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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: ETH and Occam's Razor [was: Area 51 still]

From: Mark Cashman <mcashman@ix.netcom.com>
Date: Mon, 8 Jun 1998 01:49:33 -0400
Fwd Date: Mon, 08 Jun 1998 09:13:14 -0400
Subject: Re: ETH and Occam's Razor [was: Area 51 still]

>Date: Sat, 6 Jun 1998 22:58:08 +0100
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: John Rimmer <johnr@magonia.demon.co.uk>
>Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Re: Area 51 Still Operational

>>Gee, John, how about Soccorro, Levelland, Exeter, Delphos...

>These are all, in ufological terms, "good" cases and there are
>puzzling factors about each of them. I think you will also find
>that each case has been "explained" by one researcher or another
>-- and I'm not talking about your usual-suspect skeptics here,
>but bona fide ufologists -- so that no one case can be quoted as
>the smoking gun.

Which "bona-fide ufologists" explained which of these?

>50 years' worth of
>disputed and inconclusive investigations is no more convincing
>that one disputes and inconclusive investigation.

Yeah, it's just like cosmology, and biology, and paleontology,
with all that disputing and controversy.

>Well, I have my doubts, and I've expressed them on another
>posting, about the accuracy of triangulations based on memories
>and guesstimates, but the real point is distances and sizes of
>*what* exactly? I'm sure you're not implying that because two
>people saw something roughly the same size in roughly the same
>place it's got to be an extraterrestrial spacecraft.

You can have doubts, and there are a couple of things you can
do about them, one of which is to develop better methods rather
than sitting around tut-tutting about how bad the measurements are.
Personally, that's my main focus when it comes to this kind of
measurement.

The second thing is to substantiate how bad they are and what
effect that has on distance estimates. Let's take an example. A
baseline of 0.1 mi and a triangulation showing an object to be
670 feet from the baseline center. Now let's imagine that each
of the two sightlines are about 20 degrees off, each outward from
center - this being the worst case. The additional distance provided
is about 700 feet, for a total distance of about a quarter mile.

Further, the accuracy will be better when the witness can align
the object to a known landmark. This is often possible, and
can preclude even 20 degree errors.

Don't forget, we're not expecting to get results accurate to the
inch, or even the foot. All we need is reasonable accuracy to
eliminate natural causes. And we can derive some range of
sizes and energy outputs from the result. No, it's not perfect,

it's not like having a light meter or something other instrument, but it's something.

And, what I am stating is that when you get a triangulation, like it or not, it is a result implying the presence of an objectively existent phenomenon, in the same way trace evidence does.

Now, your attempt to suggest someone as an ETH proponent due to making field measurements and not automatically discounting witness testimony or the results of such statistical studies as Rodeghier's Vehicle Interference work, is no better than guilt by association, and it really carries no weight. About all I can claim is that the material accumulated over the years, contentious and disputed though it may be, lacking in some of the rigor I might prefer though it may be, definitely indicates the presence of an objectively existent phenomenon worthy of scientific attention - that is, the best investigation and analysis we can mount given current resources. Sadly, this sort of squabble is exactly what distracts many with the potential to contribute from actually doing so.

Also, your insistence on a "smoking gun" for ETH is pointless unless you or someone else may be prepared to identify the predictions which the theory makes that a "smoking gun" will support or refute.

The OEH (objectively existent hypothesis) is fairly straightforward in its predictions. One of the most important is that multiple independent observers (of whatever kind) will observe a phenomenon to which they assign similar or identical characteristics, within the limits of error of the observer, and that those observations will not be able to be correlated with any known natural or technological phenomenon. This prediction, I venture to say, is supported by 50 years of failure to successfully identify the natural or technological phenomenon behind many incidents witnessed by multiple independent persons and instruments.

ETH requires OEH be proven first. But what can ETH require otherwise as a prediction?

First, it will predict that the source of UFOs is non-terrestrial, and, therefore, since UFOs must come here from there, that they will be detected in space. Currently, we have very few candidate cases in this category. This can be explained by our lack of available witnesses and instrumentation capable of making such detections, and the possibility of intentional evasion of any such observational capability. Nevertheless, ETH proponents should necessarily focus their search in this area.

An indicator that such cases will be found may be seen in the number of events which describe the objects descending from great altitudes and returning to such altitudes. In addition, cases showing UFOs capable of escape velocity would also be an indicator.

Secondly, ETH will predict that UFOs are technological in nature, but operate according to engineering principles more advanced than our own, and may apply physical principles with which we are unfamiliar, or with whose engineering consequences we are unfamiliar. This would appear to be supported by the reports of metallic and structured objects displaying unconventional performance and appearance; these tend to refute non-tech hypotheses such as the Earthlights hypothesis.

Thirdly, it will predict that the behavior of UFOs will demonstrate an unconventional interest in earth and in humanity. Certainly the "loitering", "spying" and "drop-in" behaviors, as well as sample or souvenir gathering, and apparent attempts to communicate using lighting or gestures with isolated witnesses seem to support this prediction, while denying other tech hypotheses, such as the secret weapon hypothesis.

So of three major predictions of ETH, two seem to be supported and one needs more focus.

Now it might be contended that predictions 2 and 3 could be evidence of the TTH (Time Travel Hypothesis). This is where Occam's Razor comes in. We have extensive

evidence that space travel is possible. We have no evidence that any manipulation of time, other than slowing its rate, is possible. Thus, when choosing between ETH and TTH, Occam's Razor suggests that ETH should be preferred.

I hope this makes it clear that ETH is not an unreasonable provisional hypothesis. It cannot be refuted by a priori assumptions about the nature, behavior, or possible logistics of an ETI. It can only be refuted by refuting prediction 1.

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