

H O P E S   A N D   R E A L I T Y : A review of Immortality: The Scientific Evidence by Alson J. Smith (Signet)

It is questionable whether any man comes to a consideration of life beyond the grave with total objectivity -- any thinking man. Here, in this realm, whoever we may be, this cannot be an issue in which we may fairly consider ourselves uninvolved. Dr. Smith, the author of Immortality: The Scientific Evidence a number of years ago himself passed on at the untimely age of 56 on May 16, 1965.

But what is meant by "untimely"? Man at the outside, even with all of the accomplishments of modern medicine, may reasonably expect only a moment of cosmic time on this planet before his own biological clock removes him from the scene. The clock, for as long as we live and from the moment we are conceived ticks on and on whether we are white or black, rich or poor, liberal or conservative, gentile or Jew. If it exists nowhere else, here, in death, we can find "human equality". All are one in nothingness.

Or is it nothingness? Perhaps from a very early point in history, man has been interested in human immortality. Dr. Smith states (page 137) that "...the anthropologists tell us that our cave-dwelling forbears were concerned about immortality before they were concerned about God!"

Dr. Smith's background included experience as a minister. He -- perhaps correctly, I think -- saw the future of organized religion being possibly rendered brighter through an association with parapsychology. Some readers of this volume, however, may consider his inclusion of theological considerations, unwarranted and furthermore unwelcome, though in fairness a time-context consideration might be appropriate; the volume bears a 1954 copyright date, the Signet editions being far more recent (beginning, apparently, in 1967 and having run several printings since). A relationship may exist between theology and immortality, but in a work subtitled "The Scientific Evidence" one might wish for either less "church-talk" or more in the way of scientific evidence that one subject has anything to do with the other.

Don't get the idea, though, that this is a religious book. It is, in fact, just what the title claims that it is, and the volume includes a fairly impressive amount of information which might incline the thinking reader to give added weight to the notion that there is, in fact, a part of the human organism that somehow manages to live on beyond the point of biological death.

But don't count on it. I think that Dr. Smith's case as presented is strong enough for us to say the following: that there is a considerable amount of data which may indicate the reality of both a non-physical part of man and some form of reality which exists outside of the range of our usual conscious perceptual abilities. If such do indeed exist then man may - MAY - have more to look forward to than what we presently have. But "may" is an awfully big word. I would not stake my mode of living on a concept this tentative, though Dr. Smith's own positive conclusions may give one a different impression. Possibly Dr. Smith knew more than he included in this less than 200 page work. I suspect that he may have, and

what this knowledge consisted of (or consists, as the case may be) might be found in reading other works dealing with psychical themes. It likely consists of more cases such as he has given in Immortality: The Scientific Evidence, perhaps better cases. The ultimate meaning of parapsychological research may be in this area; the discovery of that non-physical factor in man and, perhaps, in reality itself. This may come as no surprise to psychical researchers and laymen, but it would be unfortunate if, in our desire for immortality we jump at the chance to believe. Jump far beyond the merits of the evidence. (See Isaac Asimov's comment, Inner Space magazine, November, 1970, page 55.) It might make good sense, if you wish to give Smith's book to a friend, to also give him a copy of a book dealing with another kind of "immortality", such as The Prospect of Immortality by R.C.W. Ettinger (Macfadden-Bartell). It is here that it is seriously proposed that man may have the chance to extend his life, to make himself "immortal" through scientific means available to him right now. I strongly urge that any consideration of the possibilities of extended human life include this concept as well as the "non-material" though perhaps eventually equally scientific possibilities outlined in Dr. Smith's volume.

A N I N T E R V I E W W I T H E U G E N E R S T E I N B E R G

The following extracts are from an interview conducted during a visit with me at my home by Eugene R Steinberg and his wife Geneva on December 27, 1970.

Greenfield - During the latter years when Jim Moseley was the Editor of Saucer News you were connected with him and his organization. How did you first meet Moseley, and could you tell us about your relationship with him and his organization?

Steinberg - I first met Jim in 1961, when Saucer News was one of the better known magazines - it was available at the Samuel Wiser Bookshop in New York City, which still sells some amount of occult and flying saucer literature even to this day - I bought the magazine there, I bought a couple of issues, and then subscribed to it. I then wrote to Jim Moseley a couple of times - this was in late 1961. We got together and became close friends after that. I first became actively connected with Saucer News when I became Advertising Manager, which really was a position that held no importance at that time, because Jim didn't accept too many advertisements. It was merely to give me some type of voice in the magazine, and I gave him a lot of suggestions and later on became Managing Editor. This became an active, full-time salaried position.

Greenfield - Are you in any way still connected with the Saucer News organization?

Steinberg - I am Editor-At-Large of the present Saucer News.

Greenfield - Isn't that more-or-less a technical, an honorary position?

Steinberg - It's like Advertising Manager; it means that my name is kept on the masthead as a carry-over from the old days in some position which I could occupy, because I move around the country in connection with the business I am in -- I don't get to stay in one area for any length of time. So I couldn't be Eastern Editor and then become a resident of, say, Charleston, South Carolina where I live now, so I became Editor-At-Large.

Greenfield - At one time, and I guess it was over a considerable length of time, you did edit a magazine of your own. Could you tell us about that?

Steinberg - Well, the UFO Reporter started as a Mimeographed magazine, and then towards 1964, after I had attended the World Science Fiction Convention in 1963, and after somewhat of a hiatus as far as flying saucer activity was concerned, I decided to change the magazine from a Mimeographed publication to a photo-offset publication. We met a printer who had his own shop and was able to charge a rather reduced rate, so I put out a couple of issues of the magazine in that format.

We got good response; as a matter of fact one of the reasons we got good response was because Jim Moseley at Saucer News had given me use of his mailing list for various considerations, and I used that mailing list to get some subscribers towards the end of 1963, and then, in 1964, we published two issues, and then it reached the point where there was a growing conflict between myself and Jim, and also a point at which the Associate Editor of UFO Reporter, Kenneth Alpert, was getting more and more inactive.

So, instead of having to take the entire burden myself, I decided to merge my mailing list and my publication with Jim's. That's when I became Managing Editor, right after that.

Greenfield - In recent years, since you became active in the radio industry, and since your marriage, you've been more-or-less inactive in the UFO field. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the period of time - the transition from getting out of the UFO field and into "straight society", so to speak?

Steinberg - O.K. - in 1966 I was Managing Editor of Saucer News. As you know, interest reached a peak in the flying saucer subject in 1966, and I was the recipient of a regular weekly salary - an hourly wage from Saucer News.

It wasn't a labor of love at that point, it was a definite way to make a living. As a matter of fact it took me about a year and a half - or more in radio before I was able to earn what I was earning at Saucer News at that time, but I could see into the future - not psychically, you understand - but I could see that there was an end to the pot. I knew that saucers would gradually fall into oblivion again; I just couldn't believe that there would be general acceptance for more than a brief period of time -- because of prior experience; I had seen when I was a lot younger in 1957, a lot of interest, a lot of newsstand publications, one-shots on flying saucers, and then it just faded into oblivion. Then from 1957 to 1963 there was very little activity.

Then towards 1964 activity increased again; then of course reached a peak in '65, '66 and '67 and now where's your interest in flying saucers? It's gone. It's not something that I can depend on for regular income.

Now some people, and I'll mention Jim Moseley, because it's generally known that he does not have to rely on flying saucers to furnish his daily bread; he has another income -- a lot of other people are in the same situation either because they live with their families, or they have a source of income which they can rely on.

I didn't have any source of income. So I had to decide to plan for the future at that point, I did contemplate marrying...then I realized that I'd have to earn a living. So I went into radio.

As a matter of fact I got interested in radio because of flying saucers: because I made various public appearances in connection

with the position of Managing Editor of Saucer News. I went to a radio school in the summer of 1966; and then I officially severed my ties on an active level with Saucer News.

Greenfield - What level, if any, of interest do you still maintain in the UFO problem?

Steinberg - Well, I think it's a more serious interest than it was before. We had contemplated - we still contemplate bringing out a magazine that would deal, in part, with flying saucers, in part, with parapsychology which- the subjects are becoming more and more similar, perhaps, and other subjects, too, which are in vogue these days.

Greenfield - ..... if I understand it correctly, you at first were - interested, shall we say, in the interplanetary theory. Somewhere around the mid-sixties, I suppose, you began to develop an interest in - for lack of a better term, the alternate reality theory. Where does it go from there?

Steinberg - I began to think about possibilities instead of acceptance. You see, what we had been doing, and I think you had been doing it, and a lot of other people had been doing it was to read the books and accept the premise that flying saucers were spaceships, and then deal with the peripheral aspects of it, there wasn't any theoretical thought. And then we got into this matter of alternate realities, and my only opinion at this point is that there is something more to flying saucers than simple, physical objects visiting and landing; the theory of spaceships that is so popular, possibly, still among many people.....I don't claim to have any answers..... Where I once accepted a theory, now I don't accept any theory - although I accept the possibility and the probability that flying saucers do exist.

Greenfield - In some objective sense?

Steinberg - Well, I would like to think it's an objective sense.

I'd like to think that you can objectively prove it, because if you can't, then there really isn't any business for me to do anything about. There isn't anything I could do to convince anybody else that anything is happening, because if it's on a subjective level, if it's only something that I could perceive for myself and can't transfer or translate to somebody else's thinking, then there's really no point in saying anything about it, or doing anything about it.

---- Editor's note: These extracts are taken from an interview of greater length. Our discussion did not close on a deeply negative note; in response to a question dealing with the possible meshing of psychical and UFO research ("What do you think of the notion of the U.F.O. field synthesizing with psychical research; in effect, becoming a division of psychical research?") Mr. Steinberg indicated, after describing possible difficulties in such an approach that this was "the only way" the UFO subject will survive.

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