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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Occam's Razor and UFOs

From: RobIrving@aol.com
Date: Sun, 7 Jun 1998 22:16:26 EDT
Fwd Date: Mon, 08 Jun 1998 08:06:51 -0400
Subject: Re: Occam's Razor and UFOs

>To: "UFO UpDates - Toronto" <updates@globalseve.net>
>From: "Jerome Clark" <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Re: Occam's Razor and UFOs
>Date: Sat, 06 Jun 98 13:33:02 PDT

Jerry,

>>Of course, I'm not trying to tell anyone that there aren't ETs
>>(or UTs and ITs, come to that), just that, as things stand, ol'
>>William's blade is more likely to lead us away from that
>>explanation than towards it.

>Ah, I don't think so, unless one holds that 50+ years of failed
>explanations for puzzling UFO cases demands another 50+.

I don't exactly follow what you're saying...

Are you suggesting that we accept one hypothesis over others by way of attrition? I guess that's how things work sometimes, but some sort of sensible explanation would be useful. I for one am happy to spend the rest of my time not knowing. You're free to jump to conclusions as much as you wish. The issue remains about compelling evidence, and what we accept as compelling.

>Since ufologists have been asking questions, challenging each other's theories and conclusions, and arguing for as long as there has been a ufology, yours seems, uh, not to be the most accurate characterization, even of what goes on on this list, that I've ever heard.

Facetious already?

I referred to the relationship between general public and ufological 'expert', rather than that purely between the latter. However, even between 'experts' you'd be hard-pressed to convince me that any reasonable standard of scientific argument is generally applied.

Don't get me wrong, I'd love to see it. Perhaps you can point me in the right direction?

In saying that, it's not my belief that ufology necessarily has to hold to scientific principles - those that feel there's a need in their line of enquiry, will. Others that pretend to will continue to be taken with a pinch of salt. More often it's the latter that gravitate towards public attention, thus sullyng any serious research, in my opinion. But it's all grist for the mill of myth, and I'm perfectly content either way.

Twisting Occam's razor in favour of the ET Hypothesis is a brilliant ploy, though. To my mind at the present time (open to arguments) it leads to no hard and fast conclusion either way.

I feel I should caveat all that by saying that I do see great value in a fantasy. Every discovery depends on our faculty for creativity, but that's perhaps a separate topic for discussion. I usually save the ol' art argument for parties where there's plenty of wine, and it doesn't matter who, or how much, or how many finer points get wasted.

>And finally, as critics of Occam's razor have always pointed out: >though the notion has its uses, it is in fact a principle of >logic, not a law of nature.

And the reason it's criticized is because it is a useful tool for flawed logic, as I said before. As Greg pointed out, sceptics - or the type of thinkers who are generally known around here as skeptics (another widely misunderstood term) - are just as prone to flawed logic as the most irrational believer, all (or most) being human.

To save you the pain of banging your knee on the desk again, I agree that the most extreme cases of s_k_pticism amount to irrational belief.

Rob

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