Forward to David Jacobs' "The UFO Controversy in America" (1975)

Dr. J. Allen Hynek

Scientific controversy has a rich history. And in modern times no controversy in science has had the global extent, the awareness by the public, the display of scientific argument and prejudice, the involvement of the media, and the scientific dilution of, and gross distraction from, the main issues by religious fanatics, visionaries, and charlatans, as has the phenomenon of the Unidentified Flying Object (UFO).

The UFO controversy has a relatively long history, but until now this has been only partially and not coherently documented from about the turn of this century to the present. There is only sporadic documentation in earlier centuries. Indeed, in earlier times there could hardly be said to have been a controversy, although the phenomenon apparently was present.

The need of a sober non-partisan compilation and documentation of the controversy itself arises precisely because the UFO phenomenon has elicited as strong an emotional and partisan response as any scientific controversy in history. Certainly it has involved far more people, and on a global basis, than the classic scientific controversies on, say, meteorites, continental drift, mechanical nature of heat, relativity, and even biological evolution and natural selection. The latter, however, is perhaps the only controversy in which basic emotional responses, buttressed by deep-seated religious and personal prejudice, played so major a role.

Indeed, there is an interesting anti-parallelism between controversy surrounding the theory of biological evolution and that surrounding the UFO phenomenon. In the gradual rise of the concept of biological evolution there was first the slow acceptance at the top echelons of biological science before these concepts filtered down to the popular levels. It was at these lower levels, however, where the greatest emotional and surcharged prejudicial responses were generated. Human dignity, it seemed to the man on the street, was at stake, as was religious orthodoxy, and the new concepts were stubbornly resisted and openly combated by the "grass roots" very much more than by the scientific establishment. One has to recall the famous Tennessee "monkey trial" in which the Darwinian concepts were ably but unavailingly defended by Clarence Darrow and vehemently opposed by William Jennings Bryan to gauge the extent of rampant emotionalism surrounding the whole subject.

With the UFO phenomenon there is a parallel, but one with the opposite sign. Here the phenomenon arose and was reported at the grass roots levels (as in the case of meteorites, as a matter of fact) and it was, in contrast, the highest scientific echelons that generated the emotional storm against allowing unprejudiced examination of the claimed observations of thousands upon thousands of persons judged sane by conventional standards.

One may expect unbridled emotional responses in scientific matter from the untutored public; one is aghast to find it among one's scientific colleagues. One should expect that they, above all, would be conversant with the history of science, which has furnished so many, many examples of violent opposition to new ideas and concepts, opposition which was forced to give way to acceptance in the face of overwhelming evidence. Above all, the ideals of science call for calm and unprejudiced examination of the evidence, duly and properly presented.

And therein lies the rub! The UFO evidence has not been properly presented at the Court of Science. The parallel of meteorites comes at once to mind. For centuries there had been stories of stones having fallen from the sky. Peasants reported finding such stones as later they plowed their fields. Why should the French Academy of Science take seriously the untutored peasants' incredible stories of stones having fallen from the skies? Clearly impossible! And by the same token, why should science take seriously incredible stories about strange craft in the

sky? Stones don't fall from the sky, and strange craft, exhibiting behaviors totally unknown and not encompassed in modern science, can't exist.

One glaring difference: many of the observers of the UFO phenomenon have by no means been "untutored peasants." Professors, scientists, air-traffic controllers, engineers, pilots, persons holding elective office as well as truck drivers, farmers, and school children have reported much the same things. And as in the case of meteorites, the reports have come from all around the world.

But the data on the UFO phenomenon have had to run an insidious gauntlet that the meteorites were spared. Discoveries of meteorite falls did not become the fabric of cultists, pseudo-religious aberrants; meteorites were not regarded as sent by other-world intelligence bent on helping and reforming the benighted people of earth. Nobody concocted a story about riding a meteorite to Venus and there meeting glorious "perfected humans" who imparted "platitudes in stained glass attitudes."

But let it be clearly understood: such UFO associated stories have been relatively few and certainly were not generated by pilots, policemen, air-traffic controllers, and persons holding public office and other highly responsible positions. These were quite clearly generated by persons for whom the concept of "flying saucers" satisfied some psychological fantasies and peculiar inner needs. Unfortunately, though few in number, such persons were generally uninhibitedly vocal and insensitive to ridicule; they were given ample press and often generated a cultist following. Meteorites were not so encumbered. Nor was final acceptance of meteorites and of other concepts obstructed by stories generated by misidentifications and misperceptions. The untutored in what can be seen in the sky, and those unaware of the vagaries of perceptions, are legion. Stimulated by accounts of truly strange sights in the sky or near the ground, and anxious to partake in the excitement, this legion innocently but devastatingly heaped large piles of UFO stories onto the market. Although these were soon revealed for what they were—"unidentified" only to themselves and certainly not to others who could easily identify the source of the misidentification—this all served to muddle the primary issues.

It was in this atmosphere of confusion and misinformation that the Condon Committee, the Air Force sponsored group at the University of Colorado headed by the late Dr. Edward Condon, was conceived. It labored long to produce a scientific mouse, and a deformed mouse at that, one with two dissimilar heads: one, the summary of the investigation by Dr. Condon, which summarily dismisses the entire subject as unworthy of scientific attention, and the other, a series of attempts, often agonizing—and unsuccessful in four times out of five—to devise a natural explanation for the UFO report selected for study. Clearly, the right hand head did not know what the left hand head was doing.

It was nonetheless quickly accepted, and with an audible sigh of relief in scientific circles, that Dr. Condon had succeeded in giving the subject a half-million dollar burial, with unctuous gestures befitting an interment ceremony. But it turns out that the corpse had not even attended the funeral. As amply detailed in the last chapter of this book, the UFO phenomenon presented itself to full view in the Fall of 1973, especially in the United States and in France, despite the overwhelming opinion that the subject had been put to rest by science itself. Once again, it was merely history repeating. How many times before had overcaution and established science seemingly buried a disturbing concept!

It is interesting to contemplate, had the Condon Committee had the benefit of Dr. Jacobs' comprehensive study of the UFO controversy, how different the final report might have been.

But we have Dr. Jacob's work now at hand. It is not my aim here to summarize it—the reader should have the pleasure of having the entire story unfold as he reads—but it is, I believe, both my privilege and duty to say a word about the UFO phenomenon itself, the subject of the controversy. Since it is impossible to treat the controversy without introducing to some extent the subject itself, as Dr. Jacobs has of necessity done, I will limit

myself to an overview, based primarily on my long acquaintance with the subject. My involvement with UFOs began in 1948 when I became astronomical consultant on "flying saucers" to the Air Force. In the ensuing years I observed at firsthand both the phenomenon of continued UFO reports and the manner in which it was being treated (mistreated would be the better word) by science, the public, and by the Air Force.

Just exactly, then, what was and is the UFO phenomenon about which so many words have been spent?

First off, a quarter of a century has clearly shown, to all who are willing to look, that after the dross is removed—i.e., accounts from the untutored, the pranksters, and the relatively few but vocal lunatic fringe—there remains a profoundly impressive body of data which can truly be said to constitute a new empirical set of observations. The only possible way to gainsay this is to accuse a veritable host of persons—from all walks of life, from all parts of the world, and adjudged sane and responsible from their personal records—of being crazy or lying. These are persons whose testimony in a court of law would be unquestioned.

Now it is quite true that these remaining accounts are unbelievable by ordinary standards. That is precisely why they constitute new empirical evidence, in the same way that meteorites once did—or radioactivity, atomic fission, anomalous motion of the perihelion of Mercury, which the new Theory of Relativity finally explained. They do represent something new. And that is precisely why they are important. They may signal a whole domain of nature (for intelligence is part of nature) as yet unexplained.

Specifically, what is new? The reported ability to execute trajectories, often but not always silently, that no known man-made craft could generate or follow; the ability to hover, and then to accelerate to high speeds in periods of the order of seconds (and generally without a sonic boom); on occasion to change shape, and to produce durable physical effects on both animate and inanimate matter; to be, on occasion, unmistakably detected on radar, yet to be peculiarly localized and preferential in their manifestation (that is, their appearance at times and places when and where they would be least likely to be detected, and their avoidance of level flight which would of necessity open them to observation by people along the way). The pattern in the "close encounter" cases is almost universal: a rapid descent to a landing or near landing, a stay of the order of only minutes, and the ascent, at usually a high angle, and disappearance either through distance or by some other means (it is often reported that at a height of a few hundred feet the bright luminosity vanishes). The choice of locale is statistically significant. The close encounter cases simply do not occur on the White House lawn or between halves at the Rose Bowl game, but in desolate spots, generally some distance from habitation and where detection would be least expected. In a small percent of the close encounter cases, robot-like or human-like "creatures" are reported.

A growing number of my colleagues and I have been driven, albeit reluctantly, into the bold step of accepting the more-than-amply reported UFO phenomenon as something that really *is* new, something not yet encompassed by our present science. There will indeed be a twenty-first century science, and a thirtieth century science, to which the UFO phenomenon may be as natural as television, atomic energy, and DNA are to twentieth century science, as these were quite foreign to eighteenth and nineteenth century science.

In any event, the UFO phenomenon presents us with a fantastic challenge. Off-the-shelf explanations just won't do. We've tried these for more than a quarter century, and they just don't wash. Acceptance of the UFO as a new empirical phenomenon worthy of very serious study is growing not only among scientists, engineers, and technically aware persons, but by educators and the socially aware and the politically astute. There is a growing recognition that here is indeed something new.

And anything new almost surely creates controversy. The controversy about UFOs has been, however, no ordinary one. It has brought into play a veritable host of human concerns: science and scientific prejudice, human emotions, bureaucratic authority, the press and other media, charlatans, religious fanatics—the list could

be extended.

Dr. Jacobs' most admirable work has put the UFO controversy into scholarly perspective. It is indispensable reading for any who seek an informed view of the tortuous history of the UFO phenomenon. And now that the controversy has been ably and fairly presented by Dr. Jacobs, where does that leave the actual subject matter—the UFO phenomenon itself? Where can we logically go from here? Can the controversy be resolved? And more precisely, can it be resolved by science, or are we in a realm beyond the legitimate concerns of science?

One can certainly hold—and I for one do—that nothing that intrigues the mind of man is automatically ineligible for scientific approach. As logic is the basis of all scientific endeavor, even the most bizarre subjects can be approached in a logical manner. The methodology may differ from one subject area to another, but not the logical substrate. In determining causal relationships, logic demands that we isolate variables and hold as many possible constant—all but one ideally—while the effects of running one variable through its total feasible range are noted. This has "paid off" in the classical physical sciences. If the variables are too numerous, as they frequently are in the behavioral sciences, statistical methods prove fruitful.

Unfortunately, little has been done in this direction, the Condon Committee notwithstanding. Any school child learns that in science one tests hypotheses. What he generally does not learn is that the hypothesis to be tested must logically follow from, and be suggested by, the data. As Dr. Jacobs indicates, many of the members of the Condon Committee did not apply this stricture. Without once asking what the overall, observed nature of the UFO phenomenon was—which could easily have been learned from a serious survey of a statistically significant number of well documented and truly puzzling cases—they set out to test the hypothesis that UFOs were visitors from outer space! And the relatively few cases they examined were studied individually, as though that one case—and only that one—existed. No attempt was made to find patterns, relations between the thousands of cases from all over the world (which were available in copious literature), and then to consider various testable hypothesis. This would be like asking, in times past, whether the Northern Lights represented interstellar communications, and concluding that since the data did not support this hypothesis, the Northern Lights were hallucinations, hoaxes, or sheer imagination.

This is clearly not the place to criticize the Condon Report. It is proper, however, to enter a plea for the proper scientific study of the UFO phenomenon and to profit from our mistakes.

One must first determine, if the controversy is ever to be resolved, whether a legitimate body of data really exists—that is, whether UFO reports, at least in part, represent truly new empirical observations. I am convinced, from my long acquaintance with the subject, that they most certainly do. But the majority of scientists still tend to reject this, often on emotional grounds, and in all cases because they forget another cardinal rule: A scientific opinion demands of the opiner that he be "acquainted with the literature."

When the nature of the UFO controversy is understood—and this book is dedicated to that end—and when the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon is grasped (no one knows to what discipline the subject belongs simply because not enough yet is known of the subject), a meaningful start can be made on a truly scientific study of the subject, which can then be approached as scientific subjects should be approached—without prejudice or emotional bias.

CENTER FOR UFO STUDIES
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

J. ALLEN HYNEK
CHAIRMAN, DEPT. ASTRONOMY
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY