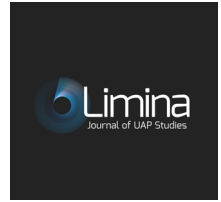




Limina — The Journal of UAP Studies

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Editorial

Michael C. Cifone, Ph.D. *

Editor-In-Chief

*Author contact: editor@limina.uapstudies.org

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1. Preliminary Remarks

In my previous Editorial, I articulated the aim of both *Limina* and the learned society that publishes it—the *Society for UAP Studies*. Our goal is to foster the development and stabilization of UAP Studies as a recognizable academic field, alongside other established disciplines in contemporary scholarship. With this second issue, we continue the essential task of publishing work that forms the foundation of the field and furthers its development. As UAP move further into the structured discourse of academic scholarship, they take on more nuanced, subtle, and complex resonances, shaped by their conceptual, phenomenological, and experiential dimensions. These dimensions, as situated within a variety of academically inflected discourses, contribute to the constitution of the field.

As I noted last year, UAP Studies both draws from and departs significantly from the “classical” tradition of ufology.¹ UAP Studies is not ufology. The latter serves as a necessary but preliminary stage of forensic investigation and case compilation; its primary object is the UAP case report, not UAP themselves. While ufology informs the new science of and scholarship on UAP, it does not exhaust it. UAP Studies is broader than both classical ufology and the nascent scientific study of UAP; it constitutes a richer conceptual landscape that is critical, empirical, and interpretive, applying the rigor of academic scholarship to UAP as well as the accounts surrounding them (insofar as today we can increasingly distinguish the two). While UAP are not merely objects of academic interpretation, they are also empirical objects of scientific inquiry²—a mode of inquiry that, while necessary,

will not resolve all aspects of UAP. More than this, UAP Studies recognizes that beyond hermeneutical and empirical frameworks, UAP are also *experiential* objects, tied to subjective encounters³ that, in some cases, rise to philosophical, religious, or existential significance. Such experiences must be approached carefully and with a degree of independence from the strictly empirical question of veridicality. Especially with UAP, we must often “bracket”⁴ the reality question—what precisely is the nature of the object-cause of the experience?—in favor of studying how these phenomena manifest in human consciousness. And that brings us squarely into the domain of a *phenomenological investigation* into the *experience* of UAP⁵, a significant theme of this volume.

Curiously, UAP are allegedly anomalous in a realm of human experience (the mesoscopic, as opposed to either

1 Cf. Knuth *et al.* (2025) where we attempt to make clear what the nature of this key distinction is. See also Gough (2025) for the coverage the paper received in *Phys.org*. It marks a significant departure from typical media coverage of the subject. For an excellent overview of the challenges UAP Studies has had to face from a communications and information sciences perspective, see Stahlman (2024).

2 That this now needs little justification is in itself an important stage of departure from classical ufology.

3 Not all objects of empirical study have this intimately subjective dimension, or least if they do, they are heavily mediated by instrumented observations into realms for which human beings do not have relatable experiences: for example, the life cycle of bacteria, or the flux of elementary particles showering the Earth from cosmic sources (and here we might have need to anthropomorphize to gain some measure of access to these realities).

4 This is a technical term used in philosophical phenomenology, as will be discussed in some articles in this volume.

5 When Hynek (1972) wrote about “the UFO experience” he in effect placed the UFO squarely in the domain of phenomenology. Only now is this clearly being thematized as such.

the micro- or macroscopic) that we might have thought the sciences have (mostly) exhausted with its apparatus of explanation and understanding. If nothing else, UAP may demonstrate the possibility that Nature can still surprise within realms of experience which human beings do not necessarily need a technical apparatus to access.⁶ While much attention of late is given to “experiencers” (of UAP and related phenomena), and the evidentiary significance of their encounters,⁷ we must not forget that it is human experience itself that underpins the sciences and their methodologies. Experience provides the foundation from which scientific concepts and principles emerge. If we are to more objectively characterize the ways in which UAP appear to those who encounter them, and thereby better understand UAP as they present themselves to human subjects, we must suspend our scientific presuppositions and allow UAP to appear as they are. The suspension of presuppositions when studying UAP encounters should be mirrored by a parallel phenomenological gesture in the sciences, freeing both subjects and researchers from assumptions that might prematurely foreclose the inquiry.⁸

This “bracketing” of the question of UAP reality is fundamental to phenomenology and, as we said, a major focus of several essays in this issue. This approach might appear to sidestep the harder problem of UAP origins; however, given the empirical challenges of UAP research, phenomenological inquiry is essential. Before turning to the empirical sciences for an understanding of the facts, we must first engage with the experiential ground from which UAP realities emerge. Only then can we transition to empirical analysis and, ultimately, hypothesis formation. That a residual component of the UAP phenomenon resists easy classification as scientific “fact” is not unique to UAP but reflects a broader challenge within the sciences when dealing with phenomena closely tied to human consciousness and experience.

As I pointed out in my last Editorial, we lack a widely accepted theory of psychophysical relations—we have no

unifying “mind-matter” framework that bridges the physical and the psychical. And so, when the UAP experience crosses into the strange or non-ordinary, we often find ourselves at sea, without theoretical guidance or conceptual guardrails. This is why it is crucial to first bracket our presuppositions about what is and is not possible, allowing the experiences themselves to emerge on their own terms.⁹ From there, we can return to scientific inquiry, possibly with new methodological tools that do not prematurely diminish the complexity of the phenomena. Recognizing the phenomenological origins of the sciences grants us an opportunity to intervene at their foundations, allowing us to expand the sciences to meet the demands of experience, rather than prematurely narrowing experience in order to meet the demands of the sciences.¹⁰

Our second volume of *Limina* is entitled “Varieties and Trajectories of Contemporary UAP Studies”. It is partly the product of the *Society for UAP Studies’* annual [academic conference of the same name](#), held in August of last year (2024). There, our colleagues organized a series of discipline-specific workshops across the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences.¹¹ These workshops, designed for focused academic exchange, preceded each day’s keynote and plenary talks. Many of the essays in this volume originated from these discussions.

As I compiled the final set of peer-reviewed articles for this volume, it became clear that they presented a cohesive collection of essays that naturally fall into four thematic groupings. In the remainder of this editorial, I’d like to provide a programmatic overview of the contents of this new volume of our journal.

2. The Phenomenological Turn in UAP Studies

As suggested above, one of the major themes running through this issue is the importance of phenomenology as a methodological tool for UAP research. Several articles

6 Here, then, the imaginal and mythical might with the “experiencer” reflect a *desperation to understand*, not a fabrication in an effort to *confound*; indeed, we must wonder what is the role of imagination and myth at the liminal edge of human experience, where (as even Kant recognized) Nature arrests and surprises?

7 As Garry Nolan recently reminded us, in an [excellent lecture](#) at his Sol Foundation’s November 2024 meeting, evidence is *always and already conditioned by a meaningful context of explanation*: evidence is always *evidence for this-or-that hypothesis*—the latter functioning as the context of meaning for the former. This is an absolutely crucial clarification to keep in mind, especially as the new science of UAP crystallizes.

8 The “bracketing” or suspension of presuppositions cuts both ways: for the experiencers and the scientists, both of whose presuppositions perhaps foreclose on the true empirical character of UAP as they show themselves in Nature, complicating our endeavor to understand them.

9 On this point, we should be reminded that Truzzi (1989) references C.S. Peirce, the great American pragmatist philosopher, who, he writes, “required that the first and primary obligation of any philosopher or scientist is to do nothing that would block inquiry”.

10 As philosopher of science Mario Bunge reminded us decades ago, science *is a method*, not a body of beliefs which would indeed serve to stand before experience as gatekeeper (as referenced by Truzzi (1989)—though we should here note that Bunge himself was no fan of UFOs, putting them alongside things like the “magical power of crystals.” See Bunge (1991), p. 271).

11 Though papers in this current volume do not cover it, this conference also had a UAP “citizen science” workshop—a deeply important topic we aim in this journal to highlight in future volumes.

engage with the phenomenological tradition, exploring how it can help us rigorously examine the experience of UAP encounters while suspending prior assumptions. We have foundational investigations into both the phenomenology of the UAP experience and the conceptual lexicon of attempts to *define* UAP as a definite object of study (be it empirical, interpretive, speculative, etc.). Let us not forget that experience is fundamental even for the hardest of the so-called “hard” sciences. Indeed, one of the greatest of the philosophical phenomenologists, the 19th century thinker Edmund Husserl (who is specifically invoked in Dr. Engel’s essay), took it as his purpose to first critique the tendency in the sciences to obscure their (very human) experiential origins, and thereby, through his innovative method of phenomenological investigation, to philosophically unearth the experiential conditions of possibility of the sciences. This, he hoped, would reorient them back towards their essential humanity, and close the gap between mind and the material world that had become increasingly pronounced following the mind/body cleft that opened during the Scientific Revolution (and especially codified, apparently, in the philosophy of Descartes¹²). What fruits would follow from this phenomenological reorientation for the study of UAP?

Dr. Engels’ essay “The Importance of Phenomenology for UAP Studies”, underscores the need to recognize the first-person perspective as a legitimate site of academic inquiry. Similarly, Prof. Gress’ “Normal, Abnormal, Paranormal: Philosophical Determination of a Ufological Lexicon” delves into the conceptual boundaries of perception, normativity, and classification, reflecting on how these shape our understanding of anomalous phenomena.

Building on these discussions, Dr. Bertrand Méheust’s “The Mystery of Elusiveness” addresses the paradox of

UFO (UAP) manifestations—their simultaneous appearance and retreat from scientific scrutiny. Here, phenomenology can provide an essential framework for understanding the limits of empirical observation and the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity in UAP research. His essay is followed by critical remarks provided by one of his reviewers which we found useful for inclusion in this issue; those critical remarks are then responded to by the author himself, and also have been included in this issue. What we see here is a moment of deep dialectical exchange that, perhaps, offers the community of interest a model for what careful, critical, patient and respectful intervention—criticism—looks like in scholarship. We must keep each other’s thinking in check, and dialogical critique is, I believe, the vehicle of decisive intellectual progress.

3. The Challenge of Nonhuman Intelligence and the Limits of Skepticism

Following these more general, even preliminary¹³ investigations, we begin to encroach on the question of just to what extent UAP (even if only in the preliminary data found in the classic unexplained UAP report¹⁴) ought to be thought of in terms of some *intelligence* of unknown origin—and the popular view among many is that UAP are evidence of a (heretofore unknown) *nonhuman* intelligence (NHI). Thus another thematic thread in the current issue concerns the philosophical challenge of NHI.

The particular historical challenge for UAP Studies—as much methodological as it is epistemological (and perhaps ontological¹⁵)—has always been to somehow move from the purely theoretical (and mainstream) discussions of (*distant*)

12 As we have discovered, the radical mind/body split that Descartes seemingly codified in his philosophical texts (e.g., Descartes 1641) belied his deeper embrace of a kind of ontological *equality* of mind and matter—which his subsequent reader and ardent disciple, the radical Enlightenment thinker Baruch Spinoza, was to argue pointed to a profounder ontological *unity*. (I am grateful to the great French philosopher of mind and physics Michel Bitbol for pointing this out to me in conversation over lunch many years ago.) And of course Spinoza famously surpasses in his own work the Cartesian dualism (two metaphysically distinct substances: mind v. matter) in favor of what many scholars call a “monism” (one substance, with infinitely many modulations) but which is probably more accurately described as a radical *unitary pluralism*—recall Deleuze’s (1980) formula: “pluralism = monism”. (Although on this point, compare Frim & Fluss (2018), who argue against Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza as a pluralist.)

13 And ‘preliminary’ here should not be taken to mean something that needs to be quickly gotten over, before we move on to more important matters. Quite the contrary: ‘preliminary’ here means *conceptually necessary for decisive advancement in the field*.

14 And here the reader is encouraged to watch the [most recent Senate Armed Services Committee hearing](#) (19 November 2024) in which the current director of AARO, Dr. Kosloski, presented a number of cases which they consider to be unexplained *despite* the reasonable sufficiency and integrity of the data they received. Cases such as these are similar to those which the official French UAP/UFO investigatory body “GEIPAN” would classify as a “D” case: those for which sufficient data is available *but which nonetheless remains unexplained*. In other words, their “D” cases are those for which they judge there to be reasonably good data, but are so highly unusual as to be unresolvable by known or accepted hypotheses. From a strict methodological standpoint, however, what the community at large awaits is a clear roadmap, governed by generally accepted (and uncontroversial) principles and protocols, that moves us from data to evidence and then conclusions drawn from the evidence—and the conditions under which data of a sufficient sort would warrant *unconventional hypothetical alternatives* for those conclusions. No such generally accepted methodological framework currently exists. It is a methodological (albeit meta-theoretical) imperative of the new science of UAP.

15 Although countenancing a potential nonhuman intelligence does not *in itself* suggest interesting or substantial *ontological* problems (maybe just *existential*). Or at least, it needn’t. There is no reason why NHI can’t be simply like us—but perhaps with radically different (even incompatible) biology. For example, there is talk today of the possibility of off-world “mirror” biologies where chirality is flipped, leading to proteins and organic chemical compounds with spatially reversed—mirrored—geometries (see e.g. the Wikipedia entry on “Mirror Life”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_life).

NHI (under the acceptable rubric of “extraterrestrial life” as, e.g., we find it in the SETI discourse¹⁶) to a consideration of the possibility that there is evidence of *actual* NHI on or near Earth.¹⁷ As I pointed out above, we simply have no generally accepted framework, no roadmap, that takes us systematically from data and evidence (of a sufficiently scientifically rigorous and legible sort, which we do not yet possess) to a set of non-ordinary or unconventional conclusions or hypotheses based on the data and that evidence. There is no general agreement or clarity on just what the data need to look like that would warrant us in reaching for the unconventional over the conventional—especially if there may never be a “White House Lawn” moment. If we did, then the (not unreasonable) dismissals of the very idea that NHI could be near or on Earth (and that UAP, moreover, are evidence of this) would have to succumb to the most basic axiom of modal logic: *actuality implies possibility*, that if NHI is actually here then there must be some means of getting and remaining here—i.e., the actuality of their presence would imply a physical possibility for which we would potentially have to reassess our understanding of travel through cosmic distances. As yet, however, the data are preliminary to a more systematic, sustained empirical research program that can yield the relevant sorts of data that would settle the matter. So, we must deal piecemeal with the possibility that some UAP could be evidence for NHI.

Two articles—“Expectations About Nonhuman Intelligences: Fermi’s Challenge, Divine Hiddenness, and the White House Lawn” by Dr. Knight and “One Science for Both UFOlogists and Astrobiologists?” by Dr. Peters—critically examine the logic of dismissal surrounding the idea that NHI may already be present on or near Earth. Knight draws an intriguing parallel between UAP skepticism and theological debates on divine hiddenness, suggesting that our expectations about extraterrestrial behavior may be fundamentally flawed. Meanwhile, Peters interrogates the divide between ufology and astrobiology, arguing for a unified approach that reconciles these traditionally separate disciplines.

4. Historical and Strategic Analyses of UAP Activity, and the Implications Thereof

This issue also includes articles engaging with historical and strategic dimensions of UAP activity. “UAP Indications Analysis: 1945–1975 United States Atomic Warfare Complex” presents a comprehensive analysis of UAP encounters near nuclear sites, identifying patterns that suggest an enduring surveillance interest in atomic infrastructure. Such findings raise fundamental questions about the potential strategic implications of UAP and their relation to global security. But then, supposing that UAP can in general be attributable to the operations of a heretofore unknown “NHI”, what then? Prof. Matthew Szydagis’ paper, “How Much Time Do We Have Before Catastrophic Disclosure Occurs?”, applies statistical modeling to estimate the likelihood of an accidental UAP “disclosure.” Using trends in camera technology, crash retrieval claims, and public reporting, Szydagis projects that if non-human intelligence (NHI) is real¹⁸, an uncontrolled “catastrophic disclosure”—occurring outside governmental or institutional control—may be imminent. His analysis provides a quantitative approach to understanding the dynamics of secrecy and the role of technology in potential future UAP revelations, which is surely of relevance as scholars apply the methods of intelligence and security studies to the UAP problem.

5. Expanding the Theoretical Framework: Alternative Models of UAP Origins

Finally, several contributions challenge the traditional extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) by exploring alternative models for understanding UAP. Using the techniques of analytic philosophy, Dr. Travis Dumsday’s “Understanding UAPs: Surveying the Nature Spirits Hypothesis” revisits animist traditions to propose that UAP encounters might be best understood through frameworks drawn from indigenous

16 On these issues, consult the work of historian and philosopher of science Steven Dick—e.g., Dick (1998).

17 The nearness being, curiously enough, inversely proportional to the apparent plausibility of the very idea. On this point, one wonders about the potential psychoanalytic-philosophical reasons for such an inverse relationship, apart from the obvious reply frequently given here in terms of the limits on interstellar travel supposedly imposed by Einstein’s special theory of relativity (no such limits would seem to apply if one considers the issue from the standpoint of the general theory—but that’s quite another matter).

18 And to reiterate: this is a possibility that not without justification remains highly contestable given not only that the widely acknowledged paucity of scientifically acceptable data, but also due to the unavailability of a generally accepted *evidentiary roadmap* from data to conclusions on the one hand, and the complications the UAP experience overall suggests on the other. And the *latter* is further complicated by a lack of agreement on just what evidentiary significance there is, or ought to be, for the human experiences had of UAP when it comes to the science of them—just because that’s an issue *any* science must face when dealing with human experience of *anything*, let alone the non-ordinary or putatively anomalous (such as is claimed for UAP).

and esoteric knowledge systems. A scholar who probed very deeply just such kinds of issues (albeit from the standpoint of religious studies), Dr. Brenda Denzler, returns to the questions in her “The Discovery of O.I.L. [Other Intelligent Life]: Some Thoughts on Finding Other Intelligent Life”. In this article, Dr. Denzler problematizes ETH as the dominant framework for attempts to explain UAP, arguing instead that its assumptions may be too narrow. She rather explores alternative models that consider UAP as manifestations of a nonhuman intelligence (NHI) that may have evolved alongside humanity under conditions we do not yet fully understand. Drawing from evolutionary theory, consciousness studies, and anomalies suggested by UAP activity, Denzler suggests that UAP may represent a form of intelligence indigenous to Earth but operating under principles that challenge conventional scientific paradigms.

6. Conclusion: Toward an Integrated UAP Studies

As the articles in this issue demonstrate, UAP Studies remains a field in the process of definition. The challenges before us are substantial: bridging methodological divides, refining theoretical frameworks, and resisting the pressures of premature conclusions. However, this issue of *Limina* makes clear that progress is being made. By drawing on philosophy, phenomenology, history, and the sciences, we are collectively laying the foundations for a field that is not only academically rigorous but also open to an objective study of the full range of (subjective) human encounters with the unknown. What we see being demonstrated today, and in these pages, is a decisively new modality of engagement with UAP/UFOs that, perhaps unlike treatments of the subject in the “gray”¹⁹ literature of days past, maintains a clear line of demarcation between the scholar’s objective analytical and interpretive treatment of UAP v. whatever subjective engagement they may have with the object of their study. What allows the incipient UAP Studies literature to exit the gray zone of evidentiary and analytical indeterminacy (and unevenness) is its foregrounded commitment to the rigors of methodological, conceptual and logical scrutiny, accepting the reality of human ignorance, while embracing the humility required of patient, systematic study wary of premature acceptance but nevertheless mature enough to challenge the narrowness of those frameworks that have, perhaps, outlived their usefulness or vitality when it comes to the creativity and great expanse

of Nature.

In closing, we recognize that UAP Studies is, at its core, an inquiry into the limits of knowledge itself. As we continue our investigations, we do so with the awareness that what we learn about UAP will also teach us something fundamental about the nature of inquiry, perception, and the human engagement with mystery, and how a mystery might be transitioned to facticity while retaining the essence of what makes it so wondrous (as the sciences are so capable of doing).

4 March 2025

Los Angeles, CA

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19 The term was defined and employed in Watters et al. (2023).



Acknowledgements

Once again, our production editor Ms. Courtney Lust (of Simon Fraser University in Canada) must be thanked from here to the next galaxy; she has proven to be resilient in the face of the many editorial assaults that have relentlessly flown her way. She's a brilliant, compassionate and a preternaturally understanding human being who now knows that *other* side of independent academic publishing. We are eternally and cosmically grateful—thanks Courtney!

I would also like to thank Dr. Mark Rodeghier, my mentor in all things ufological who continues to be the voice of reason amidst the unreasonable, a guiding light that shows the way of true, patient dedication to the laying of the foundations of what needs to get done, if we're going to do things right. Thanks Mark!

Finally, I can't thank my friend and fellow traveller Mr. Greg Bishop enough, or sufficiently, for affording me a quiet sanctuary for these last few weeks, within which to work on this journal and my final editorial (all due apologies to that sourdough loaf, Greg!).