

From the Editor

Martin Gardner and the Skeptical Movement Today

Martin Gardner's passing and the latest successful skeptic's conference are both causes for reflection on where the skeptical movement Gardner helped found stands now.

I begin these comments as I depart The Amazing Meeting 8 (TAM8), the James Randi Educational Foundation's big skeptics conference in Las Vegas. Martin Gardner's legacy was much in evidence, and indeed Gardner received a moving tribute from Randi at the beginning of a late-afternoon panel on the origin of the skeptics movement. Randi, Ray Hyman, and Paul Kurtz—three giants who, with Gardner, were present at the beginning—and I talked about the events that led to the creation of CSICOP (now our Committee for Skeptical Inquiry) in 1976. Ray's, Randi's, and Paul's reminiscences also lead off this special Martin Gardner Tribute Issue of the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*, pp. 28–42. Many other colleagues and I also contribute, and we've added a small taste of Martin's writings.

Back when Martin Gardner was writing his groundbreaking *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, he was a lone voice exposing pseudoscientists and their foibles. But in the 1970s he was joined by Randi, Hyman, and a few others. Soon Paul Kurtz, with his organizational genius, had them (and fifty other scholars and investigators) assembled as our Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP, now CSI). Paranormal claims were rampant, and voices representing scientific thinking were much needed.

From that single centralized group, the modern skeptics movement was born. The movement, has proliferated and is now much more diverse. Groups, publications, Web sites, podcasts, blogs, and innovative programs have spread across the planet. Some of the participants are well aware of how it all started; others came independently and are just doing their own thing. The Amazing Meeting seemed to be the chance for everyone to come together. Thirteen hundred people showed up and packed a huge ballroom devoted to all the sessions. CSI, for the first time, was a co-sponsor of the event, along with the Skeptics Society.

Women are now much more a part of the scene, which is a very welcome improvement. At a panel on women and skepticism, six prominent women skeptics (Ginger Campbell, Pamela Gay, Harriet Hall, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Carol Tavris, and Rebecca Watson) pondered this topic and welcomed the significant proportion of females in the audience. All audiences were younger than usual, too—another welcome sign. Just as new generations of students need to be educated, new generations of skeptics are learning the ropes, with many already hard at work, much of which is excellent. Skeptical inquiry is not only important, it is fun, and that aspect draws in even more people. All this is refreshing. We need all these talented, diverse people. That's because the venues for uncritical promulgation of unsupported claims have likewise proliferated as endless cable TV channels and constantly multiplying new electronic media.

Some criticism at the conference was directed at fellow skeptics. Such self-criticism is another healthy sign. Astronomer Phil Plait gave heartfelt warnings for skeptics to be careful of their tone if they want to be effective. Philosopher/biologist Massimo Pigliucci spoke out against skeptics who allow their ideology to trump objective science and argued that one of skepticism's roles is to support good science, not undermine it.

Martin Gardner didn't go to conferences, but I think he would have liked this one. He would have enjoyed seeing a movement he inspired be so alive, vital, robust, and mature—while appealing to and drawing in motivated new generations.

—KENDRICK FRAZIER



Hyman, Kurtz, Randi, and Frazier at TAM8.

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