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Re: That Ol' Extra Terrestrial Hypothesis

From: DevereuxP@aol.com [Paul Devereux]
Date: Fri, 28 Nov 1997 09:15:19 -0500 (EST)
Fwd Date: Fri, 28 Nov 1997 15:17:14 -0500
Subject: Re: That Ol' Extra Terrestrial Hypothesis

Geoff Price sent a useful posting responding to an earlier one of mine, for which I thank him:

>Date: Fri, 21 Nov 1997 12:56:32 -0700
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: Geoff Price <Geoff@CalibanMW.com>
>Subject: Re: that ol' Extra Terrestrial Hypothesis

<snip>

>I believe such things as ball lightning or geomagnetic phenomena
>may very well get mixed in with what is generally referred to as
>the raw UFO data. I find such phenomena terribly interesting
>and I'm delighted that folks such as yourself are investigating
>them.

>But when you refer to such things in the context of "the" UFO
>problem, I have trouble being bothered to give them the time of
>day. Why? It relates back to Greg's point above. I had no
>interest in UFOs prior to a sighting of an initially unlit,
>structured, rotating and then anomalously accelerating
>disc-shaped thing about ten years ago. I don't have a serious
>expectation that the source of this effect was a geomagnetic
>light of some kind, or that some kind of radiation provoked the
>identical hallucination in myself and another observer (although
>I will cede the technical possibility.)

>In previous posts, you've ceded that there may be some phantasms
>out there that do appear as structured "craft"-like things, but
>that this is probably such a rare and ineffectual phenomena as
>to be unstudyable or without import. Still, it is precisely
>*this* UFO problem that a lot of us are interested in, precisely
>because of its strangeness and potential significance. And I
>think you can make a pretty decent case that this phenomenon
>is at least real and physical (plenty of the time :).

>That said, I'm all for alternatives to the (literalist) ETH,
>such as the possibility of strange "psi"-type phenomena etc.

Dear Geoff,

I hear what you say. But I suggest that we cannot decide to be interested in just that one bit we think is the "core" UFO issue. If we do, how can we separate it from the psychosocial UFOs, geophysical UFOs and mundane misperceptions? We have to work along a broad front, because the the UFO problem is a broad phenomenon, much of it sociological in nature.

So it is not good research protocol to dismiss, say, geophysical phenomena as somehow less important than something else you think is more important, especially when that geophysical phenomenon may itself comprise much of what is genuinely reported in UFO

sightings, and, moreover, may also have exotic characteristics that we do not yet understand, and which may (I repeat *may*) have a bearing on that something-more-important core you think the UFO problem is about.

Having said that, yes, indeed, I did see a craft, in the early 1950s. You'll recall that it appeared and disappeared anomalously, but when 'present' it could be seen by a friend and I as seemingly very physical in appearance. It was a dirigible-type airship of huge proportions. I could see the ribbing in the sunlight, the gondola and the steering tackle in detail. It was a several hundred feet up in the air, about half a mile away. But not only did it disappear oddly, there was also no such craft flying in Britain at that time.

Now, you will have to forgive me, but I have never thought that the thing I saw could ever be interpreted as an ET craft -- I really do not see ETs traversing the cosmos in a version of early 20th-century human technology! So I saw an apparently (that is an important word for all of us) solid craft that was anomalous but wasn't in any obvious sense an ET craft. Now, some people see disks, spheres, rotating tops, shiny cubes, and full-blown spaceships. It could be that the ETs are occasionally seen in their spaceships, and that some other completely strange phenomenon produced my airship. But I really doubt it. It seems to me that we are dealing with something of a more enigmatic nature than visiting ETs. I actually think the "core" mystery that you are so keen on to be deeper than the ETH - that is just the best the popular mind can come up with in the present cultural and technological climate. The ETH is nothing more than that. I would have thought that if anything, the sort of phenomena you and I have seen, for examples, could be better explained by some notion of spontaneous time travel (past and future memories, if you like) - or temporally-'loose' imagery of some kind.

(Also, as an aside here, geophysical phenomena can look like metallic disks and even lumps in the daylight sky too - so these are another phenomena that might get mixed in with some genuine sightings of this even more exotic kind. There is also a pitch black aeroform, that I suspect is linked with earth lights phenomena.)

The reason I call for a downgrading of the ETH is simply because so much energy is going into it there isn't sufficient effort by enough people going into looking at other possibilities (and I am NOT promoting just earth lights here - they have their place, and a better one than they are accorded by the ufological mainstream, but there are other mysteries to solve too). More than that, it might be 'jamming' other approaches -- ie. doing actual harm.

>I would agree that the ETH is not a hypothesis in the sense of
>your proverbial falsifiable hypothesis for straightforward
>testing in a lab. The ETH is a broad epistemological >proposition.

So broad, in fact, that it has become useless. And a burden.

>Here's a quote from Michael Swords which I broadly agree with:

> "If one insists on applying hypotheses to it, then I think
>that the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis remains a viable one for
>dealing with the phenomena sufficiently (just as angels, demons,
>fairy folk, a capricious God, an extradimensional Gamestaer et
>al, do)...

Absolutely.

>"...And, I think the ETH, because it in no way stretches
>the current scientific paradigm beyond what is already admitted
>ontologically, remains the simplest (& therefore tentatively
>best supported) hypothesis available...

Here Michael screws up his logic. It seems the simplest precisely because "it in no way stretches the current scientific paradigm".
That is the problem.

>It is not a proven hypothesis..."

And that is something that needs to be remembered more than it is.

>It is also, despite insistent claims by certain "experts" and
>debunkers, in no way disproven, nor even, in my opinion,
>damaged.

This is bad logic. The ETH doesn't have to be disproven. It has
to be proven.

<snip>

>I think your ultimate beef is going to be with the phenomenon
>itself. It seems to me to be the thing that's provoking this
>hysterical groping for extraordinary explanations.

The ETH itself is extraordinary. And judging by the defensiveness
that arises immediately one dares question it, it seems that that
is where the prime focus of hysteria lies.

>>I am trying to alert fellow researchers that we ought to be
>>more conscious about our assumptions. The ETM has had 50 years
>>to prove itself, and it has failed to do so.

>You see this sentiment over and over again in critical
>commentary, and I always find it to be an interesting
>perspective. One could equally say that 100% misperception-
>hallucination-hoax has had 50 years to prove itself and has also
>failed.

Well I for one have never argued that all sightings (ie 100%)
are misperception-hallucination-hoax. So that argument has no
meaning as far as this exchange between us goes. But what **can**
be said is that **some** claimed UFO sightings have been shown to
be misperception and hoax, while no case has yet been proven as
ET. There is the rub.

<snip>

>Other alternatives, such as earthlights, have been addressed
>previously on this list by such regulars as Mark Cashman, who
>highlighted some reasons why earthlights haven't been
>prioritized as a possible explanation for the core problem
>pretty well (I thought).

See my comments above.

Phenomena like earth lights that can be as big as a house, that
have been photographed dozens of times, that have caused
radar-visual effects, that can last for over an hour, that have
been seen emerging from the ground, that have yielded
instrumental results, etc., etc., cannot be dismissed as not
having much to do with ufology. Not by anyone remotely claiming
to be a ufological researcher. (Different rules apply for
believers.) It is as simple as that.

>Then you are saying that you have argued persuasively in favor
>of disregarding that class of core UFO cases which strongly
>suggest high-strangeness (highly structured objects, CE2s with
>dramatic multiple witness testimony, CE3s etc.) But a lot of
>people aren't going to agree that you have done so.

Well, no. Because such people are operating out of a
belief-context rather than a research context. This is the
problem, and is why ufology is not scientific. Any attempt at
suggesting a research-based approach, which of necessity means
lowering the profile of the ETH (though **not** negating it), is
met with constant, irrational hostility and personalised spite.
You will have seen it for yourself on this very list in recent
weeks.

Also, it has to be said, that the list of attributes you make
remain non-proven in any case (ie. there may be multiple
witnesses but of what?). There may be other explanations than ET
ones.

But I am not aware I have ever said we should disregard
high-strangeness cases. If I did, it was a slip. All I am saying
is that we should be careful as to how we evaluate the
strangeness.

>>As to your point that if we had experiences like Jerry Cohen
>>and John Velez we might wonder about the ETM. Well, of course.

>>But let me make it clear that I am not in awe of these
>>gentlemen:I am also an experient. I have seen undoubted
>>anomalous aerial phenomena, both luminous and non-luminous; I
>>have seen an anomalous craft, and I have been within 20 feet of
>>an alien(I've mentioned that last item before on the list, but
>>apart form a couple of private queries, no one on this list
>>seems to have been much interested in this observation). Of
>>course I considered the ETM for some of them, but I have found,
>>in fact, that I did not need it. That doesn't mean I know
>>completely what some of the encounters were, but I am satisfied
>>that I know what they *weren't*.

>Well, I'm interested. What was your alien encounter? What
>"non-extraordinary" explanation did you find satisfactory, and
>why?

The phraseology of your question is inappropriate. I am not giving an explanation, I am telling you I had an actual experience - just like a large number of genuine abductees. **The difference is, I knew the context of it right from the word go**. I'll tell you what happened, but you will have to make the effort to shift the centre of your thinking -- I can't do that for you.

I entered a fully-3-Dimensional space, and I could touch objects in my environment, and feel their texture. I knew who I was, I had full memory of my life up to that point, and all my senses were working. In other words, the experience was as 'real' as any I have had in normal waking consciousness. I approached a humanoid entity from behind, to within about 20 feet. It was clad in a one-piece tunic. It was engaged in some activity. I did not want it to turn round and see me, because at that time I was uneasy about a confrontation, and so I quietly moved away.

So where was I? I was in a mental state that had been deliberately induced by manipulation of my REMS. I was neither asleep nor hallucinating, but rather my entire sensorium was *replaced* by another as completely realistic as the one I call my waking consciousness. I had switched channels, so to speak, each as realistic as the other. I knew I was seeing a mental construct (or, arguably, if one wishes to use another ontological vantage point, I was witnessing a hologram-type image transmitted inter-spatially or inter-dimensionally by some other entity).

The literalist, the ETHer, will say at this point: "Oh, you are just talking about a dream, lucid or otherwise". To which I answer no, I am talking about operating in another mental state indistinguishable from what we call normal waking awareness. It is not dreamy or insubstantial. Scenes and entities in it appear totally solid and real. Now, I knew I was in this state because I was (and am) working with others on research in which I deliberately induced it. But had it happened involuntarily (which can be the case - especially in certain conditions such as resting, quietude or while driving at night, the key circumstances of most alien abduction experiences), and if I knew nothing about such mind states and research, then I would think it was an actual entity. I would think I was still experiencing my normal waking sensorium, but with something bizarre and disturbing happening.

The range of literature and ongoing research on this mental state (actually, it is a specific, contiguous set of related mind states) is broad, and can be found in the context of a number of belief systems, alien abductions being merely the latest. The experience itself is real - indeed, as real as one can experience anything - but it is not a literal physical abduction. This state is attracting an increasing amount of research attention (but outside of ufology - because of the stranglehold of literalist ETH thinking within ufology it cannot take place there).

Now, we are working on biophysical techniques, electronic and botanical methods, sometimes combined, to find a powerful and swift induction for almost anyone. There are also experts who are perfecting ways of moving directly from waking consciousness into this other state. (One of the problems with this branch of the work is that entities appear that scratch and bite the experimenters, and touch their bodies with leathery hands - sound familiar?).

In addition, we want to be able to map the brain patterns involved in this state so we can 'fingerprint' it. It is a

difficult task, because the mapping is concerned with the frontal lobes, and eye muscle signals there tend to swamp conventional attempts, but we are hopeful that a more sophisticated technique one of our colleagues is working on can meet the challenge. A portable instrument is involved in recording the raw data, so if we are successful it would mean that, in theory at least, we could map the brains of abductees.

If, over the next few years, we can achieve these goals, then it will be possible to actually demonstrate the realism of the state to anyone who doubts - including abductees themselves. I assure you, once experienced, you are left in no doubt as to the nature of the alien abduction experience. And it ain't literal (but it feels like it). In this way, I am hopeful that we will be able to release abductees from the the real and genuine fears that plague them. We will still be left with an ontological puzzle, of course, but we will at least be able to dispatch the latest pop framework, ie. physical alien abductions, and get onto an uncluttered playing field, as it were.

The mental state or states I am discussing are also - **in part** - the subject of David J. Hufford's "The Terror that Comes in the Night", which you may have noticed Jerome Clark refer to a couple of times recently (and in some pretty peculiar ways too, if I may say so). This is an excellent study of hypnogogic and related mental states that produce experiences involving tactile realism. In checking some of the descriptions there against a set of abduction accounts, anyone can see the stunning similarities (unless one doesn't want to). But Hufford's work, while still valuable, is now quite a bit out of date, and we have some missing links at our disposal now that were not available to him at the time of his study.

So -- the abduction phenomenon is being heavily worked on, but outside the ufological frame. Indeed, one of my projects is to abduct an alien!

>>The ETM is so insidious that I honestly believe it is doing
>>more harm than good at this stage in the game.

>>Think about it.

>I promise.

Good for you. Excellent. First class. And do please try to understand that I am attempting to coax ufological thinking into some deeper areas, so we may yet get a grip on the "core" mystery as you perceive it. My concerns about the ETH/ETM are only that it is so overbearing that it skews most thinking in the field. Although I am only receiving a childishly personalised response for my efforts so far from people like Jerry Clark, there is the hope that in time, when the dust settles, everyone might be able to stand back from stereotypical thinking and actually hear what I am trying to say.

For example, I have NOT been promoting the earth lights issue as such in these latest exchanges at all - it is those who see me as some kind of threat who keep bringing that topic up. Perhaps a new, creative and useful current of thinking could emerge within ufology if we could learn to put our heads together, and see the ETH/ETM as a cognitive **model** that can be altered or even deconstructed if necessary. Or, at the very least, put in the corner and not played with for a while. It is because at the moment it has become a piggy-bank for emotional currency that we cannot raise ourselves to the level of rational debate.

Ufology really does need a revamp, you know.

Anyhow. Thank you, Geoff, for your thoughtful questions and views, and civil manner. This is the way to conduct debate.

Best wishes,
Paul Devereux

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