

A semi-religious certainty about UFOs based on insufficient evidence has occurred in many cases with which I have become acquainted.

The Scientist and the Contactee

by John Taylor

Something stuck in my mind from a conversation I had in the mid-1970's with Edward Condon, the American physicist who ran the American scientific establishment investigation into UFO cases in the 60's. Condon's team had already produced its report essentially turning thumbs down on all the UFO cases they had investigated. I asked him if this had been what he had expected. "Always knew there was nothing in it, even before we started," was his bluff reply. I was shocked at this, since I thought the investigators were meant to begin with open minds about the UFO cases they hoped to study. It was certainly not the objective attitude I had expected from a scientific colleague.

At about the same time I also heard of a UFO case studied in some depth by another scientific colleague of mine. The evidence was the photograph of a 'flying saucer' apparently hovering a little distance from the back yard of the man who took the photograph. After much careful analysis (using sophisticated techniques) it became clear that the photograph was of a saucer actually flying. The man who had taken the picture was challenged with the evidence for this deception and asked why it was practiced. He refused to admit anything for quite a period of time, but finally broke down and admitted that he had deceived everybody. He had arranged the photograph by having his son throw up the saucer so that he could snap it. He had done it because his wife had recently left him, and he had hoped that the fame his UFO sighting would gain him would also

regain his wife (which, however, it did not).

These two experiences had already prepared me for extremes of UFO belief and disbelief. Since 1973, in particular, I have met many who have believed most sincerely in UFO's and also numerous scientific colleagues who are still open-minded about the nature of UFO sightings. I have also seen those who are completely closed-minded against the UFO experience as well as those who try to manipulate the gullibility of others for their own nefarious ends. From this range of experience I can discern two extremes in people's reactions to UFO's. The rational or scientifically minded person will attempt to explain the phenomenon in terms of natural phenomena—planets, stars, ball-lightning, balloons, etc. They will be concerned at the lack of more tangible evidence than a fleeting glimpse or a poor photograph; certainly they won't go overboard and 'believe in UFO's.' On the other side of the coin is the more artistic and emotional person who will undergo a quasi-religious experience akin to religious conversion when he or she realizes they have seen a UFO. From then on they will 'believe in UFO's' in spite of possible natural explanations of their observations.

An example of the latter was an airline pilot who had observed glowing objects in the sky near sunset one evening as his plane was preparing to land in Portugal; these were also seen by all of the passengers in the aircraft, as well as by people in other planes flying near.

Several hours later, on a night return flight to London, several objects were observed by radar in about the same position as the earlier ones. The pilot told me of his complete conviction that these two sets of objects were one and the same UFO's, and that in the succeeding nine months his whole outlook on life had been changed. I gently raised the possibility of these objects being explicable in terms of noctilucent clouds, radar angels, etc. but he immediately retorted 'in no way.' Further probing indicated that he had not troubled to look up literature on these and similar phenomena. It was as if he was already in a vulnerable state and his UFO's only triggered off the jump into 'UFOlogy.'

A further case in point was a policeman who observed some lights flying low over his house one evening. He was absolutely certain that he had seen a UFO; his wife had seen it also. But his new faith was not based on the evidence one would have expected to be required by the police. The reason he gave for the lights having to belong to a UFO was that he could discern portholes and objects moving around inside them, and that the UFO was flying exceedingly fast and no more than 400 feet up. When I questioned him as to its height (a crucial quantity for the other features of his observations to make sense) he said he was absolutely sure of it: "they always come over at that height." The absurdity of the use of 'always' was completely lost on the policeman; he could not be shaken in

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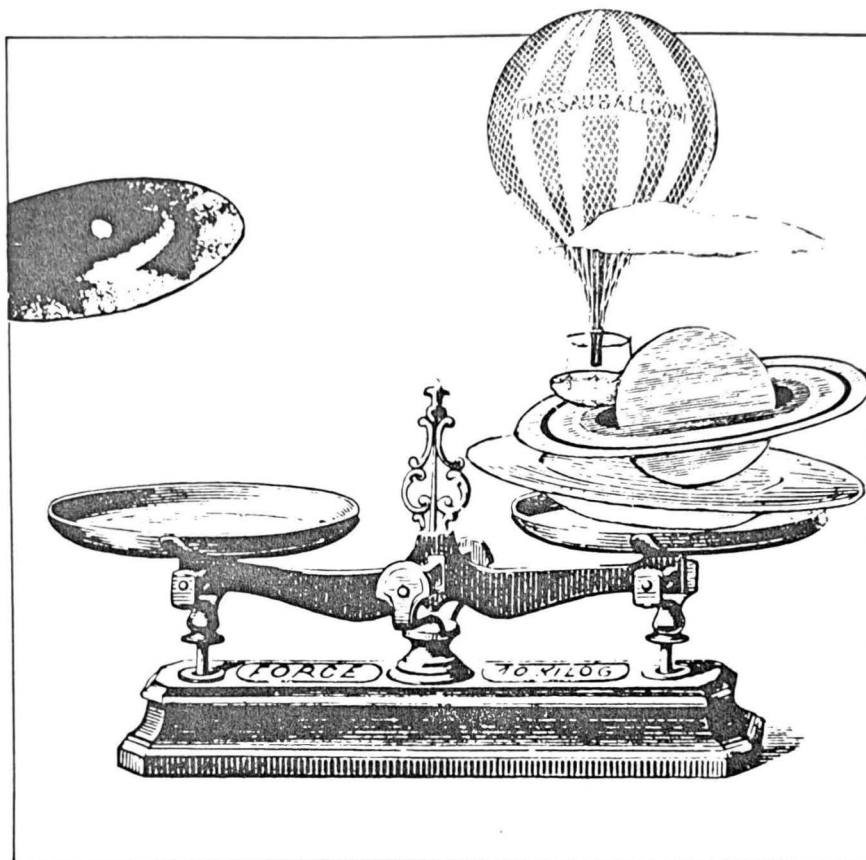
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his unswerving belief that he was one of the chosen few to see a real inhabited UFO.

This semi-religious certainty about UFO's based on insufficient evidence has occurred in many other cases with which I have become acquainted. But there are even more extreme cases when people appear to have become almost mentally unbalanced by some sort of strange experience which they claim to have been a close contact of the third kind or something similar. It is necessary to disguise the identity of people involved but one case stands out in my mind. It involved a middle-aged woman who claimed that her car had been halted by a blinding light. She had driven off the road in the process, and as she sat helpless in her car on the grass verge she claimed that two extraterrestrials approached her car and motioned her to get out. She felt so frightened, she said, that she put the car windows up, locked the car doors and sat tight. After a few futile attempts, the extraterrestrials departed, the light then went away, and the car finally restarted.

This seems a remarkable UFO case, but further inquiries indicated to me that it was doubtful. Other people had driven past the immobilized car; why had those cars also not been arrested by the presence of the supposed UFO? And why had none of the passers-by noticed the two extraterrestrials? In any case the description of these latter was unimaginative in the extreme; their only label of extraterrestriality being their piercing blue eyes. There were also strange discrepancies between this account and that given by someone else who had been in the car at the same time. The case was reported quite extensively in the media. At about the same time, the contactee claimed she had acquired paranormal powers of various forms as a result of the visitation. Almost simultaneously the lady reported various types of persecution she was suffering, some of them being most bizarre. Neighbors were apparently afraid of the contactee's new-found powers, and instigated a campaign against her so that she soon lost her job.



I could only conclude that the lady had already been somewhat disturbed and that she was using UFO's as a way of drawing attention to her plight. She was clearly vulnerable to the 'UFO conversion.'

Another case of paranoia occurred to someone who over the years had investigated many UFO cases and came to believe in them implicitly. His belief was so strong that he charged governments throughout the world with suppressing the evidence and even worse. He even claimed that the Russians were far ahead of the West in terms of UFO technology, and implied that they were already using their UFO contacts for dastardly ends.

I have been twice on the receiving end of such paranoia and in both cases found it frightening. The first case involved the person I have just mentioned. I was with him at a party some years ago, and the talk turned to UFO's

and governmental suppression of information on them. This person suddenly turned on me and started berating me, as a scientist, for supporting such suppression. Almost immediately I was pinned in a corner of the room, surrounded by a vociferous mob, led by the UFO believer, all trying to crucify me mentally and morally for the sins of my scientific colleagues for neglecting and/or suppressing UFO information. I managed finally to escape but was in somewhat of a shocked condition for some time thereafter.

Some years later I had a similar but more public experience at a meeting in which I sat on the platform as a scientist to answer questions on space exploration. The questions soon turned onto UFO's and the same hostility developed, now from a good proportion of the audience. It seemed that these people believed fanatically in life on the majority of the planets, and seemed even prepared to use strong language to

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prove their case. Again I felt relieved to escape their incessant haranguing without anything worse than a severe mental mauling.

I've met numerous others with a similar outwardly rational approach to life who appear, however, ultimately vulnerable to a quasi-religious conversion. In this scientific age many people still have this need to worship the unknown, but yet can only do so to an appropriately technological God. I suspect that many UFO believers are of this cast. I only hope that if a real extraterrestrial craft does come down to earth these UFO-fanatics do not go down on bended knee and worship in real earnest. We would surely have much to learn from such a visitation but would have little hope of being treated as rational by the visitors if their only contact was with shining-eyed fanatics. Nor would it help if the disbelievers turned their backs on the visitors. Let us try to tread a middle way, being open-minded yet not gullible. Only then can we hope to be treated by extraterrestrials as worthy of their concern. □

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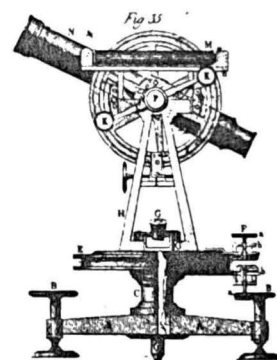
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lights independently of the unusual lights. My investigation in New Zealand, sponsored by Channel O of Melbourne, Australia, and carried out over a two week period in New Zealand and another week in Australia during February, confirmed these newspaper quotes and also turned up much other evidence which makes the planet hypothesis "impossible" (one hates to use that term under any circumstances) and the fishing boat hypothesis very improbable. The only qualified skeptic in this case, because he is the only one who has had complete access to my data, is Robert Sheaffer. He agrees with me that the film does not show the planet Venus (which wasn't up at the time). He also agrees that it is extremely unlikely that the planet Jupiter played any major role in the sightings, although he does allow for the possibility that the fishing boat lights were involved in some way.

It is my opinion, after thoroughly evaluating the "soft" evidence (which consists of tape recordings made at the time of the sighting and the memories of eight witnesses) as well as the film, that there are portions of the sightings which cannot be accounted for in terms of normal phenomena including, fishing boat lights, ground lights, other aircraft, astronomical objects, etc. I have also

concluded that the sightings are not a hoax. With regard to the radar sightings, I have determined from the weather records that the atmospheric conditions were not conducive to anomalous propagation and "angels" and, moreover, in an explicit test for effects of anomalous propagation at the time of the sightings, a radar technician was not able to detect any such effects. Perhaps if Mr. Gooch reviews the New Zealand case again, with better evidence, he will be moved back from his present position to "a few degrees nearer to the acceptance of UFOs as objects independent of the observer."

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represent a concept of perfection as the way to approach a *huaca*.

Some isolated communities and an anthropological investigation may produce results, though I fear that one of our informants in the fieldwork area was typical: the data was recorded. When I asked about the Indian religion, he was quite open. "To my mother it meant a lot, but to me, not." After many years travelling in the Andes, that remark was enough to signify the end of one line of research, and the need to approach the problem from the broader base of the cosmos of South American Indians. Already pointed out to me are the parallels that can be drawn tentatively between the purely conceptual paths of some tribes, and those scored on the Nasca desert. By moving away from the computer and C14 analysis, even from the practical business of

surveying, and by looking to the Indian mind for an answer infers speculation.

To discover how these straight path concepts grew needs hard research. One enlightening paper was written by Prof. R. Tom Zuidema and U. Quispe in 1968. In 'A Visit to God,' Zuidema, whose monumental work on ceques is a classic, suggests how some of the levels reached on the path to the Indian conception of Heaven, are in fact pre-Spanish and thus cannot be related to the introduced religion. In *Pathways to the Gods* I conclude that the straight paths in the desert and the *huacas* staged along them, must be pre-Christian.

On the other side of the sub-continent, the investigations of Johannes Wilbert among the Warao Indians of Venezuela gives some insight of the cosmology of people alive today who are not far removed from the Stone Age. We learn of the divisions of the world and their concept of the universe.

At the cardinal and intercardinal points there are world mountains said by the Warao to be gigantic petrified trees, which are the dwelling places of deities. Other Warao gods include the zenith and nadir. The form of the gods and paths to them are clearly defined by both investigators and it is clear that the Indian mind is closely tied to the natural world. Impressions of the spirits are often reinforced by visions induced by the ritual or medicinal use of native drugs, particularly hallucinogens, and the concepts are recorded in the art and mythology. Therein, I suggest, lies the answer to the Indian quest for a path to his god. □

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The real story begins in 1954 with an Eliot, Me., woman named Frances Swann who believed beings from the

Neasham and Larsen later passed on their own imaginative version of the episode to Maj. Robert Friend, acting director of the Air Force's Project Blue Book. Without conducting a followup investigation Friend prepared a memo about the story and gave it to his superiors, who apparently merely filed it. Years later J. Allen Hynek, then the Air Force's chief scientific consultant on UFOs, found Friend's memo in Blue Book files and copied it surreptitiously. And years after that historian David M. Jacobs found it in Hynek's file and used it as the basis for the account in his book.

Where Bermuda Triangle writers claimed ships and planes had vanished in good weather, Kusche found that weather records revealed quite the opposite. Where the writers claimed no trace of the ships or planes was ever found, Kusche learned that in many cases the remains were located, sometimes within days of the "disappearances." Some of the vessels were simply lost after losing radio contact and they, together