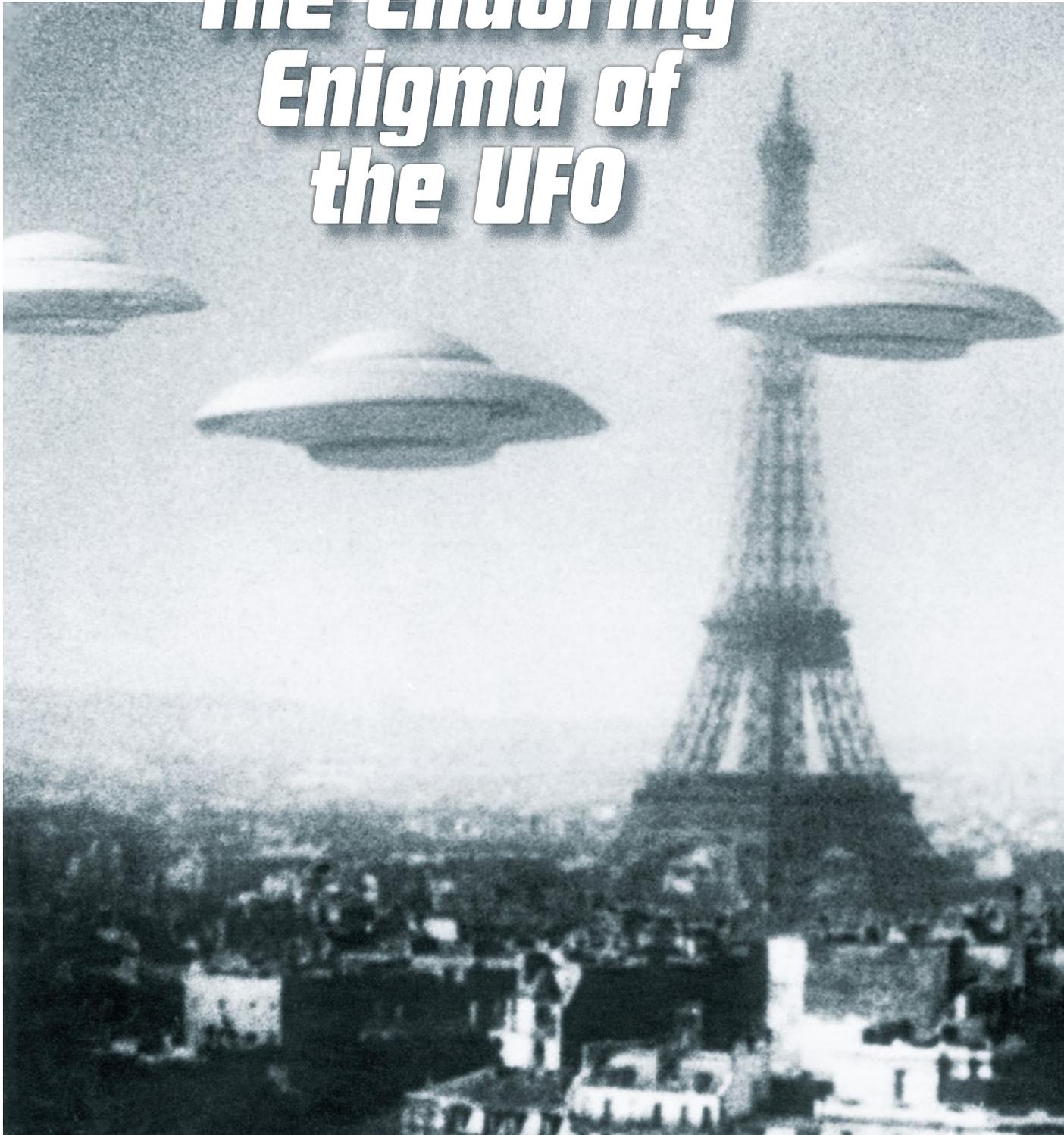




Emerging Worldviews

The Enduring Enigma of the UFO



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*As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today.
I wish, I wish, he'd stay away.*

—HUGHES MEARNS, 1899

by Dean Radin, PhD

ON JANUARY 8, 2008, A UFO WAS SPOTTED over the northern Texas town of Stephenville. It was a mass sighting with credible independent witnesses, including a constable, a chief of police, a private pilot, and a former air traffic control operator, and it became worldwide news. At least ten military jets were observed flying in the vicinity of the sighting that same evening, and ground radars tracked the object and confirmed the sightings. The UFO flew in complete silence; was estimated to be between 500 and 1,000 feet in length; did not have a transponder beacon (required by all aircraft); accelerated and decelerated in ways no known aircraft could; and at one point was headed directly toward President Bush's ranch in the nearby town of Crawford. The Air Force has steadfastly denied that anything unusual occurred.

In April 2008, the former Minister of Defense and Senior Minister of Canada, Paul Hellyer, said at a conference in Maryland, "We have a problem when official U.S. policy insists that UFOs don't exist. The veil of secrecy must be lifted, and now, before it is too late." In May, the British Ministry of Defense made its formerly secret files on UFOs available to the public through its official government website. That same month, the chief astronomer of the Vatican, Reverend José Gabriel Funes, published an article in the Vatican's newspaper stating that there was no conflict between believing in God and also in our "extraterrestrial brothers." In July

of this year, IONS founder Edgar Mitchell stated on a British radio show that “I happen to have been privileged enough to be in on the fact that we’ve been visited on this planet, and the UFO phenomenon is real.” Mitchell’s comments created a media firestorm and were reported by most of the major news outlets.

Time to Panic?

To those who don’t pay much attention to UFOs, such events may seem surprising or alarming. But the flurry of media interest is not really news. For decades, astronauts, government officials, and former military officers have maintained that the UFO phenomenon is worthy of serious investigation. Their stories can be found in hundreds of books, in thousands of articles, and on countless websites. Their claims are supported by a growing number of formerly classified military and intelligence documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Statements from Astronauts

Apollo 14 astronaut Edgar Mitchell repeatedly has said that high-ranking military officers have privately admitted that for many decades factions of the U.S. government have been aware that UFOs and alien technology are real. Many other astronauts have provided corroborating statements. *Mercury* astronaut Scott Carpenter photographed a UFO while in orbit on May 24, 1962, later saying, “At no time when the astronauts were in space were they alone. There was a constant surveillance by UFOs.” In 1985, *Mercury* and *Gemini* astronaut Gordon Cooper, in an address to the United Nations, said: “I believe that these extraterrestrial vehicles and their crews are visiting this planet from other planets . . . For many years, I have lived with a secret, in a secrecy imposed on all specialists and astronauts. I can now reveal that every day, in the United States, our radar instruments capture objects of form and composition unknown to us. And there are thousands of witness reports and a quantity of documents to prove this, but nobody wants to make them public.” Such statements are not limited to U.S. astronauts. In 1979, Russian cosmonaut Victor Afanasyev commented on a UFO he saw while en route to the *Solyut 6* space station: “It followed us during half of our orbit . . . It was an engineered structure, made from some type of metal, approximately 40 meters long with inner hulls.”

—DR

The UFO enigma is a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, it suggests that something awe-inspiring may be afoot. On the other, the topic is strictly taboo in academic and government circles, and it is permeated with hype, paranoia, and skepticism in the popular press, films, and television. The schizophrenic tension created by something potentially wonderful that we cannot speak about but are compelled to ponder leads to distrust of scientific and political authorities and to conspiratorial thinking. And worse, the idea of the UFO as *real*, as a clear and present danger, can tip us over the edge. These interlopers violate our airspace and oceans with impunity. They snoop over our secret nuclear weapons facilities. They abduct hapless victims by walking through walls. They may even be in cahoots with nefarious groups in our own government.

Is it time to panic yet?

The scientific answer is “no,” according to the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) *Science and Engineering Indicators 2000* report. This report assures us that widespread public beliefs in such things as UFOs and aliens are merely a sign of poor science education. Educated people know, or should know, that the evidence for UFOs is largely based on eyewitness testimony, which of course is unreliable. The rest can be explained as hoaxes, pelicans, stars, satellites, fireballs, swamp gas, electrical plasmas, the planet Venus, or, occasionally, our own secret aircraft and spacecraft.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, the U.S. Air Force was charged with investigating sightings of UFOs in order to alleviate public concern. For more than twenty years, they logged over 12,000 cases. An official review found no threat to national security and no evidence of extraterrestrial visitations. As far as the Air Force was publicly concerned, everything was fine.

But given the billions of star systems in the universe and assuming that evolution works more or less the same way everywhere, space should be saturated with intelligent creatures. Many of them would be far more advanced than we are because, in cosmic terms, our solar system is still young. So, “Where are they?” asked the physicist Enrico Fermi, who first raised this paradox in 1950. “Why haven’t we heard a peep from our extraterrestrial brothers?”

Perhaps we have.

Statements about UFOs offered by astronauts,

presidents, senators, defense ministers, and generals provide important clues that something is going on. While skeptics are quick to dismiss such arguments as an “appeal to authority,” realistically, almost everything we know about the world relies on accepting what experts tell us. No one has the knowledge or resources to personally confirm everything that appears in the encyclopedia. We learn about the world through networks of teachers, trusted friends, and recognized authorities. The *Apollo* astronauts in particular were rigorously vetted to be the best, the brightest, and the most skilled and rational people on Earth, and more than a dozen across NASA’s various space programs claim to have seen a UFO. What better authority could there possibly be about objects flying in space than the people who have actually been there?

But hearing of others’ firsthand experiences, no matter how credible, is no substitute for having personally seen one land on the White House lawn. Maybe not on the White House lawn, but in July 1952, a rash of flying objects was seen performing incredible maneuvers up and down the U.S. East Coast, including over the Capitol Building in Washington. Hundreds of astonished witnesses saw glowing lights in the sky. Radars at Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base independently confirmed that something was traveling at speeds of up to 7,200 mph. Jets were scrambled to intercept, and photographs and films were taken. An Air Force spokesman tried to calm everyone’s fears by explaining it all away as “temperature inversions,” which no one accepted, not even the Air Force’s own UFO investigators. And claims of other sightings around Washington DC have continued (see Robert Stanley’s *Close Encounters on Capitol Hill*).

Classified Secrets

If the percentage of truly unidentified flying objects—those with no known plausible explanation—were small, say 1 to 2 percent, then there might be some merit in the idea that one day we’ll understand those sightings as rare but perfectly normal phenomena. But the actual percentage of unknowns is much higher, from 20 to 30 percent, depending on the collection of cases. In addition, unresolved cases with better-quality evidence are more likely to be classified as unidentified than those of poorer quality.

In light of such “evidence,” one might conclude why the Air Force keeps claiming that nothing interesting is going on: Like a parent insisting to a child that there is no bogeyman in the closet, they dare not admit their own concern, especially if matters of national security are seemingly at stake. Through documents obtained by the FOIA, we can now confirm that the Air Force’s denials were indeed a ruse. In fact, many government agencies have collected reports within classified programs. For example, an FOIA suit revealed that in 1952 the CIA continued to collect UFO reports even though it claimed that it had shut down all its investigations. As reported in 1979 in the *New York Times*, a secret CIA memo recommended that the agency continue to study UFO reports, adding that “it is strongly urged, however, that no indication of CIA interest or concern reach the press or public, in view of their probably alarmist tendencies to accept such interest as ‘confirmatory’ of the soundness of ‘unpublished facts’ in the hands of the U.S. government.”

Historical analyses of UFO cases, such as those recited in Richard Dolan’s comprehensive book *UFOs and the National Security State*, make it clear that not only has high-quality evidence been available for a long time, but it is virtually certain that classified projects have been keeping close tabs on reports of UFOs. There are also persistent reports that individuals with access to highly classified information, from presidents and senators to generals and admirals, have been denied access to information about UFOs on the basis of not having a “need to know.” Who is determining that need? How? And why?

Space-Age Myth?

The UFO phenomenon is unsettling enough, but that discomfort is significantly heightened when one considers its first cousins: crop circles, orbs, men in black, alien contact and abductions, telepathic communications, and so on. This phenomenological complex bears a resemblance to experiences reported in shamanic, psychedelic, mystical, religious, and psychic states, and to folklore, mythology, and religious lore. Perhaps these apparently disparate phenomena may all be connected in some way.

A comprehensive justification of this suggestion is beyond the scope of this article, but consider the

following: The modern era of the “flying saucer” began in June 1947 when pilot Kenneth Arnold saw a series of flying disks performing strange maneuvers, “like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water.” The June 26 issue of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* quoted Arnold: “I saw . . . a series of objects that were traveling incredibly fast. They were silvery and shiny and seemed to be shaped like a pie plate.”

Thirty years prior to Arnold’s encounter, a similar

marvel occurred in Fatima, Portugal. Three children reported that they were being visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary. In September 1917, thousands of witnesses reported seeing her arrive in an “aeroplane of light,” an “immense globe, flying westwards, at moderate speed.” The following month, the crowd had swelled to 70,000. One of them, Professor Almeida Garrett of Coimbra University, later wrote (as retold by Jacques Vallee in his book *Messengers of Deception*): “Suddenly, the sun shone through the dense cloud which covered it: Everybody looked in its direction. It looked like a disk, of a very definite contour . . . This clear-shaped disk suddenly began turning. It rotated with increasing speed. Suddenly, the crowd began crying with anguish. The sun, revolving all the time, began falling toward the earth, reddish and bloody, threatening to crush everybody under its fiery weight.”

Such experiences are reported not as fantasy but as reality—often more intensely real than everyday life. Observers interpret them according to their expectations and culture. Religious pilgrims at Fatima saw a disk in the sky as a religious miracle; pilot Kenneth Arnold saw flying craft. Others may perceive ghosts of the dead, apparitions of the living, techno-elves, blobs of light, or extraterrestrials. Westerners tend to see technologically sophisticated spacecraft piloted by humanoids, straight out of the special effects and cast of a *Star Wars* movie. We expect to get radar hits on apparently solid flying machines, and sometimes we do.

One of the first to explore the notion of mythology manifesting as physical reality was psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who in 1957 published the book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*. More recently, authors Jacques Vallee (*Dimensions: A Casebook of Alien Contact*) and Keith Thompson (*Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination*) and folklorists Peter Rojcewicz and Thomas Bullard have written about the parallels among UFOs, folklore, and mythology.

“Space-Age myth” does not imply that UFO sightings or encounters with angels, aliens, fairies, sprites, elves, or demons are fantasies. Rather, it suggests that some of these experiences may literally be psychophysical, blurring conventional boundaries between objective and subjective realities. Some may

If you want to learn more . . .

A Google search quickly locates hundreds of thousands of Web pages on the UFO phenomenon, but only a handful can be counted on to provide a relatively unfiltered perspective. Here are a few of the best:

- The Mutual UFO Network (www.mufon.com), the Center for UFO Studies (www.cufos.org), and the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (www.nicap.org) are among three of the most active UFO investigation groups in the United States.
- Independent sites that archive and keep track of various military and government documents, case studies, testimonials, and news include UFO Evidence (www.ufoevidence.org), the Coalition for Freedom of Information (www.freedomofinfo.org), The Majestic Documents (www.majesticdocuments.com), and The Disclosure Project (www.disclosureproject.org).
- The National UFO Reporting Center (www.ufocenter.org) specializes in collecting and disseminating new UFO cases.
- For a professional astronomer’s affirmative perspective on UFOs, see www.ufoskeptic.org.
- For a journalist’s skeptical perspective, see www.csicop.org/klassfiles/Home.html.
- U.S. government files and case studies of UFOs can be found at the Department of Defense (www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/ufo/), Air Force (www.archives.gov/foia/ufos.html), and FBI (foia.fbi.gov/foiaindex/ufo.htm) websites.
- For historical information on UFO investigations in the United Kingdom, visit the British Ministry of Defence’s National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ufos/).

—DR

object that this proposal doesn't account for the physical traces associated with some UFO reports, but this misinterprets what Jung and others have proposed. They suggest that the manifest world emerges from mind, that is, that *mind shapes matter*. Where have we heard this before?

In his book *Global Mind Change*, former IONS President Willis Harman discussed three basic ways of looking at the world. He called the current Western scientific worldview “materialistic monism,” or “M1.” Within M1, everything—both matter and energy—is made of a single substance. From matter emerges everything, including the brain-generated illusion called mind. In M1, angels and aliens walking through walls are fine plot points for an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, but they are impossible in the real world. In M1, UFOs are conceivable, but only in terms of hard, physical spacecraft with humanoid pilots. Most of the modern technological world was created based on M1 assumptions, so it carries enormous persuasive power. But the whole panoply of noetic experiences defy materialistic explanations, suggesting that M1 is an incomplete worldview. Detailed taxonomies of these anomalies are described by all cultures; they include, among others, the Hindu siddhis, the Catholic charisms, Sufi attainments, and, in indigenous societies, shamanic magic.

Harman's second worldview, M2, represents dualism, which assumes two fundamentally different kinds of substances in the universe, matter and mind. Many scientists today reject dualism because it begs the problem of how two deeply different substances could interact at all. In addition, it seems lavish to require the universe to maintain (at least) two distinct essences, when it would be far simpler to have only one.

The third worldview, M3, is transcendental or mental monism, which Harman argued is the source of both the perennial wisdom and the emerging worldview of the twenty-first century. In M3, consciousness is primary, and matter and energy are emergent properties of consciousness. M3 accommodates everything that M1 and M2 allow for, as well as rogue phenomena like telepathic ETs, observation-shy UFOs, and collective mind—manifested UFOs. Evidence in favor of M3 has been slowly amassing for over a century. Such recent

books as *Irreducible Mind*, *Entangled Minds*, and *Measuring the Immeasurable* (see review on page 41) discuss the empirical evidence in detail, ranging from psychic phenomena to creative genius to mind-body interactions to evidence suggestive of reincarnation.

A Persistent Taboo

If Willis Harman was right and as a species we are evolving toward an M3 worldview, then our future understanding of the UFO enigma will probably be a radical departure from anything we are able to imagine today. But short of a viable explanation, one thing is already clear: It is a phenomenon worthy of serious study.

One hopes our leaders will have the courage to break the UFO taboo that has intimidated mainstream scientific interest in these and related phenomena. With sufficient long-term funding and access to the immensely powerful (and mostly military) technologies, already in place for detecting flying objects that are virtually anywhere in the world, we would gain a much better chance to more fully understand these potentially paradigm-shattering phenomena. But as long as the UFO remains an outcast from the halls of science and scholarship, the taboo will persist. Of course, some may prefer it that way.

If academics' first responsibility is to tell the truth, then the truth is that after sixty years of modern UFOs, human beings still have no idea what they are and are not even trying to find out. That should surprise and disturb us all and cast doubt on the structure of rule that requires and sustains it.

—Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall,
“Sovereignty and the UFO,”
Political Theory 36:4 (2008) 



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“The Enduring Enigma of the UFO” by Dean Radin, appeared in *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness* (No. 21, Winter 2008–2009, pp. 22–27), the quarterly publication of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), and is reprinted with permission of IONS (Websites: www.noetic.org and www.shiftinaction.com), all rights reserved.

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