



Limina — The Journal of UAP Studies

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Editorial

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1. *Limina* and the challenge of “UAP Studies” as its own field of inquiry.

Limina is a journal created out of necessity. Ever since publication of the *Journal of UFO Studies* came to an end in the early 2000s, for the English-speaking audience there has been no serious and sustained scholarly publication focused *exclusively* on the subject of what is now termed “unidentified aerial or anomalous phenomena” (UAP). Papers on the subject are scattered throughout the existing ecosystem of academic journals, if they are published at all. We might pause to reflect for a moment on why this is, and the significance this situation has for UAP Studies.

It perhaps goes without saying that the subject matter (UFOs or now UAP) has long been considered unserious – even “fringe” (Hynek 1972; Appelle 2000; Wendt & Duvall 2008; Watters *et al.* 2023). Study of the subject had been tolerated, if at all, only to the extent to which it could be shown to be unworthy of organized, substantial scientific research, and best handled as a purely psychological or sociological curiosity (or a matter for scholars of religion). Whenever work on UAP or UFOs has appeared in mainstream scholarly publications, it is found mostly confined to acceptable and well-established academic disciplines and the journals corresponding to them.¹ For example, since at least the 1970s and 1980s one can find numerous studies of UAP or UFOs in journals devoted to atmospheric science or astronautics, or in those devoted to psychology, sociology or religious studies – even political theory.² With little exception, the subject is examined without further question as one that

¹ There are of course a number of journals operating explicitly beyond the pale of the mainstream scholarly ecosystem, where one can find high-quality papers on the subject. One thinks here of the open-access *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, spearheaded in the early 1980s by Prof. Peter A. Sturrock of Stanford University (himself a “ufologist”), or more recently, the German/English *Journal of Anomalistics* (affiliated with the pioneering Freiburg-based research group IGPP, the *Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene*).

² One thinks here of a more recent example: Wendt & Duvall’s seminal paper “[Sovereignty and the UFO](#)”, published in the prestigious journal *Political Theory* in 2008. The journal’s website lists the paper as having been viewed or downloaded over 27,000 times since tracking was begun in December of 2016. This paper is arguably one of the first in a high-impact, mainstream academic journal to *not* immediately treat the subject of UAP as one which can easily be reduced or explained away in conventional terms; on the contrary, the essay argues that serious (i.e. non-dismissive) treatment of the subject in academia is prohibited (treated as taboo) because the phenomena are potentially incompatible with key presuppositions – such as that human beings hold a place of *sovereignty* in the ontological hierarchy of being. If they are right, then the dismissiveness or unease with UAP as a serious topic in mainstream scholarship can be explained as basically *ideological* in origin, rather than as “rational” (i.e., evidence-based).

can be unproblematically handled by an existing academic discipline; rarely if at all is it treated as a problem requiring a discipline or field of its own.³ Indeed, the fact that research and reflection on UAP is acceptable for publication in reputable, mainstream academic journals only if such work can be processed through existing disciplinary channels, corresponding to established university departments, reflects a deeper epistemological and even ontological uncertainty regarding the very *status* of the subject itself. What are UAP, after all, if we don't treat them as mere case studies (for example) in atmospheric or aeronautical physics, or the psychology of human perception – curiosities sure to be resolved on further physical or psychological (which is to say, scholarly) analysis? This also reflects a corresponding unease with treating – or unwillingness to accept – UAP or UFOs as phenomena whose (objective) reality is established, i.e. as due neither to human perceptual error nor instrument artifact, as the evidence now seems to clearly indicate.⁴ As a result, the landscape of scholarship on the subject is deeply problematic (even confusing), with papers frequently unreliable as authoritative sources of knowledge or information about the subject, leaving scholars outside of UAP or UFO circles in a position of radical uncertainty.

Requiring that study of UAP be channeled into existing academic disciplines, and the work published in corresponding journals, allows this ambivalence and uncertainty to persist, so that the subject can always be safely (and indeed must be) reduced to a mere problem in atmospheric physics, the psychology of human perception, or the sociology of human belief – or be taken as a problem in the history of human religion and religious experience. It avoids the far more challenging approach that treats these phenomena as “real” in themselves and therefore as constituting their own field of study, which in turn searches for a further refinement of the reality of these phenomena beyond the pale of existing assumptions governing current fields of scholarly study.

Surely it is obvious and uncontroversial that certain aspects of UAP have relevance for any number of existing academic disciplines; such study can be and indeed has

been quite illuminating. Those aspects of UAP which seem to intersect with existing fields of study can, therefore, be unproblematically approached through historically well-established scholarly techniques, methods and assumptions. However, if real progress on understanding UAP is to be made, where we are not simply furthering the presuppositions and aims of these existing fields of study (or engaged in endless, unconstrained and therefore fruitless speculation if we exit them), but rather are focused on the nature of UAP themselves, the study of UAP cannot be so confined.

So the fact remains that this ambivalence or uncertainty regarding the status of UAP within academia has helped keep the subject confined to existing scholarly disciplines; it has therefore prevented the emergence of one (be it a field or discipline proper) devoted to the scholarly research and analysis of these phenomena *in their own right* – research and analysis, moreover, that is not necessarily governed by existing disciplinary frameworks but which seeks those proper to its subject. As there currently exists nothing called “UAP Studies” in the landscape of modern academics, *Limina* therefore partly aims to correct this, and so seeks to move the study of UAP well within the mainstream by providing a resource for a new area of serious, sustained scholarly inquiry.

Adopting the broader term “UAP Studies” as part of *Limina's* name, then, signals a fundamental shift in academic-scholarly outlook on the core phenomena it examines: It reflects a purposeful reorientation and refocus, a decisive move away from older attempts to find a place for the study of these enigmatic phenomena in modern academia. Calling the study of these phenomena “ufology”, for example, and thereby attempting to conceive of it as some sort of a *scientific* discipline⁵ (which is what the suffix “ology” signals), was both premature and unnecessary. It immediately put this nascent field of inquiry into direct confrontation with centuries-old and well-established scientific fields – research traditions which have accumulated a number of methodological and ontological assumptions the relevance of which cannot be assumed or even assessed when it comes to the UFO phenomenon. Since even the very elementary data on these phenomena was (and continues to be) difficult if not

3 That there is a clear distinction to be made between an academic ‘field’ vs. a ‘discipline’ (and what, in particular, the study of UAP should be considered in this regard) is itself an interesting question – one that must at some point be addressed carefully and reflectively if “UAP Studies” is to emerge within modern academia as an accepted part of its educational-institutional ecosystem. For a recent discussion of the field/discipline distinction itself, see Tight (2020). On the question of the disciplinary status within academia of the study of what were called “UFOs”, see Stuart Appelle’s classic treatment (Appelle 2000), although here the problem is construed specifically in terms of “ufology” – which is not the same as UAP Studies, as we discuss below.

4 See for example the relevant discussions in Watters *et al.* (2023) and in the recent – and significant – [report](#) issued by NASA’s Independent Study Team on UAP (NASA 2023). By speaking about the “reality” of UAP, I mean to refer, of course, to that smaller subset of all initial UAP reports which cannot be explained by means of the standard menu of mundane or conventional possibilities (e.g., human malperception, instrument malfunction, and so on). Such a “recalcitrant residuum”, as it were, is now widely acknowledged.

5 This was the almost unquestioned assumption guiding Stuart Appelle, for example, in his seminal treatment of the issue of UFOs and academia (Appelle 2000).

impossible to obtain (partly because of ongoing stigma and profound doubt regarding their very status), attempting to conceive of the study of UAP as a strictly “scientific” one was (and is) therefore doomed to fail. In the least it is unnecessary. Using this broader term “UAP Studies” we consciously step away from classical “ufology” *per se*, and allow our inquiry to proceed afresh – to find its own way, even while it draws significantly from existing sciences, from the humanities and from other more mature scholarly fields and disciplines which make contemporary academic research so dynamic, diverse and fruitful.

By using the term “UAP Studies” we do not therefore prematurely *limit* research on these phenomena, and are thereby held open to new possibilities (perhaps even a new Renaissance for the academy and learning itself, as had accompanied and even presaged the development of the sciences).⁶ And by calling the journal “Limina” we indicate as well that not only the phenomena themselves, but also their scholarly study, operates of necessity in-between what is currently known and accepted as consensus reality: the *liminal* is what inhabits an epistemological, methodological and perhaps even an ontological zone of transition – one part within the known and accepted, and another oriented away from it.

2. *Limina* and its intellectual inspiration.

Our journal faces, then, a unique challenge. Given the absence of something called “UAP Studies”, by its very existence *Limina* contributes to the formation and interrogation of this new area of scholarly study. It is created with the purpose of being a publication where scholars can explore the very meaning of “UAP Studies” as they explore the subject of UAP from their various disciplinary perspectives (because of the absence of UAP Studies *per se*, this remains of course a practical necessity). And so, by its very nature, *Limina* is deeply inter- and cross-disciplinary in terms of its authorship and its intended audience.

The necessity to create a journal whose purpose is partly formative of a unique area of scholarly study – an area that, for contingent, even ideological, reasons could not be formed – is certainly not unique to *Limina*, nor is it unique to the subject of UAP. Indeed, in creating this journal I have been inspired by another, founded under similar conditions and organized around a subject that had also been considered

either taboo, or thought best approached by channeling it into existing academic fields of inquiry, similarly allowing for a convenient abeyance of the deeper intellectual challenges which the subject provokes. *Mind and Matter* was formed at the beginning of this century (c. 2003) by Prof. Dr. Harald Atmanspacher, who soon after formed (as I did) a corresponding scholarly Society devoted to the subject. I can do no better than to quote at length from Dr. Atmanspacher’s own inaugural editorial, which, I think, contains a number of observations that are directly relevant to our efforts at *Limina* (and with the *Society for UAP Studies*) to create a journal which both fills a scholarly void and opens up a new, more challenging area of study:

The title of this journal [*Mind and Matter*] makes its core topic self-evident. The question of relationships between the material world and its apparently non-material counterpart or complement is one of the oldest, most puzzling and most controversial issues in the philosophy and history of science. There exists a vast literature addressing its many different aspects from a wide variety of viewpoints. Monistic, dualistic, and even pluralistic approaches have been proposed in both epistemological and ontological interpretations, and elaborated in quite a number of variants.

Although the issue of consciousness and the brain is presumably the most discussed mind-matter issue in contemporary research (the notion of the “hard problem” has been coined and several journals have been created to address it), its boundaries have become somewhat fuzzy and permeable. Today we are witnessing an increasing interest in mind-body questions, be it due to a revival of psychosomatics or due to the emergence of relatively new fields such as psycho-neuro-endocrinology. These areas have even started to involve relations to and the impact of social and cultural environments. But the role of the material environment of agents has been emphasized as well, for instance in recent studies of embodiment. Yet any basic understanding of the relationship between the categorically different concepts of mind and matter has remained lacking for centuries. It must be admitted that progress in individual sciences has most often not only disregarded problems

6 Even so, we should ask how classical “ufology” and UAP Studies are related, and how the two may inform each other going forward.

of this kind, but even depended on disregarding them. The traditional methodologies of physics, chemistry, biology and the neurosciences illustrate this insofar as they restrict their interest exclusively to the material domain of their respective level of reality. However, this must not be taken as a proof of the validity or even necessity of such a procedure. With the present journal, we want to explore basic mind-matter questions in a way which is unbiased by the presuppositions of individual disciplines, yet builds on their achievements. It would be outright impossible to investigate general or specific mind-matter issues without explicitly considering the important results of the individual disciplines involved.

With this background, *Mind and Matter* is conceived as an interdisciplinary journal, aimed at an educated readership interested in all aspects of mind-matter research from the perspectives of the sciences and humanities. It is devoted to the publication of empirical, theoretical, and conceptual research and the discussion of its results.⁷

If I were to highlight the most important sentence here which has direct and immediate relevance for us, it is this – and it can be modified to fit exactly our purpose: “With the present journal, we want to explore basic ... questions [about the subject of UAP] in a way which is *unbiased by the presuppositions of individual disciplines, yet builds on their achievements*. It would be outright impossible to investigate general or specific [questions related to UAP] without explicitly considering the important results of the individual disciplines involved.” The rest of Dr. Atmanspacher’s opening remarks in the first issue of *Mind and Matter* are equally germane to our endeavors here at *Limina*, and so you are encouraged [to read on](#).⁸

3. An editorial survey of articles in this inaugural issue.

Some of the articles in this first issue were submitted for

review by scholars who presented at *Limina*’s [Inaugural Symposium](#), held in early February 2023 and organized on behalf of the journal by the *Society for UAP Studies* (with immense and invaluable behind-the-scenes help from Karin Austin and Mark Hurwitt of the *John E. Mack Institute*, and the team at vFairs, who provided our online platform). Others were submitted during the course of the previous year. They represent a sample of the kinds of submissions that *Limina* is honored to review and publish, and reflect the broad interdisciplinary scholarly ecosystem where UAP Studies can thrive.

The theme for our first issue was taken from *Limina*’s February 2023 Symposium: **“Foundations, Frontiers and Future Prospects of UAP Studies”**. A total of five articles comprise the substance of this issue. The first two are essays that engage very fundamental – even preliminary – questions that should inform all UAP research (especially scientific research). These first two papers also seek to address some of the most important historical challenges this research faces going forward. Both offer key insights regarding best research practices, including the communication of results and proper handling of the (often sensitive) data obtained during the course of UAP research (with special attention given to those cases involving crucial *witness testimony*). The next article presents results of some decades of research done by means of instrumented field observations of UAP (primarily using astrophysical techniques) and offers further substantial methodological considerations for, and theoretical reflections on, the general physical science of UAP. The issue concludes with two further articles: a book review and a Letter to the Editor. The review covers a 2023 text by Durham University Prof. Michael Bohlander (also one of *Limina*’s subject-area editors), who writes on the serious legal questions raised by any potential intelligence associated with UAP (particularly relevant as future physical science of these phenomena would seem to require a closer and sustained *interaction* with UAP). Finally, the Letter to the Editor outlines an intriguing historical case from 17th century Germany that offers suggestive connections to contemporary UAP Studies, and which is submitted to the wider research community for further consideration.

⁷ Atmanspacher 2003, p. 3 (emphasis added). We should also note that Prof. Dr. Atmanspacher was an affiliate of the IGPP, referred to above.

⁸ We might also pause to reflect for a moment on another important correspondence between *Limina* and *Mind and Matter*: the very focus and content of Dr. Atmanspacher’s journal – a broad and interdisciplinary study of what can be called “psychophysical” (matter-mind) relations – is itself directly relevant to UAP Studies, and can profoundly inform it. As we have seen time and again, the question of the nature of the relation between mind and matter is one very prominent in discussions of the subject, especially where the focus is on the *human experience* of UAP. Given the conspicuous absence of a general theory of this relation, UAP Studies is, when probing issues related to the mind-matter question, caught in endless speculation. This fact should prompt further interest in forging definite ties between UAP Studies and the field of Mind-Matter research.

4. Scientific and empirical research is preparatory and foundational – not final.

As the reader will no doubt discover, in our inaugural issue papers tend to emphasize the foundational importance of methodologically sound *scientific* work done on UAP and related phenomena. But I would like to emphasize that this is not where UAP Studies as such ends. Rather, it is where it begins: by determining and more clearly understanding the physical characteristics of UAP insofar as they are able to be established *within* the parameters of existing science. Even if UAP can be shown to be profoundly *anomalous* (in one way or another – and different UAP may present different challenges on this question, since we cannot assume that all UAP have a single origin or cause), it must be demonstrated as such *against* our existing understanding of matter and mind; this means that we must first bring *what we already know* (or think we know) to bear on the phenomena. If (some) UAP prove to be anomalous, perhaps even constituting a true *scientific anomaly* (as many suspect – a question deserving of further philosophical scrutiny on its own), the only way for this to be both clear and productive is by producing compelling and widely-accepted results of methodologically sound physical research, using accepted parameters of observation and measurement; this can in turn offer specific suggestions as to exactly where, how, and for what reasons known physics is inadequate to the phenomena (if that is what is discovered). This is how many fundamental breakthroughs were achieved in the history of physical science (for example, the discoveries that lead to the development of the quantum theory of matter): by trying to render new and puzzling observations consistent with classical (i.e. known and widely accepted) physical assumptions, one can show precisely where and how those assumptions lead to inconsistencies – or even paradoxes – given what the new observations and measurements reveal. But even this is not enough, if some UAP have an essential connection to their human percipients (again as some suspect). Here, it would not even be enough to document and study human witness testimony, for what would be at issue are the *mind-matter* connections – something which, if we are to take Prof. Dr. Atmanspacher’s own suggestions in his opening editorial from 2003 to heart, would require deciding on a *theory* of those connections. And this is something which we do not yet possess (indeed there is no general agreement even on what such a theory would look like). In this way we see that neither the physics, nor the psychology or human testimony

alone (neither the physical nor the “psychical” aspects) are individually sufficient for a full understanding of and intellectual engagement with the UAP enigma. Rather, as for other complex phenomena that challenge the limits of human understanding, both – and perhaps something else altogether – will be required. Hence do we seek the development of a new field of inquiry in which such complexities find their own conceptual voice. We seek, that is, the essence and scope of “UAP Studies” proper.

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