Book Reviews

The Philadelphia Experiment: Project Invisibility. By William A. Moore in consultation with Charles Berlitz. Grossett & Dunlap, New York, 1979. $10.00.

Reviewed by Larry Kusche

The Philadelphia Experiment, subtitled "An Account of a Search for a Secret Navy Wartime Project That May Have Succeeded—Too Well," is a more interesting and thorough book than I thought it would be when I saw the first trade-journal ads several months before publication date. Frankly, Berlitz's *Bermuda Triangle* and *Without a Trace* were quite dull; I have yet to talk to anyone who has read either one completely. Primarily rehashes of previously rehashed tales culled from various books, the *National Enquirer*, *Saga*, *Argosy*, and similar storehouses of knowledge, true or otherwise, they were insults to the intelligence of the average fourth-grader. Principally because of Berlitz's unflagging reliance on easily disproved information, paranoid reasoning, and blindness to logic and to any answers that were less than spectacular, I did not expect much from *The Philadelphia Experiment*; but it is a level above Berlitz's previous books, apparently because Moore seems to have done most of the work. *TPE* is, for the most part, reasonably intellectually honest, a quality totally lacking in the previously mentioned books.

Having done years of similar research—tracking down people, documents, and other sources of information many years after the fact—I can appreciate the time and effort Moore has put into this book. I have also done a fair amount of research on the alleged Philadelphia Experiment, and have located some of the same people and sources that Moore has. Yet I have come up with information that is a bit different from his, and conclusions that are radically different. I found the story of the *search* for the information for *TPE* to be far more interesting than the information itself. If the case for the Philadelphia Experiment were tried in court, the judge would demand something more substantial than what Moore found. The case, as it stands, would quickly be dismissed because of the lack of good evidence.

The alleged experiment, for anyone who is not yet aware of this old chestnut, is an alleged attempt by the U.S. Navy in 1943 to cause a destroyer to become invisible. The "experiment" did not seem to be known by anyone until more than 12 years after it was supposed to have occurred, when Morris K. Jessup, author of *The*

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Case for the UFO, received several strange letters from someone who used the names Carlos Miguel Allende and Carl M. Allen. Allende told of witnessing the destroyer vanish and the horrendous effects suffered by the crew. Jessup paid little attention to the letters until he was contacted by the Office of Naval Research. Someone had sent ONR a copy of Jessup's book, with "annotations which seemed to imply that the writer of them possessed intimate knowledge of UFOs, their means of propulsion, origin, background, and history." Because of the use of different colored inks, and for other reasons, it was assumed that three poeple had done the annotations, passing the book back and forth between themselves. Jessup recognized the writing style and was convinced that Allende/Allen was one of the annotators. (Moore is certain there was only one annotator—Allende.)

What bothered Jessup was not so much whether the annotations were true or not, but that ONR found them worth checking into. Not only was ONR interested, but a private firm heavily involved in "space-age military research" contracts, the Varo Corporation of Garland, Texas, became so interested that they produced a number of copies of the book, annotations and all, for distribution among engineers, scientists, and Navy officials. If Allende were merely another kook (and everyone who writes about fringe subjects such as UFOs and the Bermuda Triangle gets piles of kooky letters—you should see some that I have received), the Navy and Varo would not have been so interested, the reasoning goes. In fact, over the years, the interest shown by ONR and Varo has been one of the main factors lending credence to the possible validity of the alleged invisibility experiment. This, at least, seems to be the reasoning in the minds of some of those who think "the experiment" occurred, or would like to think it occurred, and are looking for support for it.

Since the ONR's and Varo's interest has given the matter some sort of pseudocredibility over the years, I pursued the matter to see, first, if there had actually been an annotated copy sent to ONR; then, if they had actually been interested; and then, if Varo had made copies, why? Then, if it all had indeed occurred, was it because anyone thought there actually was anything to the story of the disappearing ship? Although Moore did do a lot of research on the alleged experiment, he did not delve into it to any depth from this angle.

The chief officer in ONR who was interested in the annotations was then-Commander George W. Hoover, the Special Projects Officer. It took some doing, but I did manage to locate him and ask about his thoughts on the alleged invisibility experiment. Hoover does not especially care to talk about the subject anymore. It has become a plague to him over the years because it has taken up so much time, and because he has been misquoted so many times. However, he told me that the story of the alleged Philadelphia Experiment "has gotten completely out of hand. There's absolutely nothing to it," he said. The reason for his interest in the annotations was because, as ONR's Special Projects Officer, it was part of his job at the time, to peruse many publications, as, we could assume, ONR and other scientific organization do continually. Some publications may lead to something worthwhile, others may not. Hoover's final opinion on the annotations, and on the subject of the invisibility project, was that there was nothing of substance to any of it.

I also pursued the matter through the Varo Corporation, to see why they spent what would obviously be a fairly substantial amount to reproduce the Jessup book and its annotations. I located Jack G. Smith, who was the vice-president of research and development when the reprint was done. After telling me how amused he was by the continuing developments in the story, he said that Varo had become

involved because of the personal interest of the then-president, Austin N. Stanton, who had learned of the book from Hoover while visiting ONR to discuss contract work. In the 1950s many engineers and scientists had not yet made up their minds about the reality of UFOs. Many of those at Varo were interested in UFOs basically as a lunchtime hobby, as others might play chess or debate the dangers of communism. Because the annotations were such a jumble that no one could make any sense of them, Stanton hired a high school girl to type them after school. Smith said that the project probably cost the grand total of a few hundred dollars. Copies were mimeographed and sent to various scientists and Navy officials, and the eventual conclusion of all concerned, including the men at ONR, was that the annotations made no sense at all. They had not the least trace of scientific merit. Least of ONR's or Varo's interest was the alleged Philadelphia Experiment. Also, it was at Varo's request that ONR had talked to Jessup. Since Jessup was in Washington at the time, he was more convenient to the people at ONR than he was to the Varo people in Texas.

"The mistake we made," Smith told me, "was that we put our corporate name on the cover. Copies somehow started to circulate among lay people, and because Varo was a recognized research corporation, they thought the annotations had some substance."

When I talked to Stanton, he said basically the same thing as Smith, adding that those who believe that the alleged Philadelphia Experiment did occur are naive and have good imaginations. Neither Stanton nor Smith recalled having been interviewed by either Moore or Berlitz.

The limited space allotted to a book review does not allow me to comment in as much detail as I would like on matters in *The Philadelphia Experiment*. As I previously mentioned, Moore *has* spent a lot of time doing research, and much of his analysis of the factors is very good. But some of his logic could be more rigid. While keeping a seemingly objective stance in some parts of the book, in other places he seems convinced that the alleged experiment definitely did take place. Then, before long, he appears to be weighing the matter again.

One example of poor logic is on page 99, where he notes that the *Eldridge*, the destroyer purportedly involved, when sold to Greece in 1951, had lost some 660 tons of weight. What was removed? Moore suggests electronic equipment (of the type that might cause invisibility). Why did he not suggest guns and other implements of war?

Moore suggests that whatever happened to the destroyer might be tied to the "strange series of events and disappearances that seem to plague... the Bermuda Triangle," where, he says, we find or suspect the presence of electromagnetic clouds, craft stuck in time, and other dimensions of time and space. This suggests either that he has not read my 1975 book, *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery—Solved*, which showed the poor evidence and hypocrisy that led to the creation of that manufactured mystery, or he chose to ignore my information, or he let Berlitz write that part of the book. None of these alternatives are excusable for one who claims to be a skeptical researcher.

TPE includes discussions of "the Einstein Connection"; Carlos Allende, the writer of the letters and annotations that started the whole story—about as unstable a character as anyone could hope to meet; the logs of the ships involved, which Moore concludes were falsified; an interview with a now-deceased "Dr. Rinehart," a pseudonym for a scientist who regularly used another pseudonym that had been inspired by a road sign, who "personally verified the substantial truth of

Allende's statements." A long interview with "Rinehart," says Moore, "tends to reinforce the possibility that there was indeed a project in the works that could easily have developed, and very possibly did, into something of the magnitude of the Philadelphia Experiment." Quite tentative, it seems. The book also discusses the "force fields" of Townsend Brown, and many other circumstantially related topics.

The Philadelphia Experiment has a healthy dose of paranoia, of establishment coverups for the sake of mankind, as do all books of this nature. For example, one man who was ready to bankroll a study of force fields met his "convenient demise" when his private plane reportedly struck a high-tension wire. Berlitz supposedly attempted a "discreet but thorough inquiry" at one undisclosed source, but was "coldly informed" that the story was all imaginary. Would he have believed what he was told had he been warmly informed? (Several years ago, through an official at a Massachusetts bank, I challenged Berlitz to provide reliable proof for the existence of an alleged man-made pyramid that he claimed was underwater in the Bahamas. Berlitz later said that the bank had attempted to pressure him in the matter. The pressure? They asked him to respond, yes or no, to the challenge by a given date, several weeks ahead. Paranoia of the third kind. Not surprisingly, he declined to accept the offer.)

More paranoia: Berlitz reports that he attempted to discuss the subject with officials at the Varo Corporation, who told him they would not discuss it in any manner. When I had called them, however, they were extremely friendly and willing to discuss it openly. They said "the experiment" is absolute nonsense. Perhaps a negative answer is Berlitz's idea of "not discussing something." Perhaps Berlitz never even called them. The men I talked to had not heard from him.

An example of the "evidence" given to support the possibility of the experiment is an "all-important" article that Allende had said would back up his story. It was about a fight in a tavern in which two sailors "just sort of vanished into thin air... and I ain't been drinking either," as the waitress scientifically put it. Well, whoopeedoo. I have a ten-year-old son who, every time I get ready to take him somewhere, disappears, only to rematerialize blocks away on his bicycle, seemingly without knowing how he got there, and with no memory that we were about to leave. Time warp, or...?

TPE obviously took a long time to research. Much of it is interesting and well thought out, but there is not the faintest smidgeon of *substantial* evidence that the incident ever occurred. It is not a difficult matter to provide circumstantial evidence to support *any* contention. There are people who are certain that Tolkien's Middle Earth is real. Surely, they could find some evidence that it is. Besides, science has yet to disprove it.

It is frequently said that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. But there comes a time when the continuing absence of evidence makes the phenomenon appear to be all the more likely to be absent.

The oddest line in *The Philadelphia Experiment* is the last one, which, I suspect, Moore probably already regrets using: "If the Philadelphia Experiment never happened as described, what actually *did* happen in a high-security area of the Philadelphia Navy Yard in October 1943?" Not surprisingly, in an interview, Moore credited the line to Berlitz. It is a very strange statement to make after 162 pages of "evidence" that supposedly shows that the alleged experiment did actually take place. But then, Berlitz's creations have always been gold mines for people who pan for nuggets of nonsense and illogic. This one, thanks to Moore's labor, is

far more intelligent, but there still is nothing more than the flimsiest of circumstantial evidence to back up the claim that a destroyer ever became invisible.

As the last line asked, if the "experiment" never happened as described, what actually did happen? Obviously something else, and the whole invisibility business is part misinterpretation, part hoax, and part show biz. How much of each is anyone's guess. I can hardly wait for the movie. •

Understanding Scientific Reasoning. By R. N. Giere. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1979. 371 pp. $14.95.

Reviewed by I. W. Kelly

The publication of a book aimed at teaching college-level students to be more critical consumers of scientific information will be welcomed by SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers. The individual who works his way through this book will emerge with a formidable arsenal of reasoning skills. Giere introduces the reader to these skills in a logical sequence, graduating from basic skills, such as recognizing valid and invalid deductive logic patterns, to values and their role in decision-making. In addition, each chapter contains an excellent set of exercises (with answers to many of them at the back of the text) that provide feedback to the student regarding his understanding of the chapter.

The book is divided into four sections: Part 1 ("Basic Concepts of Scientific Reasoning") introduces the reader to such concepts as *truth, falsity, contradiction, tautology, belief, knowledge,* and *certainty.* In addition, there are chapters on inductive and deductive arguments and on the justification of such reasoning. These terms and patterns of argument provide a basis for understanding the sections that follow.

Part 2 ("Reasoning About Theories") expounds the distinction between two main types of scientific hypotheses, theoretical and statistical. From examples taken from the physical and biological sciences, the reader learns how theoretical hypotheses may be justified or refuted. The last chapter of this unit introduces the reader to various fallacies of theory-testing with examples from the paranormal: The Delphi fallacy (vague predictions), the Jeane Dixon fallacy (multiple predictions), the Patchwork Quilt fallacy (no predictions), the ad hoc rescue (failed predictions), and circumstances where attempts to justify a theoretical hypothesis by elimination fail. The fallacies cited are taken from claims of clairvoyance, precognition, conspiracy theories, astronauts from outer space, and UFOs. The unit ends with an excellent set of arguments, taken from proponents of astrology, pyramid power, gods from outer space, UFOs, and reincarnation, for the student's critical examination.

Part 3 ("Causes, Correlation, and Statistical Reasoning") examines the distinction between correlation and causation and the justification of statistical and

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causal hypotheses. The reader works through issues of everyday concern, such as saccharin and cancer, tobacco and health, and blood clots and the pill. These issues are tied in with notions of adequate experimental design to rule out alternative hypotheses.

Part 4 ("Values and Decisions"), the final section, deals with judging the relevance of scientific findings to both personal and public decisions. This section provides the reader with various strategies for producing the "best" decision in a variety of situations.

Giere states that the objective of this book is "to help beginning students to learn to evaluate and utilize scientific information" (p. iii). He provides the resources so that this objective can be met, and he presents the material clearly and cogently. The book was produced as a response to students' demands for "relevance." It is this reviewer's contention that Giere has written a book that goes a long way toward this end.

Some Recent Books

A listing here does not preclude a detailed review in a future issue.

Bainbridge, Williams Sims. *Satan's Power: A Deviant Psychotherapy Cult.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, 312 pp., $14.95. Intriguing ethnographic study of a Satanic cult based on the author's first-hand observations of its activities over a six-year period.

de Mille, Richard. *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory,* 2nd ed., rev. Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1978, 205 pp., $4.95, paper. Updated revision of de Mille's much-acclaimed exposure of Castaneda as a clever hoaxer, with a newly written preface commenting on reactions to the revelations.

Gauquelin, Michel. *Dreams and Illusions of Astrology.* Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1979, 158 pp., $14.95. First English translation of a study of the commercial use and abuse of public gullibility by popular astrologers and horoscope makers. Final chapter outlines the Gauquelins' own controversial claims of a planetary-birth link. With a foreword by astronomer George Abell.

Sagan, Carl. *Broca's Brain: Reflections on the Romance of Science.* New York: Random House, 1979, 347 pp., $12.95. Twenty-five essays on diverse topics of science and philosophy in Sagan's lively and thoughtful manner. A 104-page section on "The Paradoxers" provides welcome critiques of a variety of borderline-science claims, and a final chapter speculates on psychological links between the birth experience and reports of near-death experiences. Throughout, Sagan eloquently affirms the joy of science and the value of rational, scientific inquiry in deciphering the universe's mysteries.

—*K.F.*