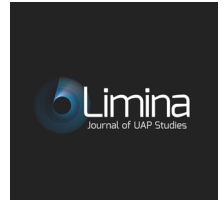




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## The Discovery of OIL (Some Thoughts on Finding Other Intelligent Life)<sup>1</sup>

Brenda Denzler, Ph.D.\*

*Independent researcher*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4611-2991>

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\*Author contact: [bdenzlerster@gmail.com](mailto:bdenzlerster@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

From the dawn of the modern age of UFOs in June 1947, the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) has been the dominant explanatory framework for the provenance of the devices and their presumably intelligent occupants. In more recent decades, however, students of the phenomenon have begun to think that it has nothing to do with off-worlders. Instead, the UFO-nauts may very well be non-human locals. This essay presents one possible explanation for how this might be, weaving together insights from science, observations from religion, and our best collective evidence-to-date about the nature of UFOs. It concludes with an appeal for a dimension of inquiry that might shed further light on the UFO phenomenon to be added to the field of religious studies and a suggestion that science return to its roots and tweak some of its foundational assumptions in ways that could make the study of UFO phenomena not only more productive, but possible at all.

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“Anomalies are rarely beautiful when we are first introduced to them. They confound what we think we know.”

(Avi Loeb, *Extraterrestrial*, p. 99)

Twenty-six years ago I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the UFO and alien abduction movement. It was published in 2001 by the University of California Press (Denzler 2001) and received largely good reviews. By that time, there were a few things I was pretty sure were not going to happen in the world

of UFOs. I knew that a UFO declaring itself by landing on the White House lawn was pretty unlikely, documents pried from our government via the Freedom of Information Act were unlikely to give us a ringside seat to anything ultimately convincing, and a definitive revelation from some non-governmental source was equally unlikely.

On the other hand, I was pretty sure of a few things about UFOs. First, the phenomenon is real. It's not all hoaxes, misidentifications, or hallucinations. Second, there may be more than one thing happening with UFOs, but human

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beings may lack the perceptual and cognitive abilities to be able (right now) to distinguish between these things.<sup>2</sup> Third, if this is so, attempts to make sense of the phenomenon with a single theory may be doomed to failure because no one theory can make sense of all the rich variability in the data.

The default hypothesis about the origin of UFOs that has been operative since the beginning of the modern UFO era is the extraterrestrial hypothesis (or ETH). It may be right. Perhaps incredibly advanced off-world technology can account for all the bewildering data. But I tend to doubt it. I'll wager that the ETH is only partially right, at best...if it's correct at all. There are other possibilities that may be harder to wrap our heads around, but closer to the truth. I want to chase one of those possibilities in this paper.

When I wrote my dissertation, I tried very hard to be sympathetic to UFO experiencers of all stripes without betraying the self-negating objectivity that the scholarly world demanded of me...and the threshold for what could be perceived as a lack of objectivity was pretty low. My advisor, for instance, was horrified at my merely mentioning the barest facts about the Roswell incident in one mid-sized paragraph. He said that to mention it at all made me sound like too much of a "believer." I knew I could not let my personal biases show, whether for or against UFO reality, much less could I offer any opinions about what UFOs might be if they were real, but the Roswell thing really shocked me. Clearly the river of denial in academia ran more deeply than I had imagined, and I tried hard to keep my "freak flag" safely folded up and out of sight.

But now I'd like to flaunt my biases and run a freaky thought or two up the flagpole. The following ideas are just speculative thoughts, not something I'm willing to go to the stake for. They are *informed* by what science tells us about Reality, but they are *shaped* by what 70+ years of modern UFO encounters have suggested to us. This is, in a way, the final chapter of my book—the chapter that I couldn't have written in 2001 even if I'd had the conceptual tools and intellectual freedom to do so.

My book outlined the history of human encounters with and reactions to the UFO phenomenon, exploring the two main interpretive frameworks that had been used within the UFO community to understand what was going on: science

and religion.

If the UFO myth has done nothing else in the twentieth century, it has crystallized within itself the language and praxis of a scientific modernity along with the myths and symbols of an ancient and venerable human quest that first found a home in religion. It is a quest that in all times and ages has taken the more astute, the more persistent, or the more fortunate to the edges of reality—to the ends of our cognitive maps (and further), to the mystical margins that are said to join this world with a World Beyond.... "The study of UFOs is an opportunity to move toward a new reality, a means of increasing the borders of our awareness. The edge of reality is also the edge of knowledge. But beyond this edge is another science and another knowledge" (Denzler 2001, 159; embedded quote Hynek and Vallée 1975, 263).

Jeffrey Kripal has observed that "an author of the impossible is someone who has ceased to live, think, and imagine only in the left brain, who has worked hard and long to synchronize the two forms of consciousness and identity and bring them both online together" (Kripal 2010, 270). To the rollcall of that other science and that other knowledge toward which UFOs beckon us, I have an (im-)possible response: "Yes. I'm here."

## 1. Alternative theories about the nature of UFOs

There are a number of reasons to doubt the ETH as an explanation for UFOs, ranging from the odd behavior of the anomalies themselves<sup>3</sup> to the even odder (though more readily understandable) behavior of the U.S. government, which has simultaneously promoted and debunked the idea almost from the outset.<sup>4</sup> If the government seems to be more than a little evasive and manipulative when it comes to dealing with the subject of UFOs (and it does), the phenomenon in and of itself seems to be pretty much a carnival fun house in its own right.

2 Over the years, this has become a more popular position with a number of students of the UFO phenomenon. John Alexander, for instance, has also observed, "Clearly there is no single theory that will explain the totality of such complex events" (Alexander 2011, 269). Similarly, "even if some UAP turn out to be attributable to extraterrestrial civilizations, others may yet have a more mysterious and even unfathomable nature" (Lomas and Case 2023, 616).

3 For specific arguments against the ETH, see Vallée 1988, pp. 85-86, 99, 133, 161, 191, 259, 294, 297, 325-326, and Chapter 9; as well as Vallée 1990. The chorus of thoughtful people rejecting the ETH has grown over the years to include, for example, Kastrup 2023.

4 For an excellent treatment of the government's role in seeding the UFO subculture with disinformation, see Hansen 2001, esp. Chapter 18. See also Fawcett and Greenwood 1984; Haines 1997; and Gorightly 2021.

The craft go faster and fly higher than any technology we've had on Earth since the dawn of the modern UFO era in June 1947. They seem to deliberately toy with anything we can put in the air to try to track them. They go from sea to air and back again seamlessly, so even if we could go as fast as they do, we might not be able to follow them. They execute maneuvers that defy the laws of physics as we know them and would pulverize a human body: they change direction on a dime, disappear instantly into thin air, or sail with impunity into the sides of solid mountains. They change shape and color before our eyes. They may leave traces on the nearby environment or may fail to show up on radar screens or film no matter how experienced the photographer or fancy the equipment. They may disgorge beings that look a lot like us, or like insects or reptiles or robots (humanoid and otherwise). They can injure witnesses, or heal them (and their pets) of both chronic and acute health conditions. They may or may not come to us when beckoned, while indisputably showing themselves to unsuspecting people who never thought they'd see a UFO. As if this weren't enough, in many cases paranormal events like poltergeist disturbances occur in the wake of UFO sightings<sup>5</sup> or psychic gifts may blossom in the experiencers.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing what to make of the phenomenon when you strip it down to basic behavioral traits like these is tricky. The ETH begins to seem like just "a tidy explanation for a grossly untidy phenomenon" (Cutchin 2015, 23). It is clearly not "strange enough to fit the facts" of UFO behavior (Vallée 1988, 325). Over the decades, a number of other ideas that try to account for some of that untidiness have been championed. They break down into three main branches of thought about the possible provenance of UFOs.

## 2. Other theories about UFOs

### 1. Material-based, namely:

Pure ETH (1947, on)

- A. Ancient astronauts: a tangent of the ETH (e.g., Alexander Kazantsev 1946; Brinsley Le Poer Trench

- 1960; Paul Misraki 1962; W. Raymond Drake 1964; Erik von Däniken 1968; Zechariah Sitchin 1976; Robert Temple 1976; Richard Dolan 2020)
- B. Atmospheric animals (e.g., Trevor Constable 1958, 1976; Bruce MacEvoy 2024)
- C. Prior earth civilizations
- i. Silurian Hypothesis: underground or underwater, hidden remnants of a long-defunct prior civilization on Earth (e.g., proposed *sans* UFO component in 2018 by astrophysicists Adam Frank and Gavin Schmidt; upgraded to consider UFO phenomena by Bernardo Kastrup in 2023)
  - ii. Crypto-terrestrials—quasi-extinct creatures (who may long ago have lost robust fitness for their evolutionary niche), a few of whom linger on (e.g., Mac Tonnies 2010)
- D. Our progeny from far into the future (e.g., Michael Masters 2019)

### 2. Psycho-social based, namely:

Projections individually or collectively created due to intrapsychic or social stressors (numerous authors).

- E. Archetypes (e.g., Carl Jung 1957 )
- F. Tulpas

### 3. Non-material, characterized variously as:

- G. Cryptids—animal-like creatures that move between our Earth-based reality and some other realm or condition
- H. Faeries
- I. Demons/angels (most conservative/evangelical Christians)
- J. Djinn
- K. Deities
- L. Interdimensionals/ultraterrestrials (Hynek and Vallée 1975; Keel 1970, 1971, 1975; Vallée 1970; Madden 2023)

The first is materialist/mechanistic, conceptualizing the craft and the intelligences behind them as thoroughly corporeal. The ETH is the chief expression of this way of

5 The link between UFO sightings and subsequent psychic/paranormal activity has been recognized for decades. John Keel had begun to make the connection by the mid-1960s. He pointed it out as early as 1970 in *Operation Trojan Horse*, and subsequently in 1971 (esp. p. 126), in 1975 (esp. pp. 116, 156). The paranormal aspects of UFO events also began to shift the thinking of Vallée and Hynek by the 1970s. See their *The Edge of Reality*. Also see Vallée 1975, esp. Chapter 1; and Vallée 1988, esp. Chapter 6. More recently, see Hall 2001, 543-546; Ouellet 2015; Lacastski, Kelleher, and Knapp 2021, esp. Chapters 6, 9, and 16; and Coulthart 2021.

6 I met Mary Beth Wrenn at a local UFO group meeting, well before she assumed the mantle of being a professional psychic. She told me that she had been abducted by aliens and had begun to have psychic abilities. Later that day she used those abilities to tell me that I would complete my Ph.D. under totally different circumstances than the ones I was then enmeshed within. I was certain she was wrong. A number of years later I was cleaning out my files, and I ran across the field notes I had made that day. I was surprised to realize that everything Mary Beth told me had happened...without any machinations from me.

thinking about our aerial anomalies, which is usually the foundational assumption behind ancient astronaut theories as well. Other proposed materialist approaches have included the idea that UFOs might be from our human future or might be remnants of long-defunct hominid civilizations on earth that pre-dated the ascendancy of homo sapiens.

The second approach is psycho-social, focusing on UFOs as, essentially, mirrors of humanity. Under this schema, UFOs are cognitive and perceptual phenomena that we unwittingly create or tricks that we unconsciously play on ourselves. UFOs, in short, mainly tell us about us. Ultimately the questions addressed with this approach can be fruitful in providing insights into human beings and our cultures, but tend to obscure or obliterate the independent ontological status of the UFOs themselves.

The third approach to understanding UFOs and their occupants posits their natural home as a coterminous reality that extends beyond, but is “near,” our three (or four) experienced dimensions. The idea that an inhabited alternate reality exists can be traced back to our earliest ancestors, who periodically reported meeting entities from that region. The idea of there being an alternate reality as well as the idea that it is inhabited have been erased from the canons of the acceptable in the last few hundred years, largely through the rise of science and its favorite son, technology, as well as the emergence of modernity in general...but they have never completely died out. With the arrival of the “flying saucers,” the idea of alternate realities has begun to be revived, but this time with a faint imprimatur of scientific respectability.

### 3. My hypothesis in a nutshell

Science’s strictly materialist foundational assumptions about reality have abstracted out any idea of a non-material reality—or at least, any meaningful idea of one. We are left with a thoroughly material world, but (and this is key) one that is dynamic and not static. It changes, and those changes appear just by chance to have a point: greater complexity. We call this process “evolution.” Materialist science has tended to implicitly (if not explicitly) conceptualize the highest achievement of evolution on our planet as the creation of biological life. Out of that drive toward life, increasingly complex forms have arisen, until consciousness itself became

manifest in the workings of the material brain. The highest instantiation of consciousness, science implicitly suggests, is humanity.<sup>7</sup>

Many scientists and scholars, however, have come to believe that consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of the material brain but exists somehow “conjunct” the brain yet not strictly “from” it. Physicians prominent in the neurosciences like Eben Alexander and Marjorie Wollacott, for instance, have abandoned a materialist approach to consciousness. Scholars in the humanities and social sciences also raise objections and propose alternatives to the materialist approach to this most central attribute of being human. The political scientist Alexander Wendt, for example, adopts the idea that consciousness may be a fundamental macroscopic quantum trait of the universe in relationship to which human beings are “walking wave functions” (Wendt 2015).

The physicist Paul Davies also believes that consciousness “is a fundamental feature of the universe”—not just of human beings. Because it is everywhere, he says, we can expect consciousness to have evolved in places other than Earth (Davies 1995, 124-129). It evolved, he says, because the entire universe has a “mathematical unity” to it that self-organizes toward consciousness. It’s not just a universe of overlapping events and processes that are essentially unrelated.

The reason we can understand this mathematical unity, says Davies, is because the ability to do so is hardwired into the human brain. These brain structures allow us to use math to become aware of the fundamental order lying beneath the surface of things, including the order that “permit[s] matter to self-organize to the point where consciousness emerges” in creatures like us (Davies 1995, 127). The incredible thing about all this is that the ability to think in the complex mathematical terms necessary most likely developed within us long ago, *before* we needed to use it, and especially before we needed to do abstract advanced mathematics. After all, he writes, “Mathematics is not something that you find lying around in your back yard.... [It’s] very, very far removed from everyday affairs” (*Ibid.*, 127).

In other words, Davies believes that the physical laws of the universe have a mathematical organization that has led to the evolution of consciousness and to mathematically gifted

<sup>7</sup> This depiction of evolution is bare-bones and simplistic, and there are various nuances, by-ways, and complexities that the theory has taken over the years—too many to mention here. Chance seems to play a significant role and consciousness sits at the apex of the evolutionary chain of being and becoming. It’s the most important (and vexing) thing to be explained. I am indebted to anthropologist Maya Cowan for pointing out to me that my short riff on evolution suggests its intentional progression toward an end. In truth, biological anthropologists do not see evolution as having any kind of intentional rationale. Rather, they view it as tending to confer survival advantage (or not) in any given ecological niche, but that conferment is without intention. It’s just the way the system works. The end result on this planet so far is consciousness. Intelligence. Sentience.

minds. Those mathematical gifts evolved and persisted in human brains long before they were ever needed...or used. When they were finally employed, they ultimately allowed us to think in sufficiently complex ways to look “backward” in time and understand the laws that resulted in us. Unlike many other attributes of brain and (arguably) even of consciousness in the animal world, the ability to do complex math is a tool that appears to be unique to humanity.

I would ask, however, what if the human ability to do abstract, advanced math is a tool built into our brains that does not *only* allow us to look *backward* to discover the basic laws of the universe that allowed our brains and ultimately consciousness to be? What if this is also a tool that could enable us to look “*forward*” to understand something about consciousness in the universe *as it may have evolved outside the human species*? What if we are not at the peak of the evolutionary chain that has produced consciousness? What if we are not at the peak just in terms of consciousness here on earth, never mind the entire cosmos? What if, instead, we are close to the middle or even the bottom end of earth’s evolution-of-consciousness chain of events, and there are other forms of consciousness that have evolved “beyond” us?<sup>8</sup> Can we use consciousness at our level of attainment as well as our mathematical gifts to understand what might be evidence of such beings and figure out some of their essential traits?

Furthermore, what if evolution in our little corner of the universe was not limited to the three- (or four-)dimensional reality that life forms like human beings live within and can easily understand? What if there are dimensions of reality that we do not experience—at least, not on a daily basis? The discipline of physics (much of it, if not all) theorizes that there are other dimensions of which we are not normally aware that are more or less right “beside”—or better yet, “interwoven with”—what we experience. Physicists have tentatively mapped their nature and speculated about what reality would look like from within them. Assuming that in one sense or another they do exist, is there any necessary reason why the processes of evolution, including the evolution of consciousness, would have been limited to our three dimensions rather than operating in all that are available?

I suggest as a working hypothesis:

- That multi-dimensionality is a salient quality of this part of the cosmos we call “Earth”;
- That the forces of evolution operate on all available levels;
- That non-human life forms exhibiting both intelligence and consciousness may have evolved here and call Earth home;<sup>9</sup>
- That the intelligence(s) behind UFOs may be example(s) of such life forms;
- That if they are, then given the reported appearance of most of them they may constitute a branch of the primate family tree, since that seems to be the branch in 3D that has evolved the most complex forms of intelligence and consciousness;
- That they may have evolved into (or within) a dimensional evolutionary niche that is different from but not far removed from the 3D;
- That just as there are multiple kinds of 3D life on Earth, with varying morphologies and kinds and levels of intelligence, so there may be multiple kinds of beyond-3D life on Earth;
- That because they co-inhabit this planet with us, we have interacted with these life forms and come to know them by various names over the millennia; and
- In some cases, we have formed close relationships with them.

UFOs (and possibly the non-human intelligences [NHI] described by other names throughout history) might be explained by all of the above. Knowledge of their existence is something that was held before the Enlightenment, expunged by the ascendancy of rigid materialism as the default worldview behind science, nevertheless clung to and preserved by indigenous cultures, by occult seekers of a variety of stripes, and by experiencers of the anomalous around the world, and is just beginning to be re-imagined. The UFO subculture has been at the forefront of that re-imagining. The U.S. government seems to be trying to catch up, with its recent admission that UFOs are real after all (though there has been some careful hedging-about of that admission subsequently) (Cooper, Blumenthal, and Kean 2017). But

8 In making these connections I am indebted to two forward-thinking scholars of the UFO phenomenon: religious studies professor Diana Pasulka (2023, 32-33), who has observed that ability to conceptualize and understand UFOs may require a more advanced kind of mathematics (also see Pasulka 2019), and Michael Masters (2019), a biological anthropologist who uses evolutionary theory to posit that at least some of the entities associated with UFOs may be our distant relatives.

9 Kenneth Arnold’s opinion about what the UFOs were that he had sighted went from “military vehicles” at the time to “possibly extraterrestrial” by late July of that year to “most likely native to this Earth” fifteen years later (Clelland 2018, 55).

to create a bit of linguistic distance between what is now sanctioned as legitimate in contradistinction to what has gone before, the government has given the phenomenon a shiny new name: unidentified anomalous/aerial phenomena (UAP).

## 4. Breaking it down

### 4.1 The dimensions

Once upon a time, almost all human beings believed in the existence of invisible realities that were occupied by various forms of life (fairies, gods, jinn, elementals, demons, angels...) with varying degrees of apparent intelligence. Then came Sir Isaac Newton, his contemporaries, and his successors, and the conceptual world—at least for most intellectual elites in Euro-centric society and its dominions—began to be defined in much narrower, mechanistic, materialist terms.<sup>10</sup>

As many ideas circulating among elite thought-leaders tend to do, the materialist way of understanding reality slowly diffused among the less-educated masses, becoming a central belief of those who considered themselves to be rational and well-informed. Reality was conceptualized as one measurable thing, and it was Newtonian in nature. The gifts this worldview bestowed via technological innovations served to reinforce the truth and value of this approach.<sup>11</sup> Though by the 19th century there were some who used mathematics (a respectable and accepted route to scientific knowledge) to “reimagine transcendence and revitalize theistic beliefs,” including a belief in invisible dimensions, most scientists were not only *not* convinced but downright appalled at such a “credulous and simple-minded” use of the science of their day (White 2014, 1483; see also White 2018). Nevertheless, the scientific narrative about reality did not govern all thought. As Christopher White points out,

Mathematical truths, like religious truths, had long been considered ways of seeing beyond the shadowy phenomenal world to the highest realities beyond them.... Not every scientist and mathematician gave up on otherworldly realities and

ways of conceptualizing or envisioning them (White 2014, 1483, 1484).<sup>12</sup>

When unseen realities finally re-emerged from the outer darkness where a materialist science had tried to banish them, it was for one primary reason: things didn't make sense without them. Mathematical things.

The theory of relativity and development of quantum mechanics forever changed the face of a Newtonian understanding of the world. As theoreticians chased the revelations provided by advanced mathematics, the equations didn't make sense without the inclusion of unseen realities, i.e., other dimensions. The exact nature of those dimensions has not been nailed down yet, but theories range from multiverses where everything that can happen DOES happen, to universes composed of varying finite numbers of dimensions. We don't see the dimensions beyond our 3 or 4, they say, because the rest are rolled up into extremely tiny, impenetrable pinpoints of energy. There is no tangible evidence for them, they explain, but the math tells us that they exist.

That doesn't keep physicists, however, from trying to imagine what they are like and how we might perceive them if we bumped up against them in our 3D/4D window onto reality. Of particular interest is the dimension conceptualized as “closest” to our familiar 3D reality—the 5th dimension. Scientists using the Large Hadron Collider are trying to coax sub-atomic particles to manifest to us from the reality next door in the form of gravitons. Physicists aren't certain that gravitons exist, but if they can be found they would be evidence for the reality of a 5th dimension.

For the rest of us who would like to know more about these dimensions but don't have enough room on our credit cards to buy a collider, we're left to try to imagine what we would perceive if something from the dimension next door became observable in our 3D/4D world. Some physicists think that “ripples or fluctuations in the 5th dimension [would] appear as light or even particles in our reality.” Whatever we could perceive would no doubt appear distorted or wavy, because we'd be seeing, in effect, “shadows” from the

10 The fact that Newton and a number of his contemporaries were also alchemists, students of the kabbalah, etc., is not normally mentioned alongside the facts of their discoveries and ideas with regard to the material world. For an excellent account of the development of science into an era-defining way of relating to reality, see Shapin 1996.

11 An idea that complicates the straightforward picture I am trying to paint, here, is that our “technology is not generated by humans but is somehow derived supernaturally, as a gift from either gods or non-humans” (Pasulka 2023; cited in Madden 2023, 112). The key point is not just the physical changes in our society that technology causes, but the changes in our relationship to each other, the world, and the cosmos that technology induces (Tonnie 2010, 121).

12 I strongly suspect (but of course cannot prove) that this reticence to reject the idea of higher realities was at least partly due to some scientists and mathematicians, just like some commoners, having personal experience(s) with what Jeffrey Kripal calls, the super-natural. See the corpus of Kripal's work starting with 2010, 2011, 2019, 2022, 2024, and Kripal and Strieber 2016.

other dimension. Imagine our 3D reality to be a swimming pool, they say, and human beings are creatures who live out their lives underwater. We might not be able to see the ripples that form at the surface of the water (ripples from the 5D world), but we would be able to see a wavy, distorted shadow of the ripples on the bottom of the pool (Hickey 2024).<sup>13</sup> We are never likely to be able to [directly] see or understand what 5D reality is like, say physicists, unless “some [other]-dimensional life-form pulls us from our three-dimensional Spaceland and gives us a view of the world from its perspective” (Groleau 2003).

I suggest that perhaps this is exactly what UAPs have been giving us: a glimpse into another level of reality. As any good UAP sighting database would confirm, their manifestations in our world could be described in exactly these terms.

- They often appear as balls of light;
- When they appear as particles, though, it’s not just at the sub-atomic or atomic level like the hypothetical graviton. They appear as solid structures that are visible to the unaided human eye, trackable on radar, and capable of leaving physical traces;
- Sometimes they change shape or seem to split into many or merge into one, all of which might be expected of a 5D object manifesting in 3D/4D reality;<sup>14</sup>
- Their points of entry or departure sometimes appear in our reality as exactly these kinds of wavy, distorted areas;
- They (or their non-human intelligent [NHI] occupants) have lifted hapless human beings into disorienting settings that may be within their reality.

As Leslie Kean has observed, UAPs operate as if they were “outside the boundaries of our physical world but *in it* at

the same time” (2011, p. 102). Perhaps it’s because they are.

## 4.2 The non-human intelligences

Michael Masters is a biological anthropologist with an intriguing theory about UAPs. In greatly condensed form, his basic argument is that the ETH has significant problems when accounting for UAPs and their reported occupants. The bipedal, big-brained, intelligent species that is humanity is “a physiological form that is not likely to evolve on a separate planet elsewhere in the universe” (Masters 2019, 63, see also 65, 69). In particular, walking upright evolved among our proto-human ancestors about 6-8 million years ago, he writes. It has led to a number of changes in our shape and neurology, and it would be unlikely to have happened in a closely similar way on other life-supporting planets due to environmental (e.g., gravitational) differences between those planets and Earth. Any other species on Earth that is similarly bipedal is the result of “similar [evolutionary] problems resulting in similar solutions, in similar environments” (*Ibid.*, 69). We are thus more likely to share traits (physiological and cognitive) with creatures that have evolved within this Earth environment than we are to share traits with extraterrestrials. The fact that the NHIs behind UAPs share our basic morphology in a number of key respects suggests that they could be what humanity looks like in our distant evolutionary future. UAP occupants, suggests Masters, may be our descendants. They could be our kids.<sup>15</sup>

Another clue in support of this relationship, Masters points out, lies in how we communicate. The physiology of communication as it might have evolved in some extraterrestrial species could be so far removed from the norms on Earth as to make mutual understanding extremely difficult. These likely hurdles extend to the cognitive and symbolic aspects of language, which could be even more

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Hickey (2024) for this simple explanation of what 5D might look like to us. For a survey of the many worlds hypothesis at a lay level of understanding, see Byrne (2008).

<sup>14</sup> For the classic treatment of how objects familiar to us in 3D might appear in 1D or 2D worlds, see Abbott (1884, repr. 2012). Abbott is commonly referred to as a theologian, but during his university years he did prize-winning work in (you guessed it) mathematics, as well. The fictitious author of the book, “A Square,” gives this dedication to the story (emphasis mine):

This Work is Dedicated  
By a Humble Native of Flatland  
In the Hope that  
Even as he was Initiated into the Mysteries  
Of THREE Dimensions  
Having been previously conversant  
With ONLY TWO  
So the Citizens of that Celestial Region  
May aspire yet higher and higher  
To the Secrets of FOUR FIVE OR EVEN SIX Dimensions....

In light of this, I hope I am not far off in thinking that Abbott would find commendable my own enlarged imagination herein.

<sup>15</sup> See Masters 2019, chapter 8 in particular for an explanation of the biological evolution of these future humans into the forms reported today by UFO experiencers.

divergent from Earth norms (*Ibid.*, 84-85). There are 6,000 to 7,000 different languages spoken on this planet, and any human can potentially learn any of them. The reason, Masters says, is because we are a single species and share certain basic biological and perceptual skills (*Ibid.*, 85). Interestingly, UAP reports from around the world all say that the entities communicate in the experiencer's native language. While an off-world NHI might have extreme difficulty doing so, "future humans would have a much easier time communicating with us in their own past [i.e., our present], as a result of cultural continuity and our shared history on the same planet" (*Ibid.*, 88).

Masters' theory is thought-provoking. When I considered his evolutionary perspective together with the other pieces of evidence about UAP behavior, however, I came up with a slightly different scenario. Is it possible that the majority of UAP occupants are a branch of the evolutionary tree here on earth that split off from the early primate branch at some point in the long-ago past and went on to develop and evolve into its own niche in the local dimensional environment? That local environment does not stop with the 3D, physical world as we experience it. But the niche into which they evolved (the 5<sup>th</sup>?) is close enough to our own 3D niche that they can move between it and ours when they choose to and in doing so become visible to us. Ergo, at times they seem physical, but then they (to our senses) suddenly "disappear" as they go back to their own niche.<sup>16</sup> Their ability to speak to us in our many native languages would come from the fact that they have lived and moved among us for eons and had ample opportunity to track our development and learn our languages.

This is admittedly all speculative, and Masters has done the heavy theoretical lifting. I'm simply tweaking his work and making a slightly different assumption about dimensionality. Whereas Masters proposes that time travel is possible (counting "time" as another dimension), I propose that reality includes other dimensions beyond the fourth one of time and that given the right know-how they may be traversable.

More and more students of the UAP phenomenon are suspecting that the NHIs behind the UAPs are locals—not off-worlders. If this is true, there are currently at least three

attempts to account for how they came to be here with us. One is some form of the Silurian Hypothesis, which posits the entities as remnants of a humanoid race that existed on earth and then met disaster at some point in the pre-history of *homo sapiens* (Kastrup 2004; also Tonnie's 2010; Lomas, Case, and Masters 2024), one is Masters' Time Traveling Progeny Hypothesis, and another is my own Distant Cousins from Next Door Hypothesis. As Mac Tonnie's has observed, "Alien contact—whatever 'alien' might ultimately mean—might be what the process of evolution looks like to the human mind" (2010, 18).

### 4.3 Their interests

Why these NHIs are manifesting themselves on Earth (or in our 3D/4D segment of it) can only be guessed at by looking at how they have conducted themselves and what they say to the people they interact with (assuming their standards of truth-telling are no worse than our own,<sup>17</sup> and making allowances for the foibles of human memory). There seem to be three major rationales proposed for their presence: general environmental study, research into human biology and reproduction, and alarm over human behavior.

*Environment:* As Vallée has observed, UAP occupants are forever seen digging around in the dirt, collecting samples of soil, vegetation, and who-knows-what-else. This gives them the appearance of being scientists and explorers. Vallée thinks they've been doing these things far longer than any normal scientific project would take, which militates against their being ETs. But perhaps his vision in this regard is too anthropocentric. Perhaps the repetition reflects a scientific endeavor with a longitudinal study design that staggers the imagination of relatively short-lived humans. If they are indeed engaged in some sort of study, they may not be physical scientists. Masters suggests they could be archeologists and anthropologists from the future coming back in time to do field work on the lives and times of their forebears (i.e., us) (Masters 2019, 90). Perhaps, I would suggest, they could be engaged in a field of scientific endeavor that humanity has yet to define for itself, so their actions seem nonsensical to us. Or as a friend has suggested, perhaps they

16 For what it is worth, some UAP entities now claim that they come from the same place that experiencers do (Hall 2001, 531, 532, 541, 553-554, 559). There are several ways to think about the fact that in the contactee era the UAP entities claimed to be from space but in more modern times have also claimed an origin on Earth. They could have been lying earlier, lying today, or there could be more than one group appearing in our skies. As Mac Tonnie's points out, "[W]e should never believe what the others tell us without taking into account their obvious need for secrecy" (2010, p. 99). For now, their claims about where they come from are simply data points to consider.

17 Tonnie's suggests that we should not necessarily buy hook-line-and-sinker what the UFO occupants tell us, because they seem to have a need for secrecy and may shape what they say in order to remain a bit of a mystery to us (2010, pp. 24, 99; see also pp. 66-67).



are gathering samples as part of a terra-forming project on some other planet.<sup>18</sup>

In truth, however, I tend to side with Vallée. The nature of this repetitive activity makes me wonder if it's all just a show—a part of the choreography of their manifesting themselves to us in non-threatening ways. According to Ardy Sixkiller Clarke's informants, American Indian traditions say they've been doing these kinds of things on Earth for thousands of years (Clarke 2012, loc. 387, 1678.). Similarly the NHIs who abducted Herbert Schirmer in 1967 told him they were engaged in a slow “reveal” campaign to prepare the way for eventual open contact. They purposely contacted people at random so as not to reveal too much of a pattern, they told Schirmer. They want to keep us confused so we won't get too upset as we gradually get used to their presence (Hall 2001, 531; Lindeman n.d.). In other words, “You should believe in us some, but not too much” (Lear 2020).

*Biology:* They also seem to have a fascination with human reproduction. Betty and Barney Hill were famously subjected to procedures during their 1961 abduction that had something to do with their reproductive systems. Indeed, the NHIs seen by Schirmer told him that “they had a ‘breeding analysis’ program and had been observing Earth for a long time” (Lindeman n.d.).

In the era of the abductees, biological/reproductive manipulations became one of the defining features of close encounters. The rationale for this, however, continues to be a matter of debate. It has lost all semblance of being anything so neutral as a matter of mere “analysis” on the part of the entities and has taken on more questionable—even ominous—overtones of genetic manipulation or even infiltration of the human race (Jacobs 1998; *ibid.* 2015; Hopkins 1987; *ibid.* 1996; Hopkins and Rainey 2003). Some of Clarke's informants have said that the entities they encountered were not the tribal Star Nations and ancestors of yore but a new group of entities who were interested in inserting themselves into the human population through genetic engineering of their own species using materials taken from humans they abducted (Clarke 2012, 160-169).

*Human Welfare:* The NHIs behind the UAPs have long been thought to be coming here to help humanity. In the early decades of the post-WWII era, the messages contactees and other kinds of close encounter experiencers shared

from the beings concentrated heavily on the danger of nuclear weapons. The pattern of UAP sightings over the decades verifies that they have a keen interest in our nuclear technology, especially our nuclear weapons. This is not a benign, observational interest. In fact, there have been multiple instances where UFOs have been sighted above nuclear missile installations at the same time that every single missile went offline—a situation that these facilities are designed to prevent happening (Hastings 2017, especially chapter 10; Hancock, Porritt, and Grosvenor 2023). At other times, their presence has occurred at the same time that nuclear weapons facilities went into “launch” mode for a short time without any human operator giving the necessary instructions to make that happen (Alexander 2011, 171-172). In a similar vein, it is not unusual for them to render missiles aboard fighter jets unable to launch or handheld guns unable to be fired (Clarke 2010, 20-21, 197; Alexander 2011, 33-34).

I think this is a key to understanding who they are and why they are seen so often. It's not that from some distant vantage point in space they saw us explode a nuclear device and came on over to investigate and caution us. Rather, the issue is that they live here in these close cosmic environs with us, and our nuclear capability is a threat to their existence... not just our own. In one sense, these NHIs and their interest in us are nothing new. UAPs and various types of non-material entities have featured in human history (mythic history, at the very least) for quite a long time, and still do for members of religious traditions (Vallée 1969; Vallée and Aubeck 2009).<sup>19</sup> In another sense, however, there is something new about what's happening with UAPs today.

Within one month in 1945, humanity exploded three nuclear devices (at Alamogordo, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki) in a wartime setting. Within a couple of days of the last bomb, a strange object appeared in the skies over the Trinity test site and by all accounts crashed (Vallée and Harris 2021). The wartime use of nukes was followed by two nuclear detonations (tests) conducted by the U.S. during relative peace in 1946 (Wikipedia 2024, “List” and “Nuclear”). In 1948, the US military created a plan to send nuclear missiles to 30 different cities in the Soviet Union if an attack were ever ordered by the president (Hastings 2017, 219.) This suggests that we either had enough warhead-capped missiles to do so or could quickly have had the necessary number.

18 My thanks to my friend Tom Davis for drawing my attention to this idea.

19 For contemporary treatments of non-material entities that some see as forerunners of the modern UFO, also see Keel (1970); Harpur (1994); Purkiss (2000); and Lomas and Case (2023).

By December 1948, UAPs were being seen regularly near the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Sandia Base in Albuquerque (*Ibid.*, 38).

Note that while UAPs have a track record of shutting down nuclear missile silos, shooting down test rockets (Cooper 2023; also NICAP n.d.; Alexander 2011, 168-172; and Hastings 2017), and even disabling weapons on military aircraft and simple handheld guns, they did NOT anticipate Hiroshima and Nagasaki and prevent that carnage. They did NOT prevent us from using nuclear weapons to commit actual violence. Did they not know in advance that this was our intent? Did they not care? It's hard to know. After we had demonstrated our intent, however, they seemed to take notice.

Are they really here to try to save us from ourselves? Are they an altruistic lot, when all is said and done? Maybe. But note the areas of interest that they seem to focus upon. The danger of messing around with breaking apart atoms was their first and strongest area of concern. In more recent decades, as the nuclear threat has diminished somewhat, they have begun to focus their warnings on environmental degradation. The reason for this new global interest is not supported by their behavior, however. While they are seen surprisingly often at nuclear sites, they aren't reported hovering very often near toxin-laden Superfund sites on land or the floating garbage islands in the Pacific Ocean.

Let's bracket the idea that they are just being altruistic and look instead at what they might have to gain by what they say and what they do.<sup>20</sup> Engaging in a bit of speculation as to why they have an interest in the ecology of our 3D reality might lead us into some dark places when considered alongside their apparent genetic interest in human beings. Since the actual evidence for their having such a genetic program is exceedingly thin, however, we can only speculate, which does us little good. On the other hand, when it comes to our nuclear capabilities, our reasoning about the interest of the NHIs can be less opaque because the evidence for that interest, in terms of behaviors that we can track, is much more substantial. Their words match their deeds.

It has been noted in the past that the messages from these NHIs seem to be copycatting whatever our current social concerns are in a given time period. The implication is that UAPs and their occupants are just projections of our collective angst. They deliver, as if from outside us,

messages that we are trying to tell ourselves. This is one of the observations about UAP behavior used to support psycho-social theories about their origin.

However, human angst over the last 70+ years has covered a lot more ground than nuclear fears and environmental concerns. Yet you never hear these NHIs talking about social justice issues, or inflation and recession, or political shenanigans, or the rapid rise in rates of obesity worldwide, or the benefits and dangers of artificial intelligence, or cancer and other scourges, or hunger in technological and developing nations alike, or the increase in gun violence...all issues of concern for the welfare of humanity. If UAPs and their occupants are really just our own projections onto the cosmos, the narrow range of their reported interests compared to the wide range of human concerns needs to be explained.

The record so far shows that UAP occupants have a fairly narrow range of issues that they speak about with those they contact. Those issues almost exclusively show an ongoing concern for one or two things in human society that, if they share this earth with us, conceivably might directly impact their own lives. For the first time in history, human beings have the capability to impact our shared environment in massively negative ways. And this matters to them. Unlike the whales and sparrows and prairie dogs and all other forms of life in our 3D/4D world that cannot advocate for their own preservation by trying to get humans to adjust their behaviors, the NHIs associated with UAPs can—and apparently do. Maybe the reason we see them as often as we do is because they're patrolling the neighborhood to try to make sure humanity doesn't turn it into a wasteland?

#### 4.4 Our relationship with them

There have been numerous theories about the ways in which UAP entities might have interacted with humanity down through history (from ancient times until today). One set of theories is that extraterrestrial NHIs were involved in the biological evolution of *homo sapiens*.<sup>21</sup> Another set explains the creation of great monuments and temples as aided by extraterrestrial knowledge and technology, if not in fact being the direct result of their efforts. Most of these theories have been discounted as giving too little credit to the natural

20 Tonnies also believes that the NHIs may not be especially altruistic (2010, p. 86).

21 Most recently, Harvard astronomer Avi Loeb suggested that human evolution really might have had a "nudge" along the way from beings he conceives of as extraterrestrials. At least, he maintains, the idea should not be dismissed out of hand (2021, 168). Also note this from Pulitzer Prize finalist Garrett Graff: "Maybe...this is all less of a leap than we think...our evolution was more preordained and automatic than we currently believe" (2023, 419-420).

processes of evolution and to the growing ingenuity and talent of our species over time.

However, the ideas are “sticky.” They persist in the UAP community and seem to percolate into the thinking of more and more people as time goes on, with suitable adjustments in terms of just who our proposed benefactors were. Whether these ideas about ancient alien STEM will one day help to structure a new revolution in scientific thought remains to be seen. In the meantime, I would like to think about a different and important aspect of human life in the context of a multi-dimensional neighborhood cosmos with intelligent beings populating it. I want to think about humanity’s religious beliefs and behaviors.

In October 2017 a foreign object was discovered traveling through our solar system. As astronomers worldwide rushed to figure out what it was before it disappeared back into the depths of space, they found that it defied the laws of physics governing the movement of things like asteroids and comets. It was, some suspected, a technological rather than a natural thing—a mechanical stand-in for our first confirmed interstellar visitors. The many conversations that have ensued about this wanderer “often veer into the religious,” says Avi Loeb, a professor of astronomy at Harvard University who was involved in the discovery (2021, 153). It’s not an unusual reaction to encounters with an unexpected “other” that fall outside the parameters of the known.

In 1973, the chair of the physics department at Southeast Missouri State, Harley Rutledge, assembled equipment and a college-educated team of observers to track and try to explain (away) a series of UAP sightings that had been occurring in the area. It was the first scientific field study of its kind, and the findings were not at all what everyone expected. His first unmistakable encounter with a UAP left him in awe:

A great wave of excitement overwhelmed me. Never had I experienced such exhilaration. UFOs really exist. And I was an eyewitness! ... [Later that night] I slowly succumbed to sleep, believing that my life would never be the same.... For more than a year, as I approached that particular episode during public lectures, I had difficulty dealing with the emotion it stirred. Even now, the impact of the experience may surface without warning (Rutledge 1981, 43-47).

As the immediate psychological impact wore off, Rutledge thought about what had happened.

More was involved than the measurement of physical properties of UFOs by dispassionate observers. A relationship, a cognizance, between us and the UFO intelligence evolved. A game was played.... In this Project, we dealt with an intelligence equal to or greater than that of man.... In my opinion, this additional consideration is more important than the measurements or establishing that the phenomenon exists. This facet of the UFO phenomenon perturbed me as much as the advanced technology we observed. It is a facet I cannot really fathom—and I have thought about it every day for more than seven years (*Ibid.*, 23-33, 236).<sup>22</sup>

As Loeb noted, reactions to encounters with NHI—whether in person or via what appear to be their artifacts—often go beyond simple awe and veer into frank religiosity. For instance:

In officially atheistic, communist Russia, a 1965 spate of UAP sightings in Kazakstan produced feelings of awe in local residents and, to the great consternation of the authorities, resulted in a revival of religion (Edwards 1966, 272-274).

French farmer Maurice Masse had a close encounter with a UAP and its occupants in the summer of 1965. He said he’d developed some “new abilities” in the wake of the event, considered the land upon which it had occurred as personally “sacred,” and ultimately admitted that he had communicated with the entities he encountered. Nevertheless, he refused to countenance a religious interpretation of the event (Vallée 1990, 96-101).

On the other hand, Nebraska patrolman Herbert Schirmer, who was taken aboard a landed UAP in 1967, over the years came to view his experience as a positive religious event (Clark, 1998, 611-615; *Night Sky II* n.d.).

Conversely, New Mexico patrolman Lonnie Zamora had the opposite reaction to his 1964 sighting. The first person he called for assistance

<sup>22</sup> Compare this note from an anthropologist reporting on nocturnal lights while doing fieldwork in Chile 25 years later: “There seemed to be a kind of ‘game’ going on, with an exchange of actions or interactions between the objects and us, mediated by some type of acknowledgement of our presence and our attitudes.... to this context we should add another component: the phenomenon of intercommunication between the objects concerning our group” (Escobar 2012, 1, 40).

when the sighting ended was fellow officer M.S. Chavez, who soon arrived at the site to find Zamora pale, sweating, and badly shaken. “You look like you’ve seen the devil,” Chavez quipped to try to lighten Zamora’s mood. “Well, maybe I have,” the officer responded, then asked Chavez if he thought he (Zamora) should talk to a priest before he talked to anyone else about the sighting (Project Blue Book, 1964).

Betty Andreasson Luca, a conservative Christian who had a series of close encounters starting in 1967, ultimately decided that her experiences were from God (Fowler 1979; Fowler, 1982).

Forty years later, businessman and conservative Christian Chris Bledsoe had an extraordinary experience with UAPs and their associated NHIs about which he ultimately made the same interpretation. They slowly changed him into a person who rejected the label “religious” but embraced the label “spiritual” (Bledsoe 2023).

Even Kenneth Arnold, whose 1947 sighting initiated the modern age of UAPs, experienced a series of odd, paranormal-type events both during and after his sighting—events that he did not mention in public at the time. As his thoughts developed, he came to feel that the whole thing was essentially a spiritual experience (Clelland 2018, 54-61).

It is a well-worn observation, nowadays, that any sufficiently advanced technology might look like something supernatural to an observer lacking a similar level of scientific know-how. The result of such encounters is to awaken a “fundamental religious impulse” within us. When that impulse is triggered, we don’t tend to “theorize about transcendence but to worship it” (Berger 1969, 86, 87). Even the modern scientific mind, Loeb says, can see “a good approximation to God” in such situations (Loeb 2021, 153-154). The reasons for this appear to be rooted in our biology.

The human brain is apparently hardwired to need “gods”—or at least to respond to certain kinds of stimuli as if they were gods, according to Newberg, D’Aquili, and Rause

in their book *Why God Won’t Go Away*. The center of sensitivity to these triggers is in the limbic system—the oldest part of the brain. This important neural nexus was present even in Neanderthals and is part of the evidence that they, too, likely had some kind of propensity to feel transcendence and respond with some form of worship when confronted with triggering events (Newberg, D’Aquili, and Rause 2001, 55).<sup>23</sup>

If the NHIs behind UAPs have been around our cosmic neighborhood for as far back as we can remember—which is what the historical record strongly suggests, at least in terms of our belief—then it would make sense that close encounters with them might have triggered our forebears just as they trigger us today and could ultimately have led to the growth of not only mythic stories about non-human creatures like fairies, jinni, and elementals, but also religious traditions about gods, devils, and angels.

This means that the field of religious studies likely has a strong role to play in advancing our understanding of the intelligences behind UAPs. Religion is a worldwide, pan-historical phenomenon. This makes it a record without equal that has something important to say about our longstanding relationship with the NHIs who have impressed us so profoundly throughout our history that we have sometimes ascribed the powers of gods to them. But I am not advocating for a religious studies approach in the usual sense, although that has wisdom to offer.

Typically the study of religion proceeds along two broad paths. The first is the traditional one that goes back for millennia: theological. The inquirer stands within a religious tradition and studies it as an authoritative pronouncement about what a deity wants and how humans ought therefore to behave. It is based in a fundamental attitude of worship toward the deity. The second is a more recent development that gained traction in academia in the mid-1900s: socio-historical and historical-critical. The inquirer stands outside of [or firmly brackets] any kind of frank commitment to the object of study, adopts an attitude of more or less dispassionate examination, uses the tools of the social sciences and historical criticism, and looks at the thing not as a deity-centered phenomenon but a human-centered one. In other words, the phenomenon is treated as if it tells us all kinds of things about humanity, with little attention given to the

23 Newberg is a neuroscientist whose work focuses on the relationships between brain function and religious states, a field called “neurotheology.” Also see Nelson (2011, 173). Michael Shermer, a professional skeptic and ardent supporter of scientific materialism, takes up the neurology of transcendence for a few pages in *How We Believe* (2000, 65-69). The role of events like UFO encounters in religious belief is examined in a more socio-psychological vein by James McClenon in *Wondrous Events* (1994).

ontological status of the deity/-ies themselves.<sup>24</sup>

Mining the wealth of data buried in the world's religious traditions for insights about the nature of UAP occupants is going to require a hybrid approach. It will mean studying the "gods" themselves for the first time as active actors on the world stage in and for themselves, not just in terms of how they relate to and affect human beings. It will mean using the methods of the social sciences, the physical sciences, and historical-critical scholarship.<sup>25</sup> It will mean putting under the metaphorical microscope the NHIs that our hard-wiring has led us to regard with awe in the past and who still strike us with awe today. It will mean looking at their interactions with humanity in much the same way that we look at political, economic, and cultural interactions between, say, ancient city-states in the Middle East. It will mean treating them first and foremost as independent entities apart from any consideration of the ways in which they may stimulate our religious impulses.

Let me make myself a bit clearer. If we studied whales the way we have so far studied "god/the gods," we would study traditions *about* alleged human contacts with whales, devise belief systems that invoke whales as a reason for how things are or should be, perform rituals to honor or appease whales, build monuments in which to ritualize our relationship to them.... Or, in a more modern vein, we would study how the idea of whales has been shaped by human culture and thinking, or how groups of humans have behaved and continue to behave in the name of whales, or the role of beliefs about and practices invoking whales in the rise of commerce in human society, etc.

We would know little to nothing about the unique (compared to humans) nature of whales' skin or anatomy, how they live and move through a medium that we can only visit, how they organize their social life (if any), how they communicate with each other, exactly where in the vast oceans are the areas they call "home" (if any), how they

propagate and care for their young (assuming such exist), and how they fit into the larger ecology of reality... We would know little to nothing about whales as and for themselves, and mostly know only about them as a mirror of ourselves in one sense (theological) or another (sociological).<sup>26</sup>

We can change this. We can develop an anthropology of the NHIs as a unique non-human culture. A particularly rich lode of information lies in our religious traditions, where we have more information about the NHIs that share our planet with us than just what we have been able to gather in the last 75 years or what we *will* be able to gather in the next 75 years, and we need to make use of it. In our species' childhood, these entities manifested to us, and it may be that we took them to be gods.<sup>27</sup> They are manifesting to us today in new terms that are more likely to make sense to us at our current stage of species development: as technologies we might be able to kick the tires of if we could get our hands on one,<sup>28</sup> and as scientists – whether environmental, anthropological, or biological. But we still have a tendency to respond with awe and feel as if we may have touched something super-natural when we encounter them. This is to be expected, given the neural structures that we have. Is it, however, what is needed as the relationship between us continues to evolve?

At this point some readers will be wondering if I'm an atheist or agnostic and whether I'm promoting an abandonment of religion or, more broadly, spirituality because I'm attributing everything to these NHIs instead. The answer to both questions is "no." I do find myself leaning more toward a deist interpretation of Source rather than a theistic interpretation, which irritates me. I never much cared for deism as a way to conceptualize Source, but I can't deny that my reasoning (and a few life experiences) have led me there anyway. I am, however, saying that all religious traditions can be examined using the framework of understanding alleged encounters with god(s) and other assorted non-human entities as encounters with these NHIs,

24 For an example of the theologically embedded approach when applied to UAP phenomena, see Barry Downing (1968). Broadening the setting and changing the tools available for the study of religion brought the inquiry more closely in line with other fields of academic inquiry, which has led to the expansion of what counts as "religion" – including, ironically enough, science itself when practiced and promoted in dogmatic and dismissive ways. Doubt, observes Walter Truett Anderson, was the force that drove scientific inquiry, but the product of that doubt often functioned as a certainty that replaced religion as "the source of absolute truth" and cast "hard-nosed scientists" in the role of its priestly caste expounding a "new metaphysical realism" built on the worshipful "mystique of the scientific fact" (1990, 33, 13, 72, 258). Also see Midgley (1992), and Midgley (2002).

25 I note that Tonnies makes a plea for the creation of a thorough "taxonomy of the otherworldly" (2010, 52-52). From the hard sciences and technology end of inquiry, Josef F. Blumrich examines a sacred text to discover what he feels could be evidence of an NHI in antiquity. He encourages other engineers to get involved in the study of UAP (or as they were called in his day, UFO) phenomena by using their skills to look closely at other ancient texts (sacred, mythic, etc.) as well as archeological evidence (1974, 146-147).

26 For those wanting to know more about whales, dolphins, and porpoises, especially how we define intelligence in non-humans species, see Mann 2018.

27 The question inevitably arises as to whether this was by design on the part of the NHIs or not. Did they seek our worship and submission, or did we offer it so readily that they simply learned to cope with the fact or use it to their advantage when necessary? Or a combination of the above?

28 Some say we have done so already. That is a subject for a whole different paper.

and I do not privilege any one religious tradition as having “gotten it right” with regard to Source while all others “got it wrong.”

## 5. For example: one possible point of departure for NHI studies

“[W]e are often watched at close distance by beings that we ourselves cannot see,” wrote Patrice Malidoma Somé, an African (Dagara tribe) shaman who was educated in the finest Western tradition but ultimately also underwent initiation into his tribe’s form of adult male education, as well. “And...when we do see these otherworldly beings, it is often only after they have given us permission to see further—and only after they have made some adjustment to themselves to preserve their integrity” (1994, 225). The NHIs behind UAPs have been doing just that for at least the last 70+ years.

Each age and each tradition, according to sociologist Peter Berger, has its own unique signals of transcendence that must be confronted (1969, 9-82), just as Somé did. “The critical reality principle,” says philosopher and theologian John Hick, is “that there are realities external to us, but... we are never aware of them as they are in themselves, but always as they appear to us with our particular cognitive machinery and conceptual resources...” (1999, 41). Because they appear to us in this way, says Huston Smith, the noted historian of religions, “Enigmatic energies of some kind seem to be at work, but...it is the very mischief to verify them or identify what they are.” The intermediate (other-dimensional) world that is the natural home of these energies consists of a hodge-podge of creatures that have been called by different names at different times and places in human history. Some of these alleged creatures are probably fanciful, but others likely have a factual basis (Smith 1982, 93-94).<sup>29</sup> Separating out the fanciful from the factual may be tricky, but one guiding principle might be that when an entity is described in closely similar terms among very different cultures and across different expanses of time, it is more likely to be real. I suggest that one of these non-human intelligences has been

documented in the Moslem faith. They are known as the jinn, and they sound very similar to the UAP NHIs of our day.

Born in the 12th century, Muhyi al-Din ibn al-‘Arabi was an influential Islamic scholar and mystic as well as a prolific writer. He described a realm intermediate between the abode of Allah and that of humanity to which humanity occasionally has access. He called this place “the imaginal realm.”<sup>30</sup> Time behaves differently there, but it is still a sensory realm. The senses that must be used to perceive it, however, are analogs to our physical senses and not our physical senses themselves. The beings that inhabit this reality are varied, but the ones with whom humanity has the most contact are the jinn, who are “neither angels nor corporeal things, but they have qualities that are both spiritual and corporeal, luminous and dark.” The mythical expression of this luminosity is that jinn can look like they are made of fire that does not give off smoke. In more modern terms, they can appear to glow or be self-luminescent.

Ibn Arabi says that three kinds of beings typically manifest themselves in the realm of imaginal reality: angels, jinn, and human beings. In doing so, beings that naturally do not have corporeal bodies may become embodied, while those with normally corporeal bodies may become “spiritualized.” The NHIs known as jinn are neither inherently good nor inherently bad; they make choices in their behavior, just as humans do. Knowing what kind of NHI (to use our contemporary term) you’re dealing with can be tricky. It’s easy to think you’re interacting with one kind when events later suggest you were actually interacting with a very different kind.

The jinn are known to be shape-shifters, and though they are not corporeal in any human sense, they can be difficult to distinguish from material, sensory objects. Despite being noncorporeal, they can leave effects on material objects and can even be killed.<sup>31</sup> One person’s experiences with them may be perceived simultaneously by nearby individuals or remain confined to the one targeted person. They can appear in view and then disappear in the blink of an eye or when you turn your head for a moment. This is because these beings,

29 The most recent efforts to name, validate and understand human encounters with these “enigmatic energies” have been undertaken by Jeffrey Kripal in a growing body of scholarship. Please see footnote 12.

30 This description of the jinn is taken from Chitick (1994, 69-77, 83-95). For another description of the jinn, see Playford (2024, 159-173). Playford uses religious questions raised by the existence of jinn in Moslem thought to approach the same questions with regard to more traditionally conceived extraterrestrials. Chitick’s translation is taken from the work of Henri Corban, who translated the Islamic texts into Western languages and, according to some critics, also unduly Westernized the traditional understanding of the “imaginal.” Playford addresses this issue by focusing on the material/immaterial nature of the jinn, ultimately stating that while they may be conceptualized as material entities, the nature of that materiality is very different from human materiality. Correspondingly, the nature of their native realm (the imaginal realm) is not usually visible to human eyes but is also not geographically separate from the human realm. “As a result, in a sense, the jinn do live on ‘Earth’, albeit, under normal circumstances, not in the way that we do.” (2024, 165, 169).

31 For the idea that jinn have limited life spans and are subject to death (including being killed), see Playford 2024.

in becoming embodied and being seen, become somewhat “fixed” in their corporeality and shape until they can make the viewer break their gaze for even just a split second.

The chief trait of the imaginal reality is its “ambiguity, its uncertainty, its deceptive qualities.” One of the chief delights of the jinn is to give humans supposedly special knowledge that is, in fact, irrational and untrue. To use an indigenous term that has made its way into our modern culture, imaginal reality is the home of the trickster.<sup>32</sup> Because human beings are largely out of our depth in this reality and lack clear-eyed experience with these sorts of NHIs, Ibn Arabi enjoins us to use great caution.

## 6. And this leaves us...where?

“One of the elements that keeps history from being a complete bore is that it is full of ‘surprises.’”

(Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels*, p. 16)

“Personally,” says theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, “...I am thrilled by the idea of entirely new worlds that exist next to ours” (2005, 360). Whether we want to conceptualize them as other dimensions or multiple alternate universes—that can be ironed out in time by our mathematical adepts. What I have been arguing for is that UAP and their associated phenomena are evidence that these other realities exist, that they are essentially “right here,” and that they are probably teeming with life.<sup>33</sup> Even intelligent life. Which brings me back to the ETH.

Could I be wrong? What if there is intelligent extraterrestrial life that has been visiting Earth? It could happen, you know. And I agree that there’s a greater-than-0% chance that it’s already happening. How much greater is a matter for debate.

But if it is happening...how do we know that what drew them here was *homo sapiens*? What if it was this other nearby reality and its NHIs that the ETs wanted to establish contact with, instead? Not us? What if making contact with humanity is the ET version of an African camera safari? Or what if making contact with us is their own version of having an “in-

the-wild petting zoo”?

These possibilities might seem like they’d be a crushing blow to human dignity if they were true, especially if we collectively persist in the idea that human beings are, either through special creation or through evolution, the pinnacle of conscious, intelligent life on earth. “Just as we once gave up on the belief that the Earth was at the center of the universe,” says Loeb, “so must we start to act from the clear statistical likelihood that we are not intelligent sentient creatures without peers....[W]e are very likely a great deal less accomplished than what the universe has already witnessed” (2021, 152). The UAP phenomenon suggests that we don’t have far to look to find our peers...and indeed, our superiors in at least some respects.

Does the scenario I have painted to explain UAPs and their occupants threaten to take us backward, back to a time when witches and fairies and gods and goblins were still a part of most peoples’ mental furniture? By re-introducing the super-natural,<sup>34</sup> are we in danger of losing a firm grip on scientific thinking? (Assuming that this form of thinking is widespread, which may be a dubious assumption to start with.) Or by pointing to UAPs as signs of an intelligence that appears to surpass our own in at least some ways, do we thereby diminish human dignity and worth?

I would like to borrow a thought from the feminist theorist Donna Haraway to propose a new way of talking about ourselves. Haraway, who is wrapped up in the world of dog shows, writes about dogs and their relationship to humans, pointing out that the two are “co-constitutive companion species” that are co-evolving. Dogs are not just companion *animals*, she emphasizes, but a companion *species*. She puts them on a level with us, because we are both more than individual creatures involved in owning and being owned. We are each members of a whole species wrapped up in a co-creative companionship that is, she believes, “the rule [in evolution], not the exception” (2016, 94, 106).

I would like to take her insight to freaky heights and propose that human beings and the NHIs behind UAPs are companion species, too. In his legendary *Book of the Damned*, Charles Fort mused that it’s possible the human race is the

32 For an excellent, in-depth treatment of the trickster, see Hansen 2001.

33 It is especially intriguing to think about whether some or all of the variety of “mysterious creatures” that have been described throughout human history—including this present scientifically enlightened time—are in any way a part of these “new worlds” that are really so very old. As jumping-off points, see, for instance, Keel (1994), Keel (1995), Keel (1975); Sanderson (1970); Evans-Wentz (1911 repr. 2004).

34 My thanks to Jeff Kripal for all the work he has done to liberate this term from the burial shroud bestowed upon it by modern materialism.

“property” of “someone else” (1919 repr. 1974, 163).<sup>35</sup> If so, we may be “property” in a way similar to the way dogs are property to us. In other words, it is not an incidental relationship; it is profoundly consequential to both of us. It is a part of what constitutes each of us as a species. We are companions of each other. And like all good companions, we and the NHIs “are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species” (Haraway 2016, 94).

## 7. Confronting our signals of transcendence

UAPs are our signals of transcendence in the 21st century, and we need to confront them both as individual thinkers/experiencers and as a species. If acknowledging not just their current presence but their historical existence threatens to take us back to a pre-Enlightenment time, to a world before the ascendancy of materialism and the expulsion of the gods and elementals and angels and fairies and jinn and demons and spirits.... If it threatens to take us back to a quasi-medieval populated cosmos, so be it. Because we keep on bumping into all of these kinds of things, and the materialist worldview is not doing justice to our lived experiences.

[T]he full scope of the way that UAP appear and are experienced in the lifeworld...are ultimately not fully knowable through the world as conceived in the sciences.... I am aware of the reasons we must be careful with relying only on eyewitness testimony. Mistakes in perception and identification occur, biases abound, judgments about what is appearing are not always sound, and we know that there are limitations in memory.... But this does not mean that we completely give up on the individual lived experiences as providing access to knowledge and truth. Thomas Bullard, for example, introduces criteria for judging some experiences as having more weight than others [Bullard 2016, 308-311].... We must, in my view, transcend the idea that the world as known through our instruments is more real or more true than the world as we experience it (Engels, 2024).

There are some dangers in doing this. In an age when

political and religious fundamentalisms heavily tinged with authoritarianism are oozing out of the darkest places of the human unconscious worldwide, simultaneously having other parts of our collective consciousness trying to open up to reality in this way can be dicey. But it’s also, in my opinion, the only authentic path forward. As Somé said, in reflecting on his initiation into his tribal reality after being thoroughly schooled in the Western perspective, opening up will be, as all encounters with the imaginal are, deeply transformational. And <<insert your favorite god’s name here>> knows we could use a transformation.

So the authentic study of UAPs and their NHIs, I believe, will take us back to the beginning of the materialist age and the rise of science, where we have much work to do. The western presumption of materialism, says John Hick, is

only an assumption, and it is challenged by many signals of transcendence in the universe....It is entirely rational and sane to regard the religious experience of humanity not simply as imaginative projection but as a range of responses involving the imagination to an ultimate reality that is both within us and beyond us (1999, 253).

UAPs are one source of contact with a reality that appears to be beyond our everyday experience of the material world and triggers a response in us that points us toward understanding reality in much larger terms. This doesn’t mean abandoning science or scientific modes of thought. It does mean questioning some of the foundational assumptions of science and tweaking them, as well as learning to integrate how we approach and think about various kinds of phenomena.

You must be used to changing modes of awareness depending on what task you are being asked to perform. You must be alert to the way in which you are looking at things, and know at any time the place from which you are looking at them (Somé 1994, 230).

We need to learn to do this without shielding our eyes from the things that are inconvenient, disorienting, or even frightening to see. In doing so, it may feel as if we are going backward in time and reverting to more “primitive” ways of

35 More charitably, Mac Tonnies suggests that the NHIs may be “a surprisingly vulnerable intelligence that relies largely on subterfuge and disinformation [of its own making] to achieve its goals...in order to co-exist with us” because in some way(s) they need us (2010, 24).



experiencing reality, but we are not. As the poet T.S. Eliot said:

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

## 8. Afterthoughts

The idea that UAPs are manifestations of another realm of existence co-local to our own that is occupied by intelligent beings who have interacted with us throughout our long existence on this planet is not new with me. I did not come up with most of the ideas that I have pieced together here. The way I have put them together in an attempt to weave the scientific and religious aspects of UAPs, however, does create a larger pattern of my own making, and there are perhaps one or two new threads that make the UAP cosmology I have woven unique.

For those who would like to confront the idea of UAPs as modern signals of transcendence, but from slightly different angles, I would suggest Bernardo Kastrup's *Meaning in Absurdity: What Bizarre Phenomena Can Tell Us about the Nature of Reality* and James Madden's *Unidentified Flying Hyperobject: UFOs, Philosophy, and the End of the World*. As well as, of course, the authors cited within this manuscript, all of whom contributed to the formation of my thoughts starting back in the 1990s when I was a UFO neophyte hungry to know more and trying to make sense of it all.

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