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✓ THE UFO ENIGMA

The Definitive Explanation
of the UFO Phenomenon

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ally as many differing reports of the event as there are observers. This has been demonstrated endlessly in staged happenings in psychology classrooms in colleges and universities, in law schools, and in the laboratory.

Thucydides attributed discrepancies in reports of his observers to emotional bias and to failure of memory. Today we have a more sophisticated grasp of the magnitude of the problem. As Cornell psychologist G. M. Whipple has said,

[The accuracy of any verbal report] involves the whole psychology of sensation, attention, and apperception; it hinges upon attention and recall, and thereby involves the whole psychology of memory; it issues in verbal statements, and thereby involves the psychology of language and expression; it is conditioned by numerous subjective factors, such as ideational type, emotional reaction, temperamental tendencies, sentiment, susceptibility to suggestion, etc.¹

Thus eyewitness accounts of any event should be considered with caution, and skepticism, and we suggest that in the controversial realm of ufology caution and skepticism should be maximal.

Consider the Chiles-Whitted case mentioned in Chapter 11, a "classic" sighting much cited by the ufologists and still defended by some of them. Clarence S. Chiles and John B. Whitted were, respectively, captain and copilot of an Eastern Airlines DC-3 flight early in the morning of July 24, 1948. Flying over Alabama, near Montgomery, that morning they had, they said, had a frightening encounter with a giant cigar-shaped object. The alien aircraft, or spacecraft (for such it appeared to be), had, both men agreed, two rows of brightly illuminated windows, or portholes. One passenger of the DC-3 also sighted the terrifying object, but described it only as a streak of light. The crew of another commercial aircraft in the same general vicinity at about the same time reported having seen on the far horizon a jet or rocket trail moving at "terrific speed."

It seemed to Captain Chiles that the spacecraft was intelligently controlled; when the DC-3 veered, the exotic object appeared to veer. So convincing was this apparent movement of the alien craft

UFOs AND PHYSIO

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Another importa been described by C

that both pilots dismissed any possibility that they might have encountered a meteor—which would immediately occur to many as a likely cause of their unusual experience. But it is almost certain that the Chiles-Whitted object was just that—a fireball, or bolide.^{2,3}

As we have seen in Chapter 11, observers of the re-entry of Zond IV provided that fireball also with windows, or portholes, that it did not, of course, have. The fact is that any observer of an unexpected, startling, or dramatic event is likely to misinterpret it in a way that brings the stimulus into the realm of the familiar and the understood.

In a staged happening in a psychology class, for example, it has been shown that a banana may be identified as a handgun—surely a startling misidentification of a very familiar object. Since it doesn't make sense to pull a banana on an intended victim, while drawing a handgun on a victim does make familiar sense, the banana was seen as a weapon.

To an airline pilot, another aircraft in the sky is a much more familiar object than a bolide. The Chiles-Whitted UFO sighting occurred during the annual Delta Aquarid meteor shower, which produced numbers of other UFO sightings that year, as it does every year. Unexpectedly confronted with a brilliant light flashing through the sky, Chiles and Whitted interpreted the stimulus as something familiar. They recognized that it wasn't a familiar type of aircraft, so they "saw" it as a strange vehicle—with portholes. Aircraft, with rare exceptions, do have windows, or portholes. So the pilots provided the streaking light with these, as at a later time did some observers of the re-entry of Zond IV.

Seeing may indeed be believing, but the interpretation of the seeing is all too often at variance with what the stimulus actually is. A common example may be cited. Where two lights are alternately flashing—as in a highway school-crossing sign—if the size of the lights, the distance between them, and the flashing rate are just right, the lights will be seen as moving from one location to the other as a single light, smoothly crossing the intervening space. Motion is perceived where none is present. This is known as the "phi phenomenon" by the experimental psychologist.

Another important phenomenon in physiological optics has been described by C. Pulfrich, who discovered that nerve impulses

} simplification

This isn't what they claimed!

Explanation

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generated by a bright stimulus apparently reach the brain more quickly than those caused by a darker object.⁴ If a suspended bright ball is caused to swing back and forth, from left to right and right to left, against a darker background, a viewer's two eyes will perceive this motion as it really is—a pendulum swinging in a plane perpendicular to the line of sight. If the observer places a dark glass over the right eye, because of the reduced illumination the image of the swinging pendulum seen by the right eye lags behind that seen by the left.

When the pendulum is swinging to the right, the observer will therefore see two images unless he converges his eyes to make the images coalesce. (The effort to merge the images is precisely that required to focus the eyes on a single, nearby object.) The observer has the impression that the pendulum, instead of swinging in a plane, is moving in an elliptical path centered directly under the point of suspension. It seems first to approach the observer and then to recede into the distance as the direction of its swing changes.

This almost-forgotten effect was recently dramatized by Edwin H. Land, inventor of the Polaroid-Land camera, in a lecture at a meeting at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore commemorating the centenary of the birth of Robert W. Wood, distinguished American physicist and authority on physical optics (see p. 230). Members of the audience, holding dark filters over their right eyes, became so convinced by the illusion that many automatically extended their free arms to fend off what appeared to be imminent collision of the moving sphere with their heads.

To illustrate the same phenomenon, instead of using dark glass to reduce the illumination received by one eye, the observer may simply squint an eye or view the swinging object through a tiny hole in a piece of cardboard. The effect is essentially the same. When the observer refocuses his eyes, a bright object moving from side to side appears to approach the observer and then recede into the distance.

This phenomenon may shed further light upon the Chiles-Whitted case. The two pilots evidently saw a bright meteor flash across their path, but so convinced were they that the object was pursuing a collision course, they executed evasive action. They refused

to believe that what was a fireball. But, in terms of what comes understandable from the Air Force files.

There is great need for search in this area. For example, are the two balance cause the illusion suggest that military specific visual tests. demonstration.

Many misinterpretations of vision. Accurate people with unimpaired vision have been adequate support of an UFO sighting is discussed. Whitted, we probably vision, but in many

An investigator of the acuity of the sighting normally wear eye-glasses sighting? Regardless of the seeing condition.

In a court case, an associate professor of Responsive Psychology officer testified that while both victims were present, the conditions at the site were dimly lit. The jury occurred. One black gathered where the