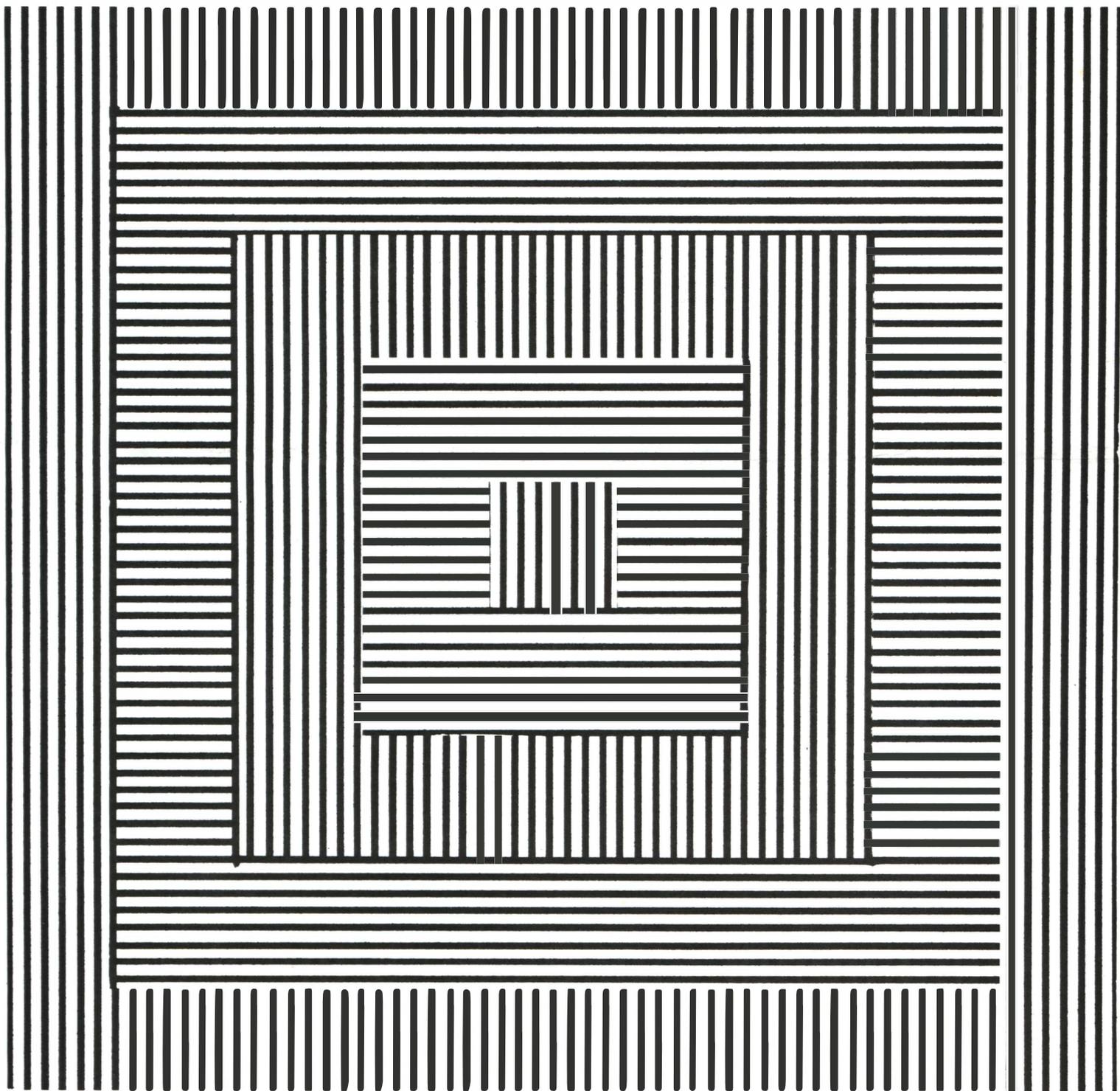




Edited by John Harney and John Rimmer

Spring 1972



PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES; CARL GROVES REPLIES

E D I T O R I A L

Psychological Explanations

Many ufologists hope that some of the more complex UFO reports may be eventually explained by applying psychological theories and concepts to the investigations of them. However, many of the details given in UFO reports seem to place them outside the pale of conventional psychological enquiry.

Elsewhere in this issue, Carl Grove discusses the inadequacy of conventional psychology as a means of explaining UFO phenomena. He also warns those who favour the application of parapsychology by pointing to the essential vagueness of its main concepts.

It is now becoming clear that the real mystery of ufology lies in the fact that every theory which has been suggested can be shown to have serious weaknesses.

L E T T E R T O T H E E D I T O R

From Mr ALAN W. SHARP

Dear John,

If I may I should like to make some comments about the letter from Peter Rogerson (MUFOB 4, 6, pp 75-6) which contains implicit and explicit accusations of factual inaccuracy in my article "The New Ufology" (MUFOB, 4,5).

In order to avoid unnecessary repetition of his charges I shall treat them in numerical order as they appeared in his communication.

1. The reason why I treated Vallee and Keel together was because Passport to Magonia and Operation Trojan Horse were both recent books which seemed to me relevant to the topic under consideration. I included references to Anatomy of a Phenomenon largely because much of it was concerned with the matter of terminology. Prof. Agrest came to mind because he had received attention by both of the authors although I could almost ~~have~~ as well have mentioned Kazantsev, for example.

2. I do not remember saying anything about the moon being mistaken for a Martian spaceship and I think that Peter concedes my point concerning the difficulty of positive identification when he employs the words "usually", "fairly", and "real" in his comments. I hope that he is not so vague when it comes to the matter of classifying library books!

3. I do not possess ESP nor, to the best of my knowledge, does anyone else. Peter has obviously not read Anatomy of a Phenomenon very closely and I direct his attention to the first part of the last paragraph on page 131 and to paragraphs 5 and 6 on page 96—which appeared incorrectly as page 46 in my article, for which error I apologise.

4. This matter receives attention in the aforesaid article in several places and I do not believe that Vallee could not have written more critically. It clearly did not suit his purpose to do so,

5. Peter implies that I made adverse comments about some of Vallee's earlier books, but in fact I merely compared Magonia unfavourably with Anatomy, if I may use these abbreviations.

6. My own impression was that Magonia amounted to very little more than a ramshackle collection of anecdotes of very dubious worth presented in a highly uncritical manner.

7. I am glad that Peter agrees with my assessment of the Warninster nonsense, though what is obvious to him may well be otherwise to Arthur Shuttlewood, John Cleary-Baker, et al. I was, however, not writing a critique of Rogersoniana.

8. See John Hamner's consideration of the Charlton Crater in MUFOB 4,6. Regarding Mr Cade's criticism I can only say that he does not deal with lightning

strikes to ground in his book, The Taming of the Thunderbolts, so I have no reason to suppose that he is an authority on this aspect of atmospheric electricity. I do not have details about the circulation of BUFORA Journal, but if Peter reads my article again he will see that his remarks are not germane to my criticisms of Vallee in this context. Vallee stresses the mysterious side of Charlton, specifically mentions "fairy rings" and fails to advance any sensible hypothesis to account for the phenomena.

9. I agree that Vallee does not, as far as I remember, say that UFOs are supernatural beings. I did not say that he did say that they were, so here again Peter is demolishing notions of his own making--a time-honoured pastime which I did my best to avoid in "The New Ufology". What I actually said was that Vallee equates the abode of the UFO entities, "Magonia", with heaven, hell and fairyland and I felt justified therefore in concluding that the entities are supernatural. Are the yarns in Passport to Magonia "kiddies' fairy tales"? The criticism of "pedantic obtuseness" is answered in my text and I think there was something to be said for the "stern Victorians", although I am not one!

10. Homo sapiens neanderthalensis, homo sapiens rhodesiensis, homo sapiens soloensis, homo sapiens steinheimensis and homo sapiens sapiens are all regarded as sub-specific varieties of homo sapiens. The later remains at Mount Carmel show considerably less neanderthaloid features than do the earlier, but in the present state of knowledge it would seem inadmissible to be too dogmatic about the interrelationships of the various forms of homo sapiens.

11. I see that Peter makes no alternative suggestion for the reality behind the dark, furry objects. I doubt if they were either church steeples or cows!

12. Superficial or not I regard my treatment of Fatina as a sensible one and reasonable enough in the context in which it was presented. I doubt if all or even many psychologists would disagree with my conclusion.

13. I am pleased to see that Peter does not take the Villas Boas business literally. According to him, however, Vallee holds this case to be literally true.

14. I see that Peter puts the word "experienced" in parentheses. His comment seems rather irrelevant. I am quite sure that there have been many remarkable MIB stories but I cannot see that this makes Keel's "experiences" any the less ludicrous.

15. Peter's insistence that a residuum of about 5% of "alleged phenomena of physical mediumship" are not conjuring tricks is more like a pious hope than an estimate based on fact. I doubt if the American conjuror Milbourne Christopher, author of Seers, Psychics and ESP, would agree with him.

16. There is, of course, some question as to what constitutes the "arena of normal debate" but I would think that anything which could be described as "mystical and escaping rational analysis" would come under this category. See Vallee, Anatomy of a Phenomenon, p 96, according to whom:

"Manifestations of the UFO phenomenon occur as a result of physical causes that can be described in terms of natural laws."

I will take this opportunity to point out an error on page 64, line 35 of MUFOB, 4,5, where I inadvertently credited John Keel with authorship of Passport to Magonia.

I make no apologies for propounding a rational assessment of the so-called "new ufology" and if Peter considers my article to be like a 19th century contribution to Practical Mechanics, well and good. People in those days had a refreshing liking for common sense.

Alan W. Sharp, 22a Fairfield Road, Widnes, Lancashire.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES

A Reply to Rogerson

by Carl Grove

In a recent article in this journal, Rogerson (1) reviewed a critique of psychological theories of UFOs in which I had suggested that, as a rule, such types of explanation were inadequate (2,3,4). He concluded that the critique contained "a number of unfounded statements and over-generalisations, and thus has not established its case".

It seems to me that Rogerson has somewhere lost sight of the central point of the critique, which was finding an answer to the question: can conventional psychological facts and theories be used to explain UFO phenomena? I stress conventional, because Rogerson is perfectly willing to make use of "paranormal" concepts within a general explanatory framework and, despite his assertions to the contrary, such ideas do not have "a wide measure of acceptance in psychological circles". Nor--as I hope to show--is their introduction into UFO debates to be encouraged, since they carry with them multiple problems of methodology and metatheory which Rogerson neglects even to mention, although he is quick to point out similar defects in my own logic.

In many single-witness cases of alleged "UFO sightings" it may be logically impossible to rule out the hypothesis of "conventional" hallucination (i.e., hallucination due to drug intake, sensory restriction, psychosis, etc.), no matter how implausible such an interpretation may appear on the surface. In regard to the special hypothesis of "normal" hallucination, therefore, single-witness cases unaccompanied by information about the witness or physical evidence of some sort remain a matter of controversy. Certain statistical considerations indirectly counter this proposition (5), but empirical evidence, for or against, is notable for its absence. Much of the relevant argument can be found in Hall (6,7), Grinspoon and Persky (8), Johnson (9) and the various papers of Schwarz and others.

When it comes to multiple-witness cases, the theory of simple hallucination becomes irrelevant, because shared hallucinations are unrecognised by psychology. This has nothing to do with the question of whether such events have ever occurred, of course, nor does it throw much light upon problems concerning the validity of using such a concept as an explanation.

If we rule out the "hoax" theory at the outset--a convenience which might find some objections, inasmuch as it is the only explanation capable of relating all UFO phenomena--we are left in a situation in which, as Rogerson argues, we shall have to throw down at least some of our generally-accepted ideas about the structure of the universe. The question being, which?

There are two major alternatives: reports of UFOs can be attributed to /1/ extramundane intelligence, which includes the ETH as well as some of the more exotic possibilities; or /2/ some sort of parapsychological interaction: Rogerson supports the second alternative. In deciding between them, it should be kept in mind that the criteria by which we judge theories of UFOs must be identical to those employed in the evaluation of less dramatic notions. The most important of these are the requirements that theories should be based upon the minimum number possible of inferred or unobservable concepts; and that they

should be advanced in sufficient detail as to be capable of generating testable predictions, preferably quantitative in form. Theories which fail to measure up to these yardsticks are not satisfactory.

In fact, neither of the two alternatives defined above are truly satisfactory, on these terms. Both make assumptions hard to verify outside of the UFO evidence; neither make precise predictions. It is a poor choice, in regard to methodology. It is true that whereas extramundane intelligence is supported by no hard evidence, astronomical or otherwise, there is a corpus of recognised, if controversial evidence relating to "paranormal" phenomena. On the other hand, it would probably be true to say that the scientific community views the concept of extraterrestrial life with less dismay than it experiences when the concepts of ESP or psi are touched upon. It is not hard to see why. Paranormal concepts reflect a fundamental break with most of our models of reality; even in the absence of direct observation it is reasonable to posit the existence of extraterrestrial life via a process of simple extrapolation. All we can conclude here is that both possibilities are equally ridiculous.

The main weakness of the ESP approach lies in its total inadequacy as a concept. It is in no sense a unitary concept--rather, it is a rough way of classifying a heterogeneous mess of puzzling events. "Paranormal" merely means--so far as I can see--anything which present-day science cannot explain. Imagine what this same concept would represent to an ancient Greek, to a Medieval monk, an Elizabethan sailor; just about anything. It is not an explanation but a description, and if science, ca. 1972, cannot explain UFO phenomena, there should be no argument against classifying UFOs as paranormal. But isn't that just playing with words? Does it help us to understand anything?

Even the most naive form of the extraterrestrial hypothesis is more constrained, better defined. We may dismiss the logic employed by Smiley (10) in "disproving" that UFOs come from Mars, but at least here is an example of the scientific method: a formal statement of basic assumptions, the production of specific (even quantifiable) predictions, and the testing of these predictions. The "Mars Cycle" observed in some UFO data could clearly provide some support for an extramundane hypothesis, if we were to relax the rather puritan assumptions made by Smiley in regard to the capabilities of possible alien technologies. Rogerson's answer is that people may tend to have more hallucinations when we are closer to Mars. An argument that I don't accept.

This example indeed highlights the weakness of the para-psychological approach. Rogerson makes no attempt to describe the mechanisms involved in the transmission of an hallucinatory UFO experience from one person to another. The vagueness which characterises ESP-type concepts relieves him of the need to do so. Thus the following questions, and many others, remain unanswered:

1. If a single "experience" is shared by several persons, why do UFO events typically obey the laws of perspective? Why don't UFO witnesses report totally identical stimuli, as would TV viewers?

2. Admitting that question 1 raises a valid point, what mechanism is there inside the human information processing system capable of calculating the perceptual effects of change-of-perspective for each of a number of individual witnesses and instantaneously transmitting the appropriate image to each?

3. If question 2 is left unanswered, would this not logically

force the parapsychologist to accept the possibility of intervention by a superior, nonhuman intelligence?

4. It is easy to imagine visual images being "injected" into the witnesses' perceptual systems just as a signal enters a TV set and produces an image on the screen. But human sensory processes in general, and the visual system in particular, are remarkably complex. We have only a very vague idea about how they work. To put it crudely: if we can't explain how normal perception operates, what chance is there for a model of some even more exotic process?

None of this argument should be thought of as disproving or dismissing the parapsychological theory. Rather, the aim is to demonstrate the dangers inherent in a chain of reasoning which runs: paranormal phenomena cannot be explained; therefore any phenomena which cannot be explained are paranormal; therefore UFO phenomena can be explained paranormally. The weakness of this logic is glaringly obvious:

5. Is there any puzzling or inexplicable event or set of events which a "paranormal" theory could not explain?

My personal feeling is that if the extramundane theory is weak (in a methodological sense), the parapsychological theory is weaker still. It may not be very enlightening to claim that "people see UFOs"; but is our curiosity any more satisfied by the assertion, "people parapsychologically transmit UFO experiences to each other"?

Rogerson's closing argument is that contemporary psychology is in a primitive state, therefore novel theories which attack psychological laws are in some way more satisfactory than are theories --such as the ETH--the acceptance of which would imply the violation of known physical laws. The argument contains one or two flaws, depending on one's philosophy: monists would maintain that all psychological laws are ultimately physical, anyway; less committed thinkers might point out that telepathy and clairvoyance, for example, provide no less profound a challenge to recognised physical concepts than does any physical UFO.

In sum, I think that the parapsychological theory as stated by Rogerson is still not powerful enough to explain UFOs, primarily because of its lack of clear definition and the absence of any specified means of disproving it. But the extramundane theory is, so far, insufficiently developed, although it is a somewhat better choice than the more specific extraterrestrial model. The best thing to do would be to adopt a less contentious inductive approach, but UFO researchers, unable or unwilling to resist the lure of speculation, rarely accept this alternative. Proponents of rival theories blandly neglect inconvenient data. Thus Rogerson would be happy to explain away reports of physical traces and radar sightings; Sharp (11) is careful to dismiss reports involving paranormal or religious manifestations; and Menzel, Condon, et al. dismiss the whole lot. In all cases there are some perfectly rational reasons for rejection; the mistake made lies not in rejection but selection. As Fort pointed out on many occasions, if you reject what you can't explain, you should be able to explain everything, it merely depends what you mean by "everything".

Some progress may be made if ufologists seek to maintain a theoretically neutral position, yet recognising that UFO reports--such as the cases of Rita Malloy, "Dr. X", Port Monmouth, and the Welsh wave of 1905--frequently involve phenomena which, at face value, lie beyond

most of our current physical and psychological concepts. A search for patterns which involved the systematic neglect of these phenomena would violate most of the requirements of statistical sampling. If the final answer is a completely novel concept, the deductive approach would necessarily fail.

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LOCAL UFO REPORTS

According to the Liverpool Echo, February 13, 1972:

Police from three counties are among the scores of people who have reported seeing unidentified flying objects in recent days. A senior Gwynedd police officer confirmed last night that patrol cars as far apart as Cheshire and Abergele had reported sightings of a brightly lit object flashing across the sky.

The versions of the UFO vary from a white light with a tail to a dazzling green flare. Residents in Rhyl and Prestatyn have also reported spotting mystery lights at night while similar reports have been received from Wrexham, Mostyn, Broughton and Birkenhead as well as from police patrols on the M6 linking Birmingham and Preston.

Commented the police spokesman: "There seems to be no explanation for these sightings except the possibility of meteorites."

And the following report appeared in the Liverpool Echo on February 21:

A Wirral woman has reported to the police that she and her husband were followed along an unlit road by two luminous objects.

Mrs Michelle Ryan, of 176 Birkenhead Road, Meols, said: "We decided to ignore the incident but on reading of the reports of UFOs in Friday's Echo, I decided to report the matter to Hoylake police at the week-end."

She went on: "It happened at about 8 p.m. last Thursday night (February 17) when my husband and I were driving along Birkenhead Road towards Moreton. It was pitch dark, there were no street lights on due to the power cuts, and no other traffic on the road."

Mrs Ryan said that when her husband said there was a lorry "right on top of our back window" she looked around and saw two dull, off-white discs of light, one in each corner of the rear window.

"It was just as if someone was following us and peering into the car," said

Mrs Ryan.

"When my husband first saw the lights he slowed down a bit, but then accelerated and a gap came between them and the car. Then they suddenly disappeared."

A sighting was made by a schoolboy, Gavin Hudson, at "about 2.35 p.m. on Friday, March 24th, at Overchurch Middle School, Moreton Road, Upton (Wirral) when (he) saw a large, silvery and unpainted cigar-shaped object move up from the south-west, moving north-west. It was travelling quite fast and was moving with no sound. It soon moved behind a wood and he saw no more of it. He then called out in his class what he had seen, but the teacher taking the class said it must have been an aeroplane, but it did not have any appendages at all."

(Report from Martin Jones, 3 Warwick Road, Upton, Wirral, Cheshire.)

NOTES QUOTES & QUERIES

New Magazine

A new UFO magazine, GEMINI, has recently appeared. It replaces the former magazines COS-MOS and SIRIUS and the editors are Mark Stenhoff, Norman T. Oliver and C. David Oakley-Hill.

The magazine consists of 52 pages, neatly offset printed. The main items are a round up of the 1971 flap in the U.K. and a section on contact cases, following the tradition of COS-MOS.

Subscription is £1 for 4 quarterly issues (including postage), which is very reasonable as the magazine is well above the average level of UFO journals.

Erratum

Front page. For "Carl Groves" read "Carl Grove". Sorry about that.

The engagement is announced...

...of our Associate Editor, John A. Rimmer, to Miss Judith Tyrer.

M e r s e y s i d e U F O B u l l e t i n

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