

William F. Bengston

# The Boggle Factor

A few years back, a friend of mine told me that a prominent member of the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE) had privately expressed exasperation at a presentation I had recently made on my healing research. In that presentation I had summarized some of my multi-decade work on healing cancerous animals using skeptical volunteer healers, and I had thrown in a couple of human case anecdotes to boot. The bottom line was he thought my results were simply “too much” for him to handle.

My immediate reaction was one of defensiveness. “Too much?” I thought to myself. I couldn’t understand what could have been too much. After all, I had by then completed a dozen of these cancer-healing experiments in five independent labs, including two medical schools. I had demonstrated a reliable though anomalous outcome of cancer cures in two animal models that had no spontaneous instances of tumor regression. The animals in my experiments were actually cured for life, for crying out loud! Furthermore, they were immune to repeated re-injections of the cancer! A dozen experiments! In my now hyper-defensive posture, I couldn’t understand what else could be asked of me: how many experiments would be sufficient to make the case for healing? A dozen doesn’t cut it? And if I did one more, would yet another experiment be asked of me before this misguided SSE member would throw in the towel and finally recognize what to me was self evident? Gimme a break.



Day 35: Tumor ulceration.

Once I got the ranting out of my system and became less defensive, it slowly occurred to me that I react in much the same way to many anomalous claims I come across. Some of the presentations at the SSE conferences have left me with that uneasy “too much” feeling. Was that because of the content? The speaker? Or was it because I was not sufficiently familiar with the data and so could not adequately process it? When you hear Henry Bauer methodically and relentlessly present

data that lead to the conclusion that HIV is not the cause of AIDS, how to react? Poppycock, you say? Interesting...next speaker? Or, do you read his many published articles and books to check his conclusions? If he’s right, this is very, very important. But is he correct? I don’t have the ability to spend as much time as he has on the question, so should I believe? Bauer is an extraordinary thinker, a world-class scholar, and he has obviously spent a great deal of effort addressing the question. If I’m boggled by his presentation, why?

We in the SSE are supposed to be open to the idea that the current scientific canon deserves some serious skeptical re-examination. We sometimes complain amongst ourselves that many of the phenomena we are interested in are off limits in many orthodox academic institutions, and that serious scholars in serious places need to re-examine the boundaries they have placed between the orthodox and the unorthodox.

The scientific establishment may dismiss the phenomena we discuss as out of hand and impossible, primarily because it is anomalous and therefore by definition outside of the boundaries of what is presumed to be possible. Anomalous phenomena by definition boggle the mind of a believer in the validity of conventional perspectives. But it is also clearly the case that those of us who are interested in scientific anomalies do not automatically accept the reality of all of the anomalous phenomena we are exposed to. Where do we draw the line, and why?

We enter the unorthodox at our own peril.

Truth be told, we all have our buttons, which if pushed put us into a state of being intellectually boggled. Sure, some statistically significant effects of healing with intent on cell cultures is okay, but full cures of cancerous mice by inexperienced non-believing volunteer healers? Too much? Sure, you might accept the deviations from expected chance of random number generators by operators in the confined PEAR lab, but Global Consciousness as measured by dozens of these same random number generators scattered around the globe? Too much? You get the idea.

I recently administered a questionnaire to SSE members asking them to rank their acceptance or rejection of ten types of anomalous phenomena. Respondents were asked to self-report on a scale of 1–10 (with 10 being total acceptance) on how confident they were in the reality of each phenomenon, and to report on a similar scale how much knowledge they had



of each. They were also asked to assess their reason for each response, whether it might be due to familiarity with published work, personal experience, or presentation by a credible authority. Finally, they were asked background questions concerning professional training, and whether they are involved in conventional or unconventional research.

In rank order of *decreasing* acceptance, about 450 SSE members had the following average acceptance scores based on a self-report scale of 1–10: General Psi (mean=8:31), Out of Body Experiences (8.03), PEAR lab data (8.01), Human Survival (7.73), Remote Viewing (7.68), Healing (7.48), UFOs (7.13), Global Consciousness (6.87), Cold Fusion (5.83), Astrology (4.88).

Now take any particular anomalous phenomenon from the perspective of an insider. My area of research, healing, was only the sixth most accepted phenomenon. Now granted, the membership leaned towards acceptance with a mean score of 7.48; but sixth? There are numerous long established journals devoted solely to healing research, uncountable studies, entire conferences. Sixth? I've given at least 10 presentations at the SSE on my research alone. Sixth?



“Murphy,” the Random Mechanical Cascade Machine, Operating in PEAR Reception Area

Any researcher within any area could have the same response, even those whose area is among the highest ranked. The PEAR lab data has a mean score of 8.01, indicating strong acceptance. But why isn't the score even higher? Where are the 10s? (Is everyone just being appropriately skeptical?) They have 30 years of data, meticulously gathered and analyzed, in hundreds of papers, books, and technical reports. What's left? Is there anything lacking that if produced would make the holdouts convert to acceptance? What could that possibly be? Would a 31st year of experimental data make any difference?

I found moderate to strong correlates between knowledge of a particular area and its acceptance. Interestingly, the self-report acceptance scores were slightly but significantly higher than the knowledge scores. Perhaps this hints at some “leap of faith” in willingness to be open to anomalies.

It is certainly the case that “leaps of faith” are required in all areas, whether traditional or non-traditional. Consider the conventional case of man-made global warming. It is currently politically and scientifically correct to accept (believe?)

in the reality of human-induced global warming. But how many of us are really familiar with the data? How many of us are even capable of sufficiently understanding the data in order to make an informed decision? I've talked to applied physicists who scratch their heads and tell me that the question is too complex to unravel at this point. What about the rest of us who aren't physicists, who aren't intimately familiar with the complex mathematical models being used, but are “sure” that global warming is a foregone conclusion? What is the source of our confidence? And if someone were to make the case that global warming is simply part of the natural cycle, would this in turn boggle us?

As scientific knowledge progresses, we all know more and more about less and less. Tomorrow you may personally know more things, but you will know a smaller percentage of that which is known, and so on. Individually, of necessity we are increasingly ignorant of the collective knowledge that is potentially available to us. And so it is likely that simply in order to function, over time we must of necessity increase our leaps of faith.

But based on what? Where shall we place our faith? Should we believe what Al Gore has to say, but not Henry Bauer? Should we believe the evidence published in *Nature*, but not the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*? Just where are the boundaries whose trespass will cause us to boggle?

In my questionnaire I asked respondents whether they thought the reason for each response was based on published work, personal experience, or presentation by a credible authority. By far the most credit was given to published material (and so the importance of publications like the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*). Personal experience in turn generally lagged behind presentation by a credible authority (and so the importance of such gatherings as the annual SSE conference). Neither the respondent's area of academic training nor highest degree had any relationship with acceptance of anomalies. Those who were actively involved in anomalies research knew more about and were more accepting of the various other anomalies.

It would be interesting to have comparative data from scientists who are strictly involved in conventional research areas, but as far as I am aware, those data do not yet exist. My experience is that there are many scientists who have an abiding interest in various anomalies, but have exercised their academic discretion so that their public research remains safely within established paradigms.

I vividly remember sitting in an SSE conference about to hear a talk about crop circles. I wasn't particularly looking forward to it. After all, weren't crop circles basically a group of guys with planks and a few too many beers pulling a prank on the gullible? What's the point of sitting through this? But what I heard made my jaw drop. Here were carefully gathered data on what turned out to be a richly complex phenomenon that blew away my preconceived notions.



## ‘LETTERS’

## Scalar Waves

I am writing as a member to express my concern about the tone of “What Do You Mean, Scalar Wave?” by Andrew May, *EdgeScience* 11.

The tells of a pseudoskeptic begin with the assumption that the subject “...violate the laws of physics and therefore cannot exist.” (Item #1 under So where does that leave us?), expressed in demeaning name calling (“Scientists ... have coined the term ‘woo woo’” under New Age Woo Woo) which is supported by broad and often irrelevant generalizations such as the reference to what Jean Dixon said (also under New Age Woo Woo). (In fact, I suspect “woo woo” was invented by the pseudoskeptical editors of Wikipedia.)

Since it was in a SSE publication, I read the article expecting to learn a little about how the concept of “scalar” is properly applied to signal propagation in the supposed nonphysical space. Instead, I only found sarcasm toward mostly earnest investigators and righteous pronouncements about the nature of “proper” science.

It is well-established that there is some form of subtle energy field which supports psi functioning, responds to intentionality, and which behaves as if it is independent of time and space. As an electronics engineer attempting to communicate abstract concepts to my readers, I characterize this field in terms of being “non-scalar” (more correctly, non-scalar-like) because it exhibits none of the usual characteristics of electromagnetic (EM) energy propagation. In this perspective, “scalar” in the context of “scalar product” is a useful descriptor for the vector-like propagation of EM which exhibits direction, amplitude, and time dependencies. Conversely, “non-scalar” is a useful descriptor for the ubiquity of whatever the subtle energy field may be.

It is fine to say that, as used by people like Jean Dixon who routinely encounter this subtle energy field, “scalar” is not a proper application of scientific terminology. However, it is incumbent on the author to then offer an alternative. From what I know of Jean Dixon’s work, she likely searched for terms that characterized what she observed. She did not claim to be an engineer or scientist but did speak correctly in what was then commonly accepted terms of her craft.

From the perspective of the philosophy stated in SSE literature, “Anomalies, which researchers tend to sweep under the rug, should be actively pursued as clues to potential breakthroughs and new directions in science,” mainstream scientists have pretty much abdicated their responsibility to provide guidance concerning what is being observed—impossible or not. I expect the SSE to bring information to the members that helps to fill the gap. If it is our imagination, then the author should explain why and how that “why” explains objective characteristics of observed phenomena? If it is objective but mundane, then the author should explain how that is so. Saying it “... violate the laws of physics and therefore cannot exist” and that our feeble attempts to fill the gap left by “proper” scientists is “woo woo,” only serves to deepen the chasm.

—Tom Butler, atransc.org, Reno, NV

But in the case of crop circles, I didn’t have any serious beliefs to defend. I really had never thought about them, and so the introduction of data essentially fell on new intellectual soil. What if I had really thought about them and had the belief that they were not real? In that case I would have more likely had need to defend a position. Would conversion be more difficult?



Credit: Jabberocky

Think about it. What would get you to change your mind about something you have some intellectual investment in? If you are an accepter of the validity of Out of Body Experience, what would get you to reject? If you are a rejecter, to accept? The same question applies to many areas of conventional research. The quantitative data that I gathered on acceptance of anomalous phenomena provided precious few clues as to the reason for our opinions. Perhaps more insight can be gained through some unconventional applications of conventional theories of radical religious conversion. Those theories suggest necessary pre-dispositional factors which the individual must possess before encountering the radical belief, such as coming to a turning point in life, being open to new ideas, and the like. Upon encountering the radical belief, the person must situationally become close to one or more persons who hold the new belief, so that conversion involves acceptance of the position of a trusted friend.

Maybe in the case of traditional scientific inquiry most of us simply have faith that someone has gathered the necessary data, and they have sufficiently thought things through to sufficient comprehension. In the case of scientific anomalies, there is already an inherent boggle by virtue of having the status of being an anomaly, and so the leap of faith necessary for acceptance is at least an order of magnitude greater. In both conventional and unconventional areas of research, the study of both boundaries of belief and conversion merit greater attention. We need to know more about the boggle factor.

**WILLIAM F. BENGSTON** is a professor of sociology at St. Josephs College in New York, and the president of the Society for Scientific Exploration. He has written a memoir with Sylvia Fraser about his healing experiences and research entitled *The Energy Cure: Unraveling the Mystery of Hands-On Healing*. His work was featured in “Breakthrough Clues to Healing with Intention,” which was published in *Edge-Science* 2, January–March 2010.

