

# COMMENTARY ON THE AAAS SYMPOSIUM

*J. Allen Hynek*

For 21 years Dr. Hynek was Civilian Scientific Consultant on UFOs to the U.S. Air Force Project Blue Book. His contract came to an end in the summer of 1969, and the Project was closed down the following December. Dr. Hynek is Professor of Astronomy at Northwestern University, and Director of Dearborn Observatory. This article was specially prepared for FSR on January 2, 1970.

ALL in all, the AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) symposium served its purpose: to inform the scientific public of the status of the UFO problem and give them a chance to note and to examine quite opposing viewpoints; indeed, to inform them that there are valid points of disagreement with the Condon Report which has been taken as the "last word" by most of the scientific community.

The closing of Bluebook just a few days before the symposium seemed like a calculated move to discredit further the symposium, as Dr. Condon himself had tried to do, going so far as sending a copy of his 7-page diatribe to Vice President Agnew!

## Problems with weather

The New England weather also seemed bent on discouraging any meetings at all. The heaviest snowstorm on record for parts of New England closed airports, and on the opening day of the meeting there was serious consideration given to cancelling the AAAS symposium altogether! Not only were the opening papers of the UFO symposium given to a sparse audience, but no session anywhere in the meetings had a very good audience. The next day people struggled in by train and by bus. Dr. James McDonald finally made it the next day, having suffered through the closing of the O'Hare airport in Chicago. In the end he flew to Washington, and then came up to Boston by slow train, and completed the trip by bus!

He missed the press conference on the first day, of course. The press was friendly and the viewpoints of the several participants were fairly represented all over the country.

## The Condon "Line"

At the conference, the most "pro" person, so to speak, was myself (McDonald having missed it) and the most pronounced "con" man was Dr. Hartmann, who acted like a pocket-sized Condon. He repudiated, in effect, his own work on the Trent photographs (McMinnville, Oregon) and took a strong Condon "party line" all along the way. This surprised many of us, but my personal opinion is that he is a young man "on the make"—as we say in this country—he cannot afford to be "pro-UFO" and expect to get anywhere in the astronomical profession. I feel part of his attitude is "protective colouration."

Dr. Walter Orr Roberts, president of the AAAS, sat in on the conference and certainly lent dignity to the whole meeting. He stayed strictly on the fence, acting the perfect scientific diplomat that he is. It was only because he supported the idea that science was to be open minded that Condon was prevented from stopping the meeting in the first place.

The Proceedings of the Symposium, by the way, are to be published in abbreviated form.

## A little light relief

The press took particular delight in the Harvard psychiatrist's Grinspoon's hypothesis that some oval and cigar-shaped UFOs might be purely psychotic in nature. The cigar-shaped ones were dismissed as phallic symbols and the oval ones were attributed to the Isakower effect (1938, Otto Isakower). "The visual impression is that of something shadowy and indefinite, generally felt to be round, which comes nearer and nearer, swells to a

gigantic size and threatens to crush the subject. It gradually becomes smaller and shrinks up to nothing . . ."

Isakower contended (and Grinspoon followed) that this oval UFO seen coming closer and closer is nothing more than a recall of infantile perception of the mother's breast coming closer and closer (we must get sex into UFOs somehow!) almost smothering the infant, and later receding into the distance.

This added a bit of levity to the presentation, and after Dr. Grinspoon concluded his paper I arose and said something to the effect that Dr. Condon had indicated in his report that if scientists had a serious research proposal to make concerning UFOs that the government might fund same, and I wondered whether Dr. Grinspoon had considered proposing the following research: "On the Incidence of UFO Reports from Witnesses who had been Bottle-Fed Babies"!

## A resolution

The most important thing to come out of the symposium is a resolution addressed to the Secretary of the Air Force asking that no Bluebook files (both classified and unclassified) be destroyed—that they be preserved and deposited with some university and made available to any serious scientific investigator. About ten of us signed the resolution.

I would say, roughly, that the worth of the papers presented at the symposium was proportional to the speaker's acquaintance with the subject, a result to be expected. Thus Dr. Hardy, who admittedly knew little of the problem, expatiated on the vagaries of radar, and

# American Association for the Advancement of Science

1515 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, NW, WASHINGTON, D.C., 20005

(Sheraton-Boston Hotel)

29 December, 1969

The Hon. Robert Seamans, Jr.  
Secretary of the Air Force  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The scientists listed below, convened at a General Symposium during the Annual Meeting of the Association, understand that USAF Project BLUE BOOK has been discontinued in accordance with Dr. E. U. Condon's recommendation in the Colorado Study of Unidentified Flying Objects. We know that Project BLUE BOOK accumulated, over the past two decades, irreplaceable data of great historical interest and potential value to physical and (particularly) behavioral scientists.

After two days' discussion of the data involved, the Colorado Study, and several proposed studies by sociologists and psychologists, we formally request that you, Mr. Secretary

- (1) Ensure that *all* of the material, both classified and unclassified, be preserved without alteration or loss,
- (2) Declassify promptly all documents filed by the Aerial Phenomena Section of the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base which are classified by virtue of AFR 200-17 and AFR 80-17,
- (3) Make all the unclassified documents available to qualified scientific investigators at a more suitable location than the USAF Archives (we recommend a major university in the mid-west), and
- (4) Order an annual review of the remaining classified documents in the present file to determine when they can be declassified without alteration in accordance with current USAF security procedure.

My twelve colleagues, who receive copies of this letter, would appreciate your favouring us with a reply. I can distribute it to the others if you address it to Dr. Page, 18639 Point Lookout Drive, Houston, Texas 77058.

Sincerely,

Thornton Page (Wesleyan University)  
Chairman, AAAS Special Committee, for

Walter Orr Roberts, Retiring President, AAAS  
Franklin E. Roach, University of Hawaii  
William Hartmann, University of Arizona  
Lester Grinspoon, Harvard University  
Robert Hall, University of Illinois  
Philip Morrison, Mass. Inst. of Technology

Douglass Price-Williams, Rice University  
J. Allen Hynek, Northwestern University  
James McDonald, University of Arizona  
Carl Sagan, Cornell University  
Walter Sullivan, The New York Times  
George Kocher, University of S. California

BOSTON MEETING .. DECEMBER 26-31, 1969

made out a good case for disregarding all radar cases except (I would say) those in which solid visual evidence was also present. This has been my attitude all along: radar returns can be caused by so many anomalies or physical effects that radar reports can be considered as supporting but never as primary evidence in the UFO problem.

## Menzel's contribution

Dr. Menzel's paper was presented by Dr. Roberts because of Menzel's

illness. Of all the papers, it was the only one to descend to personalities and in particular it lambasted McDonald. I received a lesser blast but still one which, interpreted, made me out as being some where in between a misguided scientist and a congenital idiot. When the time came for rebuttal from the floor, I declined, although McDonald did not and gave Menzel a dressing down (all in good scientific terms, of course). Menzel had stated that he had "solved" many cases for the Air Force that I

failed to solve. One case he gave as an example was that of two witnesses in an EM (car stopping) case who, he said, had mistaken the moon for the UFO; the car stopping was, according to him, "entirely irrelevant!" He failed to point out that the moon was in the wrong part of the sky—the witnesses saw the "moon" low in the northern(!) sky, whereupon it suddenly came close and hovered over their car. Perhaps a new textbook in astronomy should be written!

### An excellent paper

Dr. Hall gave an excellent presentation. He stressed that UFO witnesses "do not see what they wish to see" but rather try to explain their sighting first in ordinary everyday terms. (This is what I have long called "escalation of hypothesis"—the witness tries to think he saw an airplane, a landing light etc., until he is driven to escalate the explanation to the level of "unknown." He pointed out that many UFO reports stand up better than the best court testimony, and he spoke of the massive social pressure not to make UFO reports.

He disagreed with Hartmann's oversimplified explanation of the UFO problem as a sociological one involving the growth of rumour, fed by newspaper and magazine articles, and so on. Hartmann, it seems to me, fell into the trap many have fallen into: by showing *a way* by which something might conceivably have happened (in this case the whole phenomenon of UFO reports) it is concluded that it must be *the way* it actually did happen.

All in all, Hartmann showed, despite (or perhaps because of?) his association with the Condon Committee, a remarkable lack of acquaintance with the subject. At one point he stated: "Just because we can't identify something doesn't prove that there is something extraordinary going on . . . it just means we haven't been able to identify it." He fails to continue—that it doesn't prove that a simple explanation exists, even though we think it must.

### It's the treatment that counts

Douglas Price-Williams had an excellent paper, from my viewpoint. He concluded with a statement we should all keep in mind: "For my part I prefer to think that respectability in Science depends not on the nature of the problem but the way it is treated."

This is the way he concluded an unpublished (publication was refused) paper to *Science* giving a most devastating critique of the methodology of the Condon report. He shows most clearly that the methods used in the Condon report were ones for which a graduate student in science would be severely reprimanded (if not flunked!).

Obviously the establishment cannot afford to have a critique of that sort published.

Which brings to mind a paper that Mr. W. T. Powers submitted to *Science*; it was refused with the curt comment by the editor: "At the present time the overwhelming majority of our readers are not interested in a further discussion of UFOs." Nothing was said about the scientific worth of the paper! Such is the establishment!

Now that Bluebook has been terminated I will be free to discuss some of their "scientific" methods and indeed a part of the book I am now writing will be devoted to that.

Roach, in his presentation, limited himself largely, and unfortunately I think, to considerations of extra-terrestrial life, a point that has been amply made before. He could have given some insight into the Condon Committee, but he too is a scientific diplomat.

### Concluding talk

One of the best papers was the concluding one, by Dr. Philip Morrison, of M.I.T. He set some fine guidelines for UFO investigators, pointing out that (in effect) even scientists will listen attentively to the UFO investigator when he can assemble data the way Biot did in the famous case of meteorites.

What is required is a "chain of evidence" in that a UFO sighting (particularly by one witness) does not stand "in a vacuum". Given a sighting by one or more people, coupled with a sighting of the *same thing* by *independent* witnesses (independent in locale as well as unrelated by circumstance—thus five people in the same car do not really constitute independent witnesses, but individual people in five separate cars, strangers to each other, would) then one is getting someplace. Emphasis should and must be given to events described independently by several people. It does no good to have Mrs. Jones sighting a strange light, or a hovering craft, no matter how spectacular, from her bedroom window, with no corroboration. But if she saw it looking to the west, and Mr. Smith saw it looking to the east at the same time, and both could have taken photographs, and if other independent witnesses

could confirm a "saucer nest" or other markings on the ground (again by photograph), then again science would listen.

There is much to what Morrison said. Being thoroughly acquainted with UFO evidence as it is, I am the first to acknowledge that what is most needed is the upgrading of the original data. If the UFO phenomenon is real (and I think it is) then certainly it can be handled in the same way that other real things can be handled—documented, times confirmed, testimony of independent witnesses obtained by persons knowledgeable in the ways of scientific evidence, and so on.

Morrison's message is essentially—and I heartily agree—that even though the scientific establishment is hostile to the UFO question, it will listen to data presented on its own terms. Had any of us been able, at the Symposium, to have presented the UFO data in the way Biot presented the data on meteorites to the French Academy, then science would listen (and even *Science* would publish the results!). But none of us were able to do so. Partly this was the fault of the nature of the phenomenon (for instance, where does a UFO go when not being observed?). An aircraft starting out from New York to San Francisco is not seen only once, say over Indianapolis; it is seen all along the line, and by successive radars. No one would doubt the existence of a jet liner—even if it were the only one in the world—if it were seen consecutively by many people, photographs taken, radar-scope records taken, as it progressed from New York to the west coast. Unfortunately, UFOs seem to have nearly vertical trajectories! One comes down at one locale and then disappears. How nice if it were to appear a few minutes later in the next town, and so on, so that a time-motion chart of its trajectory could be made. What does a UFO do, indeed, when it disappears from Mr. Brown's vision . . . where is it hiding? As long as sightings are essentially isolated, the establishment just will not listen. I don't agree with them in this, but it is understandable. They are used to consecutive, well ordered data. We don't have it.