

organs — and even of living beings too. (Everyone who takes an interest in the UFO Phenomenon will recall precise cases, and there is no need for me to quote them in detail.)

We might therefore imagine that, in cases such as those, we were observing the action of an efficient farm manager who, having perceived — long before his herds did — that the animals were threatened with dangerous diseases, was taking some samples with a view to analysis for the purpose of determining the source of the danger, and with a view to taking remedial action. If such were in fact the case, then we ought by now to have seen a reaction, a treatment! . . . And, indeed, we have! This is precisely what we are seeing. For, despite all the dissensions, despite all the warfare, ideological and economic, it seems that, very gradually, step by step, while still grimacing and grinding their teeth at each other, mankind are starting to swallow the medicine. (Removal of the lead from petrol; purification of the rivers; replacement of the massive use of chemical fertilizers by more restrained and careful methods; conservation of fuel by economies in the operation of engines and in means of heating; more and more significant efforts aimed at a return to a more natural use of medicines, with a limitation on the employment of antibiotics; recycling of raw materials, etc., etc. . .)

By 1985, mankind was beginning to perceive the extent of the disaster, but "THEY" had apparently been aware of it since the 1950s. As someone once remarked: "Is anybody in the driver's seat?" In line with the thinking of Charles Fort, our mentor, we would put it thus: "Is there a Cosmic Farmer?"

#### References

1. "Les platanes et les ormes bientôt dans un autre monde." In *Le Monde* newspaper, December 2/3, 1981, p. xiv.
2. "La maladie des thuyas" in *Sud-Ouest* newspaper, November 28, 1984, p. 22.
3. "Mort de la forêt: les pessimistes avaient raison." In journal *Science Et Vie*, No. 808, January 1985, pp. 60-64 and 160. Also *Science Et Vie*, No. 799, April 1984, pp. 72-85.
4. "Avant que la forêt ne meure." Pub. by Delachaux and Niestlé: Lausanne, Switzerland.
5. "Au secours des cigognes." In newspaper *Le Figaro*, December 4, 1984, p. 9.
6. "Les pigeons de Paris sous haute surveillance." In *Le Figaro*, November 14, 1984, p. 10.
7. "L'huile toxique serait en fait des tomates." In *Journal Science Et Vie*, No. 807, December 1984, pp. 75/76.
- 7a. "La mer du Nord: égout de l'Europe." In *Sciences Et Vie*, No. 807, December 1984, pp. 70-73.
- 7b. "Le bifteck meurtrier." In *Science Et Vie*, No. 807, December 1984, pp. 60-64 and 170.
8. "L'inquiétante montée des allergies." In *Le Figaro* newspaper, November 20, 1984, p. 10.

---

# ON THE SYSTEMATICS OF HYPOTHESES CONCERNING THE UFO PHENOMENON: SOME THOUGHTS AND A MODEST PROPOSAL

*Luis Schönherr*

Consultant to FSR and Correspondent for Austria and Central Europe.

IN the field of UFO research there is such a confusing abundance of opinions and hypotheses that an at least basic systematics or classification of them is long overdue.

Unfortunately the profession of the author does not at present permit him to devote much time to this problem, and he will therefore confine himself in what follows to some comparatively simple but nevertheless basic suggestions. UFO hypotheses should be classified or structured by three basic groups or levels (L), i.e. hypotheses on:

(L1) The physical or psychological (or even other) nature of the immediate, directly perceptible

manifestation within our environment. (The term 'environment' also including the human body and human brain.)

(L2) The origin of the (L1)-event: terrestrial, extra-terrestrial, the human brain, geophysical sources, etc.

(L3) The kind and degree of design or intelligence presumably involved: natural laws, human or non-human intelligence, etc.

It is quite possible that different hypotheses pertaining to the same level are mutually exclusive, but it can never happen that a hypothesis on one given level can exclude hypotheses on other levels. This latter

statement may sound like a commonplace, but apparently many Ufologists are not aware of this fact. Otherwise the fierce and unproductive wrangling between the adherents of the classic ETH and those who promote more psychologically-oriented approaches simply would not be possible. If on level (L1) UFOs are proved to be physical, this does not mean that on level (L3) a non-human intelligence has to be the correct answer. And a psychic or psychological explanation on level (L1) does not conclusively preclude an extraterrestrial origin on level (L2) and/or an alien intelligence on level (L3).

I could well imagine that such a systematics as I propose could lead to better structured UFO hypotheses and to the elimination of much unnecessary friction in the debate.

The sequence in which the proposed three classification levels have been presented is not arbitrary. It is the same sequence of investigation that a scientist would usually adopt when a new phenomenon is put before him. At least most physical scientists would consider it very unlikely that a hypothesis concerning, say, level (L2) could be successfully tested before essential questions pertaining to (L1) had been answered. Certainly this is one of the reasons why for the greater part of the scientific community the hypotheses of an extraterrestrial origin and an intelligent cause of the UFO phenomenon (usually subsumed under the abbreviation 'ETH') do not qualify as methodologically valid, scientific hypotheses. Moreover, this opinion is also supported by the stark fact that three decades of ETH euphoria have added nothing whatsoever to a better understanding of the *modus operandi* of the phenomenon.

On the other hand, there is no such thing as a fixed scientific methodology, valid for all eternity and blindly applicable to all sorts of problems. Instead, the history of Science itself is a continuing demonstration of how the tools in the vast scientific arsenal have been discarded, changed, improved, or completed, according to the requirements of the problems themselves. Could it therefore be that in the case of the UFO problem the sequence of hypotheses has to be changed? By way of (rather prosaic) examples I will try to look at the matter from this angle:

- Suppose a military commander learns that his positions are being fired on. Then his prime concern is not going to be the type of ammunition that the enemy are using, or the chemical composition of the explosives (L1), *but the origin of the fire* (L2), so that the enemy batteries can be silenced.
- Another example: in the evening a blinking light is observed up on the mountains. Nobody will waste time in trying to determine whether the light-source is a candle, an electric torch, or the last rays of the sun reflected by a pocket mirror (L1). Even if the blinking light does not

entirely correspond to the standard Alpine distress signal, the sensible observer will nevertheless at once assume that this is an attempt at intelligent communication by some mountaineer who is in difficulties (L3).

- The second example touches yet another problem, the aspect of sense or meaning which is always involved as soon as 'intelligence' is presumed or suspected. The decoding of a cryptographic message for which the key is not known is often an iterative trial-and-error process. The cryptanalyst's work is accomplished when he has decoded a meaningful message from the encoded text, i.e., he must start with the assumption that the cypher does contain an intelligent communication. If, for example, a random, meaningless sequence of letters has been encoded in the first place, and the cryptanalyst chances by luck to hit upon the correct key, he will still not recognize the solution, because he is expecting some meaning, and there is none. To complicate things further, what constitutes 'meaning'?

The solution "AUNTIE ANNE IS ILL" has a sort of meaning, but it will not satisfy a cryptanalyst working on a presumed *military* text. So he will carry on, until he gets some such result as "ATTACK ON MONDAY", or something of the sort.

These examples show that the sequence of hypotheses (i.e. the methodology) by which a problem has to be approached, depends not only on the problem itself but also on the conditions surrounding the problem — the problem-environment, so to say. Without implying that we should now assume a fundamental relationship between examples and the UFO problem, it is perhaps not without interest to compare one of the more recent approaches with the proposed scheme.

In the early days of Ufology, contact and abduction cases were either rejected as outright hoaxes or were regarded as definite proof for an intelligence behind the phenomenon. During the 1970s Herrera and Lawson approached the problem by assuming a purely psychological process on level (L1) and a terrestrial, human origin on level (L2). Quite naturally any indication of human factors in the phenomenon is more easy to identify and therefore less likely to be disputed than, say, the alleged manifestations of a hypothetical extraterrestrial intelligence. Thus, the birth-trauma hypothesis became testable by reproducible experiments.

Some of the birth-trauma adherents now seem to believe that the re-living of the birth-trauma is an endogenous process, without any external cause. But this does not follow cogently from the results. Certainly it is conceivable that the birth-trauma has such an emotional impact that the memory of it is able to

force its way to the surface of consciousness by itself. But why, then, are abduction experiences of this sort still relatively rare compared with other psychological processes of re-living and phantasizing? Should one not expect that abduction stories would have to be at least as widespread as, say, daydreaming? Incidentally, my own (admittedly modest) survey of UFO reports has convinced me that other memory images having nothing to do with the birth-trauma and often rather trivial, can also appear in UFO experiences. (See my article *Percipient-Dependent Components in the UFO Experience\**, published in *Pursuit*, Vol. 17, No.3, 1984 (pp. 98-127).

Another difficulty is presented by the multiple-witness cases. They point more towards an external influence, triggering off the imaginary experiences, or even towards an at present scarcely imaginable sort of transient reality, than towards any endogenous process.

Then there are the physical trace cases, I think it will be difficult to brush them all aside as mere coincidences.

For the time being, I would consider it a reasonable hypothesis that an external stimulus (which is perhaps responsible for the physical traces) interacts with the human brain, causing that curious 'replay' of long-forgotten memories. Beyond that I would prefer to reserve judgement, especially regarding (L3) hypotheses.

This proposed classification scheme for UFO hypotheses is, for sure, only a modest attempt, which can and should be improved upon. The foregoing considerations however, especially the discussion of the birth-trauma hypothesis, may demonstrate how important such a systematics could be if we are to avoid both unnecessary and irrelevant debate and exaggerated claims, since, even in its rough form as presented above, it reflects the real structure of the UFO Problems and is therefore of methodic value.

\*We hope to be able to publish this ourselves in the near future.

EDITOR

---

## ONE FROM THE PAST

Extract from *FSR* Vol. 9, No. 6 (November/December 1963), page 20.

### Landing on Wimbledon Common (South London)?

From the *Wandsworth Borough News*, August 16, 1963:

Mr. Briggs, a 28-year-old artist, says a police constable told him weeks ago that a local woman claimed to have seen a flying saucer land, and he would like the woman to get in touch with him.

She reported it to the constable while he was patrolling the Common with his dog — but, upon investigation, he found nothing.

The woman saw it at about 2.00 a.m., and described

it as being the size of a double-decker bus, and added that she had 'never seen anything like it before in her life'.

The constable asked what she was doing out at that time in the morning, and she replied that, not being able to sleep, she had decided to take a short walk. After her experience he suggested she should return home and go to bed. "Unfortunately he did not take her name and address," says Mr. Briggs "but had heard since that other people said they had seen this object flying over the Common on the same morning."

### "MEN OF SCIENCE"

"Far away in some strange constellation in the skies, infinitely remote, there is a small star, which astronomers may some day discover. At least I could never observe in the faces of demeanour of most astronomers or men of science any evidence that they had discovered it; though as a matter of fact they were walking about on it all the time. It is a star that brings forth out of itself very strange plants and very strange animals; and none stranger than the men of science."

G.K. CHESTERTON: *The Everlasting Man*.