

Bulletin of Atomic Scientists
Attacks ABS Issue on Velikovsky

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* carried in its April issue a coarse attack upon *The American Behavioral Scientist* and contributors to its September issue, which our readers will recall dealt with the reception system of science in the case of Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky. Howard Margolis, onetime science writer for the *Washington Star*, wrote the article. Readers of the *ABS* studies on Velikovsky will be familiar in advance with the tenor of Margolis' article. It is as if every defect of science previously experienced in the Velikovsky case were resurrected and reem-bodied once more in quintessential form. Much of the article is dedicated to slurs against the character of Dr. Velikovsky and against those who wish to give him a hearing or acknowledge the validity and value of some or much of his work. The article's errors of fact are numerous.

The American Behavioral Scientist is presently seeking a retraction and apology from the *Bulletin*, which in recent months has been seeking to establish itself as a more popular scientific voice on public affairs. The *ABS* letter to the *Bulletin* in this regard is reproduced at left. In a forthcoming issue, the *ABS* will reprint the *Bulletin* article in full, with appropriate comment. We shall also report any reply from the *Bulletin*.

Upon reading the *Bulletin* article, the editor of *ABS* closeted himself with Dr. Velikovsky to examine books, manuscripts, notes, and the relevant works referred to by Margolis or passed over, for one reason or another, by him. The editor emerged from this session of excursions into linguistics, historiography, and the conventions of scientific literary style with enhanced confidence in the scholarship of Dr. Velikovsky. One could not help but feel new admiration for him upon viewing careful and crowded pages of 23-year-old notebooks, with date recorded, and place and serial number entered for each document, all very legible—an exemplary basis for the manuscript preparation that was to follow.

Engaged as we are these days in other matters and particularly those of social science we cannot follow engrossing developments in the natural sciences. But any reader of the *New York Times* must have been impressed on April 29 when that journal reported the surprising discovery that the enormous planet, Jupiter, may have abruptly changed its rotational speed, and furthermore may have accomplished similar abrupt changes in centuries gone by, on occasions in fact when history took note of altered behaviors of the planet. To the innocent observer such changes seem capable of producing material stresses sufficient to cause the tearing away of huge bodies. As recently as September 11, 1963, we find Velikovsky recommending in a memorandum to the Chairman of the Space Board of the National Academy of Sciences that "precise calculations . . . be made as to the effect of the magnetic field permeating the Solar System on the motions of the planet [Jupiter] which is surrounded by a magneto-sphere of an intensity, presumably, 10^{14} times that of the terrestrial magnetosphere. This is basic to the impending re-evaluation of electromagnetic effects in celestial mechanics." This is but the latest version of a 15-year-old plea.

Our issue of last September was in our opinion accurate in concluding that Velikovsky is a fine scholar; that he is a great cosmogonist; and that many scientists engaged in theoretical work on the universe, on the nature of symbols, on the mind of man, and on classical chronology and history would do well to put aside aspersions, dogma, and vendetta to see what they may learn from his books.

THE AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST

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May 12, 1964

Dr. Eugene Rabinovitch, Editor
Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists
935 East 60th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637

Dear Dr. Rabinovitch:

We published several articles in our issue of September 1963 which we believe set forth the facts of an ugly case of repression in the story of science. In doing so we thought that we were advancing a cause that must be as dear to you as it is to us. Censorship in any form of new thinking in science, however venturesome, is something which we assume you will oppose with the same vigor as did our articles. Therefore we were astonished to note the publication of an article in your magazine, under the general date line of Washington, attacking us and our contributors.

The attack was made through distortion and by remarks torn from context. It reveals an ignorance that could be based in part upon the fact that the writer obviously did not understand the languages of the original material nor of any other language involved, except perhaps English. Furthermore, it contained erroneous statements of fact which would tend to denigrate those who edited the magazine as well as those who contributed to it. The matter was not rendered any the more suitable or pleasing by the vulgar, unscholarly language of the diatribe.

We do not believe that you on second consideration will not be willing to undo the damage done. In the most conciliatory of spirits and purely as the publisher of a fellow-magazine dealing with science we ask you to withdraw the support of your journal from the article and to so state in the next forthcoming issue of your magazine.

Our contributors and our advisors have urged us to take action to remedy the wrong done us. We hesitate to do this since we prefer to rely in the first instance on your scholarly good will. We therefore ask that you favor us with a reply to this letter as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Alfred de Grazia

ad:JA

An independent monthly review of social science news, theories and research, for social scientists, educators, officials, librarians, R & D staffs, foundation officers and social science students

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Notes on "Scientific" Reporting - -

How the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists reports on the Velikovsky case.

The following material consists of an article reproduced in its entirety from the April 1964 issue of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* together with comments on that article.

Readers will recall that the story begins in September 1963 when for the first time a professional journal, the *American Behavioral Scientist*, investigated the circumstances surrounding the publication of Immanuel Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision* in 1950. The authors of the ABS studies, which were collectively entitled *The Politics of Science and Dr. Velikovsky*, presented a great deal of material that would appear to a reasonable man of good will to be damaging to the pretenses of scientific institutions, scientific practices, and certain scientists themselves. Various explanations for the behavior of scientists were offered, and substantiated by considerable evidence. A plea was made to receive Velikovsky's theories with a courteous and just appraisal, forgetting the disgraceful past treatment meted out to his work and to his character.

The response of the ABS public was cordially favorable. The "iron curtain" began to draw back. Then, in April, came the reckless and degrading attack printed here. The *Bulletin* was asked to retract the material and apologize for it (see ABS, June, p. 43). At this point, it is not clear whether its editors will agree to our request. Meanwhile, from dozens of sources, it has been made clear that the beneficial effects that the ABS Velikovsky study was having upon the atmosphere of science and on the subjects that Velikovsky treated are diminishing as the word is passed about scientific circles that the ABS has been "answered" and "disposed of" by an article in the *Bulletin*. Some of our readers, too, have been badgered for their convictions on the case as a result of the article. We have no alternative—despite the fact that our readers are not by any means the same persons who read the *Bulletin*—but to print the *Bulletin* article in full and to expose the tricks and errors that make it "wrong in 54 ways."



(The comments below are keyed to the article reproduced in facsimile on the next pages)

¹ Mere humor does not justify the existence of a science writer's profession, if the humor misleads and is useless. "Science writers" should be hired to preserve the virtues of scientific writing, not to destroy them by false animism, vulgar parody, etc. The effort to invalidate Velikovsky's work and to denigrate him as a scholar is undertaken in a magazine for scientists, mainly in physics and related disciplines. Almost no astronomical counter-argument is offered. The area of knowledge in which the attempt of invalidation is made is historical philology, a field in which the readers are unoriented and unable to judge; they have to trust in the editor and author. H. Margolis is apparently foreign to philology, has no idea of the Egyptian or Hebrew languages or alphabets; he is, however, permitted to speak with authority on the subject. He probably cannot read French, though the sources he deals with require it.

² A word scientists hate (often with good reason), but inapplicable.

³ Spelling: read *Immanuel*.

⁴ Contemptuous name-calling: cf. the "rain-man," the "circus-man." Also note the derogatory use of words; why *the man* and not simply "him"?

⁵ "Arrogance" was only one of numerous reasons for their behavior.

⁶ Contemptuous colloquialism. No sign of true reading of the lines. A cosmogonist studies the origins of the universe and its elements, often philosophically. A "savant" is a learned man. The ABS writer makes a judgment and cites great cosmogonists of the past, all of whom have naturally had their theories modified or overturned in the course of the ages.

⁷ Note that the carefully specified theory

of the ABS, which was confined to a subsection of a subsection and hedged with doubts, is tossed out here at the beginning of the article. No mention of the careful reasoning, fully explained by the ABS author, as to the scientific sociological necessity for alluding to the matter.

⁸ Not "unable to refute." "Psychologically unable to address themselves to" would be preferable.

⁹ Simplism again; see (5) above.

¹⁰ It would be better to cite Stecchini here, as the author; De Grazia in (6); Juergens elsewhere; and so on. The authors have responsibility for their individual articles. As anyone knows who has read the articles, there are differences from one to the next. Yet each man wrote in close touch with the others.

¹¹ An important point. Why does he not attack it?

¹² False reporting. No evidence advanced by Margolis. No test of these statements suggested. Actually ABS received many letters about the issue, one indication of interest among its readers. Any editor will know how little unsolicited response almost every kind of article gets. As for the physical scientists' response, one purpose in treating a little of the substance of the Velikovsky theories in a behavioral science magazine was because Dr. Velikovsky has been denied access to natural science organs, a fact carefully documented by ABS. I am reminded of the Nazis who showed me a concentration camp, where men had been reduced to animals, and said "See how these people are not more than animals." You censor Velikovsky and then say, in effect, "No physicist notices him. Therefore he is beneath notice."

¹³ We note signs of logical confusion, which grow stronger as the piece develops and culminate in a final spate of gibberish at the very end.

¹⁴ Absurd: the debate about Velikovsky's books provoked strong emotions in the scientific community ("highly unacademic fury": *Newsweek*). Much of the ABS material proves that science could be and was full of emotional and political passions.

¹⁵ "Reasonable weighing of objective evidence" is what V. Bargmann and L. Motz asked from the scientific community in their letter to *Science* (Dec. 21, 1962); instead abuse followed (*Science*, Feb. 15, 1963). Besides, the ABS was not geared to or aimed at questions of factual theory.

¹⁶ False reporting. Shapley, Gaposchkin, and others are brought to the forum of public opinion and the disclosure of their acts and motives is the main theme of the ABS special issue.

¹⁷ Name calling ("plain hokum") is no "reasonable weighing of objective evidence." (see above 15) It is a libel and slander: "Hokum" is defined as a device deliberately used by a writer to hoodwink an audience into believing something. If Margolis did not mean this, he should apologize.

¹⁸ A major falsehood. Such is not Velikovsky's view. According to *Worlds in Collision*, p. 371, the probable eruption of Venus from Jupiter took place in the 3rd millennium before the present era.

¹⁹ False reporting. The analysis is buttressed and explained on many pages, and once more and at great detail in *Earth in Upheaval*, published in 1955, perhaps unknown to Margolis. For example, going back to the previous para-

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