Forbidden Knowledge* (2006), centres on major events in his life that involved contact with extraterrestrials and his work to disclose their visitation of Earth. The book describes both his lone encounters with ETs and situations in which he had sightings with groups of people. Chapter 29, 'Witness Testimony', provides a subset of

Disclosure's first-hand testimony from reliable witnesses. *Contact: Countdown to Transformation* (2009) describes encounters with extraterrestrial vehicles from multiple persons' points of view (the book includes journal entries by participants in Greer's fieldwork). Since he and his companions all saw the same things, the inevitable conclusion is that ET contact is an actual physical event, not the fantastic imaginings of a lone person unhinged from stable reality and not the belief perseverance of those who cherish weird or inaccurate beliefs.

If we assume the accuracy of this evidence, then Greer's books suggest what political figures will not admit because of innocent ignorance, belief perseverance, active ignorance, or the fear of ridicule or physical harm. Regarding the sufficiency of the evidence, here is the relevant question at issue: 'If we send people to their deaths on the basis of one person's eyewitness testimony, what kind of credibility do 500+ witnesses carry, all responsible, sane, and educated, and all telling different parts of the same story of extraterrestrial contact?'⁵ The witnesses quoted in *Disclosure* include an array of trained observers: astronauts, military and commercial pilots, air traffic controllers, radar operators, and military personnel at locations where nuclear weapons are present (missile silos, SAC bomber bases, and Navy ships). Many of these people had stratospheric security clearances (one man's was thirty-eight levels above Top Secret). If UFO detractors' conclusion were true, all of the witnesses would have to lack credibility, and all of the reported sightings would have to have alternative explanations, which is not likely. Hallucinations, mass hypnosis, autosuggestion, and swamp gas do not go 10,000 miles per hour at 30,000 feet, make gravity-defying turns, or leave radar traces. Who, then, should be believed? Dr. Nosich bases his denial on an assumed absence of information. Dr. Greer has been collecting evidence, including government documents, for over two decades. He prepared briefing materials for the last three presidents and personally briefed members of the United States Congress, a CIA director, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In case the answer is not obvious, here is Greer's own statement about the sufficiency of the evidence he has assembled:

We feel that any objective scientist or member of the public who reviews this information will conclude that indeed we are being visited by advanced extraterrestrial civilizations, that there are advanced and exotic propulsion and energy systems behind these craft, that these systems have been studied through

compartmented special access projects within the United States government and elsewhere, and that this has huge ramifications for the future of the human race. (*Disclosure* 50)

Since some readers, of course, will never be convinced by any degree of evidence, it is particularly appropriate to keep in mind the testimony of Sgt. Clifford Stone of the United States Army:

We are conditioned by our own paradigms not to accept the possibility or probability of a highly advanced intelligent civilization coming here to visit us. You have evidence in the form of highly credible reports of objects being seen, [and] of the entities inside these objects being seen. Yet, we look for a prosaic explanation and we throw out the bits and pieces of the evidence that [do not] meet our paradigm. So it is a self-keeping secret. You can conceal it in plain sight. (qtd. in Greer, *Disclosure* 37, 327)

Although, as Stone points out, the available evidence appears to meet the standard of sufficiency, paradigms (systems) are unlikely to shift in the absence of official disclosure. Even then, the proverbial spaceship landing on the White House lawn would not sway all disbelievers. Still, first-hand experience is a key to shifting paradigms because people tend to be less sceptical of ocular proof. In that spirit, an illustration may prove helpful. First, here is a little bit of background on types of encounters.

We have all heard of the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but there are actually five different types of ET contact:

Encounters with Unidentified Flying Objects have been categorized into five groups as close encounters of the first, second, third, fourth and fifth kind. When a person sees a UFO within 150 metres, it's an encounter of the first kind. When an encounter with a UFO in the sky or on the ground leaves evidence behind such as scorch marks on the ground or indents, etc., it's of the second kind. When an encounter is with visible occupants inside the UFO, it's of the third kind. The fourth kind involves the person being taken and experimented on inside the alien craft. The fifth kind involve[s] direct

communication between aliens and humans. ('What're close encounters')

A close encounter of the fifth kind (or CE-5) is Greer's own term for an ET encounter brought about by humans who 'vector' a spacecraft to their location through meditation and guided imagery. In other words, when humans can reach out in a state of pure heart and expanded awareness, the ETs will respond. Greer calls this technique the 'Rosetta stone of extraterrestrial contact', and it is perhaps the most fundamental hidden truth referred to in his memoir (*Hidden* 82). As for ocular proof, Greer's 2013 film, *Sirius Disclosure*, includes an example of a CE-5.⁶ His group is in a wilderness area late at night. In response to the CE-5 protocols, an extraterrestrial vehicle, or ETV, appears above them. Its electrical field ionises the atmosphere around it, making the spacecraft appear as a luminescent white orb far brighter than the Moon. Encased in its own gravity field, it departs by phasing out when the Air Force shows up. There were multiple eyewitnesses, the encounter was captured on film, and the Air Force intervened in order to end the encounter. Even Nosich would find this series of events hard to dismiss as just a fantasy.

Conclusion

Logical fallacies. Given the strength of the evidence that Greer has assembled, denial illustrates various fallacies. The straw man is foremost among them: UFOs may not be just a scarecrow of uncritical thinking to be knocked over by a gust of sound reasoning. Then, by assuming that no evidence of ETs exists, one presents an inaccurate, flimsy conclusion as if it were fact. One also begs the question by conflating assumption and conclusion and becomes in turn a false authority such as those Nosich criticises in his statements about fiction and news bites. It is not merely that one does not rise to the standard of fair-mindedness or is guilty of 'belief perseverance' or the 'file drawer error'. Speaking authoritatively without having any idea of what one is talking about also illustrates activated ignorance. Finally, mistaking philosophical scepticism and scientific materialism for the fabric of reality (the part for the whole), is what David Rosenwasser and Jill Stephen in *Writing Analytically* call 'naturalizing our assumptions'. They state, 'The word *naturalize* in this context means we are representing—and seeing—our own assumptions as natural, as simply the way things are *and ought to be*' (47; emphasis in the original). That is, UFO debunkers assume that their sense of reality is worthy of universal acceptance. This is a gaffe of

very significant proportions, yet in critical thinking class it usually goes unnoticed by instructors and their students because they too have formed their world view according to mainstream culture, shutting out sources of information that may be reliable and therefore more than sufficient.

A *pedagogical opportunity*. Talking about UFOs and The Disclosure Project is a good way to engage students in a discussion of the standard of sufficiency. How much evidence do we need in order to begin to shift our paradigm from denial to acceptance? When is more than enough finally enough? When can we admit, if ever, that there may be more things in the heavens and on Earth than are reported on the nightly news? Might the testimony of over five hundred witnesses and the common-sense principle, ‘Where there’s smoke there’s fire’, be good places to start? Not all readers of this essay will believe Greer’s case that ETs are here; and even those who *are* convinced may not really care, any more than we care today about global warming’s consequences decades from now. But that is exactly the point: our individual reactions to the UFO issue, whether intellectual or somatic, affirmative or sceptical, can teach us something about our own (un)critical thinking and suggest that the process of establishing sufficiency may be more complex and difficult than we ordinarily imagine. We and our students, therefore, would do well to examine our own assumptions about humans’ place in the universe, the degree of evidence that is sufficient to shift our beliefs, our own innate reluctance to embrace the intellectual flexibility that we espouse, and the possibility of authorial bias even in a critical thinking manual.

NOTES

¹ The elements in Nosich’s manual are as follows: purpose, question at issue, assumptions, point of view, concepts, information, implications and consequences, conclusions and interpretations, context, and alternatives (chapter 2). He includes the standards of accuracy, breadth, clearness, depth, importance/relevance, precision, and sufficiency (chapter 4).

² See my article, ‘The Literary Matrix of Loren Eiseley’s “The Secret of Life”’, on the works cited list.

³ Puthoff states: ‘The best way to explain how it [moving faster than light] comes about is that it’s actually the idea of stretching space—expanding space on one side of the craft and shrinking space on the other—so that you are not only moving forward through space, but the space itself is like moving forward [as if] on a rubber sheet, while at the same time you are pulling the rubber sheet and expanding it. Then,

relative to the outside environment, you could be going at, say, the speed of light along the rubber sheet, but if the rubber sheet itself is moving relative to the rest of the universe, then your net motion is faster than the speed of light' (qtd. in Greer, *Disclosure* 524; Puthoff, 'Hidden Energy'). For another explanation of General and Special Relativity, see Marshall and Zohar.

⁴ One of Boudry and Braeckman's sources, Robert Park's *Voodoo Science: The Road from Foolishness to Fraud*, chapter 6, debunks free energy. Greer's response would be that Park's conclusion is based on an outworn system. A comment by Eugene Mallove (identified by Greer in a headnote as 'the Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Infinite Energy* [*sic*] and Director of the New Energy Research Laboratory in New Hampshire', a man with two MIT degrees and a doctorate from Harvard [*Disclosure* 543]) is also relevant to this discussion: 'Terminology is being used which is highly inappropriate and has no bearing at all on what is being done. It is called pathological science, junk science, weird science, voodoo science, etc., and it's basically name-calling. They [contrary scientists] no longer look at the data. Of course, they never really looked at the data.... There is nothing worse, I found, than suggesting to academic physicists in particular, and academics in general, that they are not only wrong; they are disastrously wrong, catastrophically wrong' (qtd. on 546).

⁵ The question is based on a comment by Col. Charles Brown: 'It is sort of strange but we send people to prison, we send people to their death because of eyewitness accounts of crimes. Our legal system is based on that to a large degree. Yet in my following of unusual aerial phenomena for the past 50 years, there seems to be some reason to discredit very viable and very reputable witnesses when they say something is unidentified' (qtd. in Greer, *Disclosure* 34). Regarding evidence, however, the notion advanced by Greer and in testimony by Monsignor Corrado Balducci that witnesses' testimony on all subjects will be diminished if we discount supposed eyewitnesses to UFO phenomena is an example of the slippery slope fallacy (*Disclosure* 49, 65). Refusal to believe testimony about UFOs will not compromise the scientific method, undermine Christianity, or relegate most of recorded history to the dustbin. Epistemological systems are not in danger of crashing. In a different take on the issue of evidence, one of the sources cited in Boudry and Braeckman considers the issue of witnesses' credibility from a standard psychological point of view. Terrence Hines, in *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal: A Critical Examination of the Evidence* (1988), chapter 7, states that witnesses' credentials are irrelevant because 'perception and memory' are 'constructive' (167-68;

emphasis in the original). That is, what we believe to be objectively real is partially constructed out of our own subjectivity and is therefore undependable. They assert in chapter 8 that photos of flying saucers are fakes, that physical evidence is simply misunderstood, and that abduction stories lack credibility. Along the same lines, Park devotes a section of his chapter 9 to UFOs, arguing that crashed UFOs at Roswell, New Mexico, are a modern myth. For a contrasting conclusion, see *The Day After Roswell*, in which Col. Philip J. Corso describes how he saw alien corpses and distributed retrieved artifacts to laboratories in the United States. According to Corso, these items helped defense contractors advance research leading to bulletproof vests, fiber optics, lasers, microchips, and night vision. In any case, Roswell is a single event, not the extent of the evidence for UFOs; debunking a part is not equivalent to debunking the whole. It would be interesting to see detractors' reaction to the over 500 pages of evidence (including government documents) in Greer's *Disclosure*, especially a statement like this one by President Harry Truman at a White House press conference on April 4, 1950: 'I can assure you that flying saucers, given that they exist, are not constructed by any power on earth' (qtd. on 56). Ufology has come a long way in a quarter century, and we should examine the evidence closely, rather than making *ad hominem* attacks on the wits of the witnesses.

⁶ The relevant segment runs from 20:57–23:41. The film, witnesses' testimony, and Greer's books and other DVDs are available at <www.siriusdisclosure.org>. Note that the first three classifications—close encounters of the first, second, and third kind—were coined by J. Allen Hynek in his book, *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry* (chapters 8–10).

WORKS CITED

- Blake, William. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. English Romantic Writers*. Ed. David Perkins. New York: Harcourt, 1995. 103–10.
- Boudry, Maarten, and Johan Braeckman. 'How convenient! The epistemic rationale of self-validating belief systems'. *Philosophical Psychology* 25.3 (2012): 341–64.
- Corso, Philip J., and William J. Birnes. *The Day After Roswell*. New York: Pocket, 1997.
- Eiseley, Loren. *The Immense Journey*. New York: Random, 1957.
- Elder, Linda, and Richard Paul. *The Thinker's Guide to Intellectual Standards: The Words That Name Them And the Criteria That*

- Define Them*. Tomales, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2008.
- Fike, Matthew A. 'The Literary Matrix of Loren Eiseley's "The Secret of Life"'. *CEA Critic* 72.3 (2009): 17–36.
- . *The One Mind: C.G. Jung and the Future of Literary Criticism*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- . Rev. of *Hidden Truth—Forbidden Knowledge and Contact: Countdown to Transformation*, by Steven M. Greer. *TMI Focus* 32.3–4 (2010): 10–13.
- Greer, Steven M. *Contact: Countdown to Transformation*. Crozet, VA: Crossing Point, 2009.
- . *Disclosure: Military and Government Witnesses Reveal the Greatest Secret in Modern History*. Crozet, VA: Crossing Point, 2001.
- . *The Disclosure Project*. 2010. 26 Nov 2013. <www.siriusdisclosure.com>.
- . *Extraterrestrial Contact: The Evidence and Implications*. Crozet, VA: Crossing Point, 1999.
- . *Hidden Truth—Forbidden Knowledge*. Crozet, VA: Crossing Point, 2006.
- . 'How Much Evidence do you Need?' 21 Dec 2013. 2 Feb 2014. <www.youtube.com>.
- . *Sirius Disclosure*. 26 Nov 2013. <www.siriusdisclosure.com>.
- Hines, Terrence. *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal: A Critical Examination of the Evidence*. Buffalo: Prometheus, 1988.
- Hynek, J. Allen. *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Inquiry*. Chicago: Regnery, 1972.
- Marshall, Ian, and Danah Zohar. *Who's Afraid of Schrödinger's Cat? All the New Science Ideas You Need to Keep Up with the New Thinking*. New York: Morrow, 1997.
- Nosich, Gerald M. *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*. 4th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, 2012.
- Park, Robert. *Voodoo Science: The Road from Foolishness to Fraud*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Paul, Richard, and Linda Elder. *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Learning and Your Life*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.
- Puthoff, Hal. 'Hidden Energy—Dr. Hal Puthoff'. 23 Dec 2013. 9 Jan 2014. <www.youtube.com>.
- Radin, Dean. *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena*. New York: HarperEdge, 1997.

- . *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality*. New York: Paraview Pocket, 2006.
- Rosenwasser, David, and Jill Stephen. *Writing Analytically*. 6th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2012.
- Sirius Disclosure*. Writ. and Dir. Steven M. Greer. Sirius Technology, 2013.
- ‘Steven M. Greer, MD—Credentials’. 26 Nov 2013. <www.siriusdisclosure.com>.
- Tart, Charles T. *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal Is Bringing Science and Spirit Together*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2009.
- ‘What’re close encounters of the first, second, third, fourth and fifth kind?’. *Times of India*. 22 March 2003. 26 Nov 2013. <timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home>.

APPENDIX

The preceding essay can serve as background information for instructors who wish to build a unit on UFOs into a writing or critical thinking course. The following activity, which I currently use in my ‘Critical Reading, Thinking, Writing’ course at Winthrop University, might serve as a model. Note that the first video below shows a CE-5 in Florida. The second is Dr. Greer’s lecture on ET-related energy sources that are not available to the public at this time.

Alternative Energy Activity

Purpose: Today’s exercise is designed to get you to work in groups to think about conflicting statements in terms of a number of the critical thinking standards. You will need your smart phones or laptops or tablets today, so get them out please.

STEP ONE (5 minutes): Write down your personal beliefs about UFOs, ETs, and space travel to other star systems within our galaxy. Do you think that ETs are visiting Earth? Do you think that there is a way to transcend the speed of light?

STEP TWO (10 minutes): Find, read, and mark Nosich’s statements about UFOs and space travel on pages 19, 24, and 114–15. Apply the 10 elements to his statements. Then apply the standards of accuracy and sufficiency.

STEP THREE (20 minutes): Watch the videos.
 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=teeRzaybrXw&feature=youtu.be>;
 <www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeXVsybEQPQ>.

STEP FOUR (15 minutes): Apply the 10 elements to the second video. Then apply the standards (especially accuracy, importance/relevance, and sufficiency) to that video. You may want to use your devices to find out information about the speaker's background and point of view.

STEP FIVE (10 minutes): You should have established by this stage that Nosich and Greer contradict each other. What do you do with that contradiction? The two men cannot both be 100% accurate, so how can you use your critical thinking to resolve the conflict?

STEP SIX (final 10-15 minutes): In small groups, use the questions below to share what you wrote with a small group of classmates. I will ask for the highlights of your discussion at the beginning of our next class.

- What did you learn today about the content of our critical thinking manual and the videos?
- What did you learn about your thinking?
- What are the implications and consequences of Greer's line of reasoning?
- Do you side with Nosich or Greer? Why and to what extent?
- Has today's class altered your personal beliefs about UFOs, ETs, and space travel? *Why* do you believe what you believe? How can you look at a video of a CE-5 and still doubt that Earth is being visited by intelligent beings from other planetary systems?

Day two questions

- What were your beliefs about UFOs before participating in the exercise?
- Did the exercise change anyone's views?
- Why do you believe what you believe?
- Share some highlights of your analysis of video two by the elements?
- How did you use accuracy and sufficiency to evaluate Nosich's statements about UFOs and space travel (12, 24, 114–15)?
- What happened when you applied some of the other standards (especially accuracy, importance/relevance, and sufficiency) to the video?

- What did you do with the contradiction between Nosich and Greer? How did you use the elements and/or standards to get past that impasse?
- What happened with your thinking when you looked things up on the Internet? Did your own bias interfere with your search?
- What did you learn about your thinking? For example, do you have a tendency to embrace 'belief perseverance'?