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If one believes comments by Scientology's founder, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the creation of Scientology's forerunner, Dianetics, related directly to his efforts to improve the success of people who explored nature. The "original goal" of Dianetics, he stated in The Explorers Journal, "was to provide expedition commanders and doctors with a therapy tool which would increase the efficiency of personnel and reduce incidence of personnel failure" (Hubbard 1950: 52). Hubbard himself had undertaken several questionable marine explorations, but by 1950 he was claiming that the realm of the human mind was the last great frontier "capable of producing some adventures scarcely rivaled by [African explorer David] Livingstone[leton]" (Hubbard 1950: 1).

The mind, it seems, replaced nature as an exciting realm for Hubbard's exploration. Nevertheless, in Dianetics and Scientology, Hubbard did develop a set of concepts (called "dynamics") that supposedly identified urges or drives of life. In Dianetics, Hubbard identified the fifth of seven dynamics as being concerned with an individual's affinity for life. By 1956 he refined the dynamics to include eight dimensions, with the fifth one involving "the urge toward existence of the animal kingdom," which includes all flora and fauna (Hubbard 1979: 37). The sixth dimension involved "the urge toward existence of the physical universe," what Hubbard called "matter, energy, space, and time" (Hubbard 1979: 38). Consequently, in the context of these two dynamics, Scientologists are able to place themselves within an environmental framework.

Throughout his corpus, Hubbard frequently discussed what he called the "environment," but he used the term in the broadest possible sense to refer to "all conditions surrounding the organism from the first moment of present-life existence to death, including physical, emotional, spiritual, social, educational, [and] nutritional" (Hubbard 1951: II, 293). Hubbard rarely discussed the natural world in his major ideological works, unless one includes his lectures and writings about possible radiation poisoning from the environment caused by nuclear bombs. This material reflected widespread fear during the 1950s of nuclear war and contamination, and Hubbard claimed that he had developed a program that would reduce the effects of radiation on the body.

In 1959 and 1960, Hubbard carried out a series of "experiments" (although they were never scientifically published), which "proved" that plants felt pain and feared death. He also experimented with the effects of heated soil on plant growth. For years afterward, media accounts about Scientology carried a picture of a pensive Hubbard looking intently at a vine-ripening tomato that he had hooked up with clamps and wires to the galvanometer (called an E-meter) reputedly used by his organization to identify negative incidents in members' current or past lives. These experiments, however, did not become part of Hubbard's lasting contributions to Scientology.
ideology. A stated purpose of the organization ostensibly is to remove the impact of negative experiences (called engrams) from people, and in many instances their removal (so the group claims) has medical benefit. Concerns, therefore, about nature are secondary (at best), since they are far outweighed by counseling and health issues.

Stephen A. Kent

Further Reading


See also: New Religious Movements; Science Fiction.