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UFOs - Extraterrestrial Probes?

James McDonald, *Astronautics and Aeronautics*, August 1967, p. 19-20
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Summary: *On the basis of an intensive study of the UFO problem, I believe that the extraterrestrial-origin hypothesis must now be given extremely serious scientific attention. There is, in my opinion, no sensible alternative to the utterly shocking hypothesis that the UFOs are extraterrestrial probes.*



James E. McDonald, Ph.D.
author's bio

On the basis of an intensive study of the UFO problem, I believe that the extraterrestrial-origin hypothesis must now be given extremely serious scientific attention.

Let me hasten to interject that I am quite familiar with all of the usual reasons as to why this hypothesis seems very remote. The solar system appears to harbor no good niches for evolution of sentient life. Recent disclosures of the lack of magnetic fields near Mars and Venus, demonstrations of the extreme tenuity of Mars' atmosphere and of the high temperatures of Venus' atmosphere, and all else that we know of our neighboring planets seem to argue cogently that the solar system is a most unlikely place to generate a second life system in addition to ours - certainly unlikely to have a life system that has gone far past us.

Within the past half-dozen years it has, somewhat amusingly, become scientifically respectable to take as axiomatic that in the billions of stellar systems within our galaxy alone, life must have evolved again and again, taking routes that may have gone far beyond our present civilization, culture, and technology. One can now broach that safely in a scientific assemblage. But all that sentient life must be way out there - not here!

The principal scientific objection to thinking that we might [ever] be visited by beings from other stellar systems is tied up with the energetics of propulsion. Edward Purcell of Harvard has presented a delightfully devastating analysis of the difficulties of interstellar travel (see "Interstellar Communications," edited by A. G. W. Cameron, W. A. Benjamin, New York, 1963). I certainly am not one to give substantial rebuttal to his arguments except in one lame [but conceivably relevant] way. All of his and many other arguments against the feasibility of interstellar travel are necessarily couched in terms of present-day scientific knowledge and technology.

To be sure, Purcell's type of argument seems to grant every benefit of doubt to the other side by looking far into the foreseeable future and still demolishes the idea of

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interstellar travel. But that adjective, "foreseeable," may be just the rob. Perhaps there are levels of technology so vastly superior to any we can now imagine that things can be done which we now regard as quite out of the question.

Clearly, that is an easy argument, by which one could soon be saying that everything and anything is possible. I certainly do not resort to such arguments in my everyday work, and I should like to add that I don't care for science-fictioneering in general.

But after a year of scrutiny of highly unconventional phenomena credibly reported from all parts of this country and [I believe] from most of the entire world, I have been driven to consider possibilities that I'd ordinarily not give a moment's thought to in my own personal brand of orthodoxy. It is the UFO evidence that slowly forces the diligent UFO student to seriously consider the extraterrestrial hypothesis - evidence that I can only describe as extraordinary in its total nature.

All over the globe persons in all walks of life, representing a wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds, are reporting, often in the face of unpleasant ridicule, sightings of objects that appear to be completely real objects yet have characteristics that match nothing about which we have present knowledge.

There are still a few persons who suspect these things must be secret Air Force test vehicles. They can forget that: No test pilot would ever dream of doing the things that these objects are repeatedly doing - hovering over speeding trucks loaded with gasoline, maneuvering low over populated areas, speeding alongside Texas sheriffs' cars, and diving down on top of trucks and tractors and motorbikes and trains. No American test vehicles would be checked out in Australia and Poland; no Russian test vehicles would be flight-tested in Canada or Brasil.

The UFOs are most definitely not secret test vehicles of superlative nature. No nation came out of WW II with a secret aerodynamic technology that could have produced the craft seen by hundreds of persons in the summer of 1947. And then there is the whole chapter that I am here omitting concerning the pre-1947 sightings that go back to before the Wright brothers.

And I cannot accept the psychological explanation, to which I have felt to obliged to return again and again for further checking and further discussion with colleagues in psychology and related fields. My conclusion: Objects that rock aircrafts at times, that leave dents in soil and railroad ties, and that splash when they dive into bodies of water are not likely to be "projection phenomena." Multiple-witness cases rule out hallucinations, essentially by definition. Much more could be said, but armchair speculations about psychological interpretations don't hold much weight when one goes over the whole picture very carefully.

Hoax, fraud, and fabrication account for a few but, in terms of percentage, negligible numbers of UFO sightings. Misinterpreted meteorological and astronomical observations and the like do account for lots of poor UFO reports, but experienced investigators learn to recognize these almost at a glance and dismiss them from further attention.

It is the detailed, close-range sightings by persons whose reliability cannot be brought into serious question that carry great weight. These are on the increase, it appears. Almost no urban sightings can be found in the records in the late 1940s. In the past year, there have been dozens of them. What does this all mean? What is happening? If you wish to know, do not ask Project Bluebook.

Pacing of aircraft and buzzing of cars by UFOs go on rather steadily. These cases so strongly suggest something vaguely resembling surveillance or reconnaissance that the student of the problem is forced to weigh the possibility that the UFOs are probes of some type engaged in something we would loosely call "observation."

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There are many other categories of sightings suggesting the same tentative hypothesis. How can this be? There is, in my opinion, no sensible alternative to the utterly shocking hypothesis that the UFOs are extraterrestrial probes.

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