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J. Allen Hynek Quote

From: **Francisco Lopez** <d005734c@dc.seflin.org>
Date: Sat, 19 Jun 1999 10:30:15 -0400 (EDT)
Fwd Date: Sat, 19 Jun 1999 13:51:15 -0400
Subject: J. Allen Hynek Quote

From: Michael Estes <mestes@methow.com>
Via: " ufolist@egroups.com" <ufolist@egroups.com>

The following is quoted by J. ALLEN HYNEK in the Foreword to
'Challenge To Science - UFO Enigma' by Jacques Vallee, 1966:

FOREWORD

WHAT is the responsibility of the scientist confronted with observations that seem not only a challenge but sometimes also an affront to science? How does one discharge this responsibility? The UFO phenomena presents us with such a problem. To most scientists who have no acquaintance with the subject, save that gained from scanning the popular press, it is an "untouchable" area. Flying saucers indeed!-the product of immature, imaginative, and even unbalanced minds, the playground of the pseudo-scientist and the quasi-mystic, the haven of the crackpot.

Is this really so? Obviously, if one is to apply the scientific principles we all staunchly defend, one must take the time to look into the subject carefully-to look and to consider. But time is precisely what today's scientists-in some respects the world's busiest people -do not have! Who can take the time to wade through the seeming morass of stories, fanciful tales, chimera, and balderdash when SO many pressing things demand the scientist's immediate attention?

As an astronomer, I probably would never have approached the subject had I not been officially asked to do so. Over the past eighteen years I have acted as a scientific consultant to the U.S. Air Force on the sub-ject of unidentified flying objects-UFO's. As a conse-quence of my work on the voluminous air force files and, to a greater extent, of personal investigation of many puzzling cases and interviews with witnesses of good repute, I have long been aware that the subject of UFO's could not be dismissed as mere nonsense. Nonsense is present, to be sure, and misidentification of otherwise familiar objects that many sincere people report as UFO's. But is there not a "signal" in the "noise," a needle in the haystack? Is it not precisely our role to try to isolate the valid from the nonsensical? By carefully working through tons of pitchblende, Madame Curie isolated a tiny amount of radium-but the significance of that minute quantity was world--shaking.

It is my conclusion (speaking now personally and not in an official capacity) after many years of working through "tons" of reports, that there is a signal, that there is "radium" in the "pitchblende," waiting to be extracted. The authors of this book have come to the same conclusion, by a somewhat different path. Whether the scientifically valid in the entire UFO phenomenon proves to be a physical signal or a psychological one -or even a

heretofore unknown phenomenon-it is in every respect a challenge to science.

Perhaps I should have spoken earlier; eighteen years is a long time. But it takes more evidence to get an idea accepted in a revolutionary field, be it biological evolution, relativity, or quantum mechanics, than it does to advance simply another step in an accepted scientific domain. Furthermore, astronomers are among the most conservative of scientists. Perhaps this is because their time scale is so great that they naturally bide their time in proposing or accepting revolutionary ideas, particularly if such ideas are subject to sensational treatment in the press and in the minds of the people.

Nonetheless, I have of late been rebuked, in my correspondence with people whose integrity I respect, with the charge that I failed to call the importance of the air force data on UFO's to the attention of my peers. If any defense is needed, in view of the controversial and explosive nature of the subject, it is that I did indeed on many occasions call guarded attention to the steadily growing mass of reports made by intelligent people from many countries. As early as 1952, before the Optical Society of America, I pointed out the significant nature of some types of UFO reports (article published in the Journal of the Optical Society of America, April, 1953). Over and above that, there remains the fact that for years I have personally devoted a portion of my time to this subject, an action that would be unthinkable had I not felt it was worthy of examination. I have long been aware that the UFO phenomenon is a global one and that it has captured the attention of many rational people. Numerous scientists have privately told me of their interest and their willingness to look further into the problem.

Also, as a scientific consultant to the U.S. Air Force, I carry a unique responsibility: any statement I make on the importance of the UFO phenomenon, unless backed by overwhelming evidence, carries the danger of "mobilizing the credulity of the world," as a university colleague of mine so aptly put it. I recognize that responsibility in accepting the invitation of the authors to write the Foreword to this book. It was only my respect for the authors as serious investigators and the continued and growing mass of unexplained UFO reports that prompted me to accept. I have over the years acquired something of a reputation as a "debunker" of UFO reports. If this arose from my honest desire to find a rational natural explanation for the stimuli that give rise to the reports, a procedure very frequently crowned with success, then I must bear with that reputation. If it stems, however, from a belief that I deliberately adopted a Procrustean approach, cutting down or stretching out evidence to make a forced fit, deliberately to "explain away" UFO reports at all cost, then it is a most unwarranted charge.

In my nearly two score years' association with the investigation of the reports, I have yet to write a book on the subject, primarily because there is no physical evidence in support of the phenomenon. Were I to write such a book today, however, I probably would take much the same approach followed by the present authors. The Vallees present a formidable amount of evidence for the global nature of the UFO phenomenon, but despite this they come to no firm conclusion. As they state: "We must realize that the observations we have reviewed . . . have no value in themselves. They are important and deserve study, only because each one is an illustration of a phenomenon that has manifested itself since May, 1946, in every country in the world." Besides the fact that the reports bear striking similarities to each other they continue to be made by people of good repute, which makes it imperative that a scientific investigation be undertaken. Because of the global nature of the total phenomenon, this investigation might well be carried out under the auspices of the United Nations. The psychological implications of the UFO phenomenon on world affairs certainly make it worthy of study. It makes no difference, in this respect, what the physical truth of the matter is; it is the impact it has on the minds of people in many nations that makes it potentially important in the psychosociological balance of the world.

My own interest, as an astronomer, in the total phenomenon is, of course, purely scientific. Some readers may well wonder whether this seemingly flamboyant subject is amenable to scientific inquiry. What constitutes scientific evidence in this

field? The authors present a convincing argument that the UFO phenomenon can be studied with the advanced methods of inquiry of the physical scientist and of the sociologist and psychologist. In all of these methods the electronic computer figures prominently.

Scientific inquiry becomes possible when the phenomenon under study exhibits patterns and regularities, when it is subject to classification. Lee authors have shown that a classification system (the start of many branches of science) of UFO phenomena is possible and, indeed, that each type they have identified shows a different diurnal frequency pattern. In particular, their catalogue of five hundred cases should be of interest to scientists. I cannot help drawing a parallel with the first catalogues of celestial radio sources: the great majority of the entries were unidentified optically; only more advanced methods of analysis and observation revealed that some of these were distant radio galaxies and that some were the striking new puzzle, quasi-stellar sources. The present catalogue of UFO cases consists, with very few exceptions, of unidentified items; one wonders whether the parallel with the catalogue of radio sources continues.

Certainly no progress can be made without scientific study. Unfortunately, as the authors point out, scientists, "draped with dignity," have often refused to study the reports. The fact of the matter is that many of my colleagues who have undraped their dignity long enough to take a hard look at the reports have joined the growing ranks of the puzzled scientists: they privately indicate serious interest in the phenomenon but publicly they choose, like the subject itself, to remain unidentified; they are unwilling to expose themselves to the raillery and banter that go with it. It is to them in particular, and to all who foster the true Galilean spirit, that this book will be of greatest value. They grope and seek, examining even those ideas that seem fanciful and strange, for they know how strange and fanciful the term "nuclear energy" would have been to a physicist one hundred years ago. They are ready to accept a new challenge to science.

J. Allen Hynek
Chairman, Department of Astronomy, and Director,
Dearborn Observatory, Northwestern University

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