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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

From: jan@cyberzone.net (Jan Aldrich)
Date: Sat, 04 Jan 1997 17:00:32 -0800
Fwd Date: Sun, 05 Jan 1997 04:34:23 -0500
Subject: Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

> Date: Sat, 28 Dec 1996 10:03:21 -0500
> From: "Steven J. Powell" <sjpowell@access.digex.net>
> To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
> Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Philosophy of Science and UFOs
> References: <2.2.32.19961227191627.00c56f34@mail.globalserve.net>

> > From: jan@cyberzone.net (Jan Aldrich)
> > Subject: Philosophy of Science and UFO

> > Thanks to Steven J. Powell for posting the articles on science and the
> > study of UFOs.

> You're very welcome.

> I've been guilty of preaching 'science' lately so I thought I'd stop for
> a moment and let others do the preaching for me by way of their
> published articles.

[.....]

> > An attempt was made to deploy a rapid response investigative team to
> > UFO sites shortly after an observation. However, as can be easily
> > seen by reading Roy Craig's book, the execution of this plan left much
> > to be desired. I have read correspondence critical of the
> > investigation teams' deployment to UFO sites which seemed of little
> > potential value. The Condon Committee's answer was, "how do we know
> > the case won't be interesting if we don't go out and investigate?"
> > (Rather unimaginative for an organization of scientists with limited
> > resources.)

> Do you suspect that Condon, and perhaps others, being conscious of the
> fact that a high percentage of reports are misidentifications,
> intentionally exploited investigation teams to create negative
> ufological press?

No! I don't think Condon was really much involved at this phase. I think this was an honest attempt--but one that lacked the initial prior planning--to get data. George Earley wrote to NICAP that he was very impressed when the team came to Connecticut. They had much of the equipment that would be required to measure any aftereffects that were present, and they were enthusiastic. They just wasted a lot of time and resources going after any ball that came near them. They had not thought enough about a standard to use to determine if the case were significant.

Later Condon would become involved during the writing and editing phase where everything but the kitchen sink was put into the report. An old trick I have used myself to good effect several times. The intended

audience reads your conclusion and is put off by the weight of your report so they do not look at what the report contains.

> > As I see it, the first step in study of UFOs involves a philosophy of
> > science discussion. Most curt dismissals given by the scientific
> > community to date also seem to recognize this point. Ignorance is at
> > work here. Most scientists have not examine the body of evidence
> > beyond the tabloid trash theories or have quickly become bogged down
> > with the sense that nothing unique is taking place because the vast
> > majority of the incidents are IFO.

> That the vast majority of eyewitness observatins are IFO is something
> that we can file in the "Duh!" category. We know eyewitness
> observations are going to be tainted to varying degrees and for varying
> reasons, independent scientific study has demonstrated it and our own
> internal review of our own data demonstrates it, therefore we should
> not automatically dismiss or include eyewitness observational data.

[....]

> I'm not sure where a discussion of the philosophy of science will lead
> but its fascinating stuff and maybe it'll help me to stop whining about
> all that's wrong with ufology <grin>.

It is necessary to define the problem. It is also important because of the nature of the data (see above.), and all the arguments about why ufo cannot be studied. We are not in a position like Churchill was with the Mulberrys when he told his technical, military and logistic staffs,

"I do not want any discussion on why this project cannot be done. I just want you to do what is necessary to accomplish it."

(Not the exact quote, but the effect is there.)

At the scientific reviews the scientists' opinions were always asked about the phenomenon. What should have occurred was a mission statement. "We have this apparent 'will o' the wisp' phenomenon. Find a way to study it."

Jan Aldrich

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