
WHAT DOES A HALF-CENTURY OF INTENSE UFO DISPLAY MEAN?

BY MICHAEL D. SWORDS

This article is a speculation about the meaning of the UFO phenomenon. Its value, if any, might be to stimulate discussion about the big questions in our field and perhaps clarify or put a few matters in focus. My only excuse for presenting this is that I've had a lot of years in the UFO trenches and listened to a lot of the best ideas of my fellow UFO workers. So, here are my thoughts, for what they are worth.

My discussion is based upon a few assumptions. The major one is that the best case reports are responses to and glimpses of high technology that we humans do not produce. In brief defense of this assumption, I can only offer the huge panoply of excellent cases, anchored by such reports as Boianai, Papua New Guinea ("Father Gill"), the Coyne helicopter case in Ohio, or the Nash-Fortenberry mid-air encounter. In my own family are two rather impressive silent-disk cases that would just be swallowed up by the hundreds of stunning close encounters of the first kind. The extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) is not the only theory that we can use for these cases, but it is the simplest, and in many ways, the least stretch of the imagination as far as expanding what we currently believe to be likely about our universe.

Some people argue that the ETH is insufficient to deal with many elements of UFO phenomenology. To them I say two things: 1) they are probably the ones who are lacking in imagination, if they cannot envision some of the near "magical" potentialities that the futurists and nano- and information-technologists are already talking about today; and 2) not *every* experience reported to a ufologist need be true, nor need it be related to the UFO phenomenon. If there is a scattering of reports that don't seem to fit well into the ETH, this should not be much of a surprise. Don't throw them away, but don't assume that they necessarily belong or that we have all the insight and creativity needed to explain every reported experience. Instead, let's give the ETH a chance and ride with it awhile in the context of this article's background, i.e., the 50-year display of the UFO phenomenon—not hidden but readily visible to our civilization.

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Our recent discoveries of extrasolar planets have heightened the discussion of SETI, the Drake equation, and the odds of a galaxy full of various kinds of intelligent life. The discussion has led scientists to predict that most life-bearing stars would be older (some far older) than the Sun, and the odds would be that life there was advanced beyond us as well. Ufology has been saying the same thing for decades. Any beings capable of the technology that we observe would be significantly advanced (and probably vastly advanced) beyond where we are today. And this view is not only modern scientific deduction, it has always been common sense. The thought arose almost immediately with the military and intelligence people studying the early cases, and, if it weren't for the lack of imagination of their various astronomically trained consultants, who knows how long the ETH would have persisted as an open theory among those circles. There is another obvious point. Whenever we decide to call ourselves a space-faring civilization, we will by definition be the newest and most technologically crude one doing so. *Everybody else* flying around will be smarter and have been doing it longer than us.

So, just for the sake of discussion, let's imagine that most of the very good, unexplained UFO cases are the product of ET technology, and that this technology is from a civilization that's not only smarter than us, but vastly smarter. We now face the questions that motivated this article. Why are they here? Why have they kept up this strange peek-a-boo display for half a century in a somewhat intense manner?

EXTRATERRESTRIAL MOTIVATIONS

We would expect that most beings do things because they have a *need*, but often also because they have a *desire*. "Need" here is meant to (roughly) indicate an urgent survival issue; "desire" indicates something one *could* do without but is nevertheless driven towards anyway. These two categories tend to fog together in a mind dominated by emotion and illogic. Whether need or desire, ET behavior would be motivated purely by self-interest.

A second class of motivations, which some philosophers will argue are really not separate (though I disagree), are motives based on altruism or genuine caring for "the

other” without regard to anything one might get out of the behavior. The typical SETI enthusiast is always talking about the great-hearted ET-altruists who are just waiting their opportunity to send us their Encyclopedia Galactica of knowledge which will end resource and energy shortages, famine, cancer, death, and even war.

Using that as a rough roadmap, let’s tease out some of the specifics. Since we know ourselves best, let’s begin with altruistic ET motivations of what they might want to do for us and compare that to the UFO phenomenon and its time frame of 50 years of display.

We imperfect Earthlings have many needs that a beneficent savior could ameliorate. We have terrible food, water, and resource problems in many areas of the world. We have created technological systems upon which many of us are totally dependent, but which have serious, perhaps even terminal, side effects on health, ecology, and our ability to sustain these into the future. Ubiquitous communication systems spread news (accurate or not) to “have-nots” about what the “haves” are doing and, in the process, incite war and terrorism. Science is so advanced and moral values so weak that groups and individuals have all they need in terms of weapons and attitudes to pursue an agenda of terror and harm. And this is just what we’ve wreaked upon ourselves. Beyond this, we could really use some help with cancer, AIDS, the aging process, etc. A recent worry is the occasional wayward asteroid or comet, and even the wayward meddling ET-civilization.

How does a review of the UFO phenomenon relate to these concerns? Do we have *any* valid and convincing evidence that we are being helped in any of these areas? Are the high-tech ETs who seem to be cruising about, displaying their powerful knowledge in their devices, demonstrably altruists? I see precisely zero evidence for this thesis. There have been no cures, no miracle devices, no functional “gifts” at all. Every time something of this sort arises, it eventually leads to nothing. Fairy tales persist among contactee circles and conspiracy cults, but nothing materializes . . . exactly nothing. Some abduction investigators claim that individuals have been helped. Maybe. Even if true—and it is just as conceivable that these individuals have helped *themselves* get through an intense experience or problem—the scattering of persons aided by the ETs is pretty meager when compared to the population of six billion humans. Such assistance appears to be a side effect, at best.

The only way of saving the “ETs are altruists” theory is to assume that they want to do this, but have decided that it isn’t time yet. This is possible, but it’s pretty thin gruel to feed on. Some say that the ETs are conditioning us for overt contact. After we are ready, they will then bring out the goodies. This is, of course, possible, particularly if we add that they want all cultures and religions to be accepting enough to have equal opportunity to share in the gifts when the contact is made. But over 55 years—since at least 1947—is an awfully patient (and inefficient) process. That

is long enough that any competent ET civilization should have accomplished the necessary groundwork by now, if their plan was simply conditioning us to the idea that they are here and trustworthy gift-givers.

Could ET be altruistically protecting us from large and destructive collisions with space debris? Well, yes. But they can do that just fine “way out there” somewhere, without us knowing about it. More to the point, that activity would bear no relationship whatsoever to buzzing people in automobiles down here on Earth. So ufology offers no support for that idea, either. Could ET be protecting us from other bad or malevolent ETs? Well, yes to that question, too. But it’s a useless concept in this current discussion. It just begs the question of what the other ETs are doing here then, although the answer must be nothing altruistic, or we wouldn’t need saving from them. No, our UFO-driving ETs don’t seem to be altruists.

They are here for their own interests, then. And, what could be more natural? Beings pursue their *own* agendas. But *what* about Earth, and us? Could they be interested enough in us to play peek-a-boo for 50 years?

Let’s address the basic physical nature of our solar system. An advanced scientific and technological society would figure out our physics, astronomy, chemistry, and geology in a week, maybe a few hours. If they were here to explore and gain pure knowledge (the ET scholars), they could pack up and move on without us ever seeing them. And, before they even arrived, they would know that there was nothing physical or chemical here that they *needed*. It has always astonished me to listen to people mulling the possibilities that the ETs needed our uranium or water. Imagine these supertechnologists: coming all this way to get a drink. Civilizations this advanced do not need any help getting resources. Basic energy and chemicals abound all over the galaxy. We are not special in the solar system. If we are, it is because of our emergent phenomena: life, intelligence, society.

Would explorer-scholar ETs be interested in the life forms of Earth? Probably. With their previous knowledge, analytical abilities, and data-sorting and sifting capability, it would most likely take them a few weeks to figure it all out. DNA is a miracle, but it ain’t *that* complicated. The understanding of how our fauna and flora function (and came to be) would rapidly fall into meaningful patterns, just as it slowly has done for us. It certainly wouldn’t take 50 years.

Would explorer-scholars be interested in higher mental activities, and sociocultural structures? Very probably. They are more complex fields, harder to predict. Would it take longer for them to understand our society? I’d guess so, especially if they wanted to set up experiments to test whatever hypotheses they had. These experiments shouldn’t take long if directed only to the individual mind (on an instincts, emotions, reasoning level), but could be quite lengthy if they were society-wide macroexperiments. Of all the hypotheses mentioned so far, this concept is the only

one that seems to fit well with a 50-year semicovert display. It would be a thing of sufficient subtlety: a velvet-touch manipulation without direct meddling in our technological, economic, or political situations. Throw stones in their pond, and watch how far this species allows the ripples to go.

There are a couple of other characteristics of we humans that the explorer-scholars might be interested in as well. Despite our tendencies toward materialism, there are those of us who maintain an in-touchness with the spiritual, and with the paranormal. This may be something that they are vitally interested in, and some aspect of it may be a feature that they cannot find in themselves. Our own difficulties in achieving these states of consciousness may require a lengthy period of study. Even then, the open display aspect of the phenomenon does not fit well with these latter interests, as it does with the societal experimentation idea.

MALEVOLENT EXTRATERRESTRIALS

Let us leave the relatively benign explorer-scholar theory behind and address hotter and nastier hypotheses. If humans can supply the solution to a need for these advanced extraterrestrials, what could it be? ETs can create all the energy and all the biological substances they require (even “genes”) off the shelves of their labs. Does our system itself have any *strategic* importance? For a society that can warp in and out of Space-Time by super technology, that seems unlikely. Could they have a prophecy that somehow involves us? That’s pretty species-centric to imagine that, but I suppose that it is possible that we are their equivalent of Bethlehem. But that doesn’t really seem likely. If they are driven to remain here for as long as they have been observed, they *want* to, they don’t *need* to.

So what about wants? We could be facing a very religious civilization (religious rather than spiritual—one bound by inflexible duties rather than compassion and empathy). And it could be their sacred trust to convert the Earth to their view. But they know how powerful our own religions and spiritualities are, and they realize that it will take a long and clever conditioning before they can become completely overt and begin the conversion in earnest. Such a hypothesis could account for an extremely subtle and patient phenomenological display. Whether we would get Saganesque goodies along with the sermons, who knows? It could be the galactic version of going to the Gospel Mission soup kitchen. Before dispensing with this idea too quickly, we should remember that very few things will motivate Earthlings to extreme efforts, and religious fervor is one of them. The fools of the Hale-Bopp fiasco would be a nearly unrelated and unfortunate side effect to this subtle game, but one wonders whether the believers in the John Mack school of spiritual abductions would see no seeds planted for this agenda.

There are much nastier possibilities to contemplate.

Having mentioned John Mack, veteran ufologists will immediately think of his opposite school: the Hopkins-Jacobs school of cold, uncaring genetic hybridizers. Well, cold and uncaring I can easily credit. And my views on the *incredibility* of real cross-species hybridization are well known to Budd and Dave. Since they are friends whom I like a great deal, I’ll say no more on that subject here. Plus, I can see what is for me a much simpler hypothesis to account for all the terrorizing, messing-with-one’s-mind-and-emotions that is said to go on in a classic CE-4. We are cannon fodder for their entertainment.

Suppose one was a member of a truly high-tech civilization. We could not only shoot around the galaxy in disks, but also cure diseases, prevent aging, and avoid most accidents. We’d be nearly immortal. And there might not be much work to do, either. We’d have a leisure-time paradise. But would it be that? Forever is a really long time. What, after the first couple hundred years, would be have to look forward to? Maybe the cleverer of us would find some bottomless mystery to devote our hours and days to, but what of the rest? What do you do when you’ve seen and experienced it all? Drugs? Sex? Probably. But even then, what, ultimately, is new? A very advanced, very long-lived species might have a gigantic need for novelty—nothing profound, just as entertainment.

Suppose that you could meddle, subtly, with an entire world. On the macroscale, you could play that world like a vast, concrete, unpredictable game. Show them a little something here, what will they do? Mess with some military installations there, then what? Maybe even fake a disk crash for them. This theory sounds a bit like the anthropological-scholars running experiments, but it is sufficiently different. Here the audience is not scholars (who might quit when they’ve gotten enough data), but the alien equivalent of fantasy football-league players who may want to go on, and even escalate their meddling, forever. As far as evidence goes, whether there is truth to the theory or not, the 50-year peek-a-boo display certainly has subtly messed with our minds about what’s true about the world.

And suppose that for some ETs these macrosocietal games weren’t down-and-dirty enough. How about using your nanotechnology to create implant linkages between yourself and an Earthling, and then titillating or terrorizing the hell out of that person, virtually experiencing the rush of their emotions? Of course, no one wants to believe that. No one wants to feel like they’re being used, especially with no say in the matter. But it would explain much of what is reported in abductions. And, possibly, it would keep the bored, uncaring, nastier element of the ET society entertained. As long as it worked, meeting their needs, why ever quit? Why not thousands of psychological terrorist acts, if they had a powerful desire and the ability and the immorality to pursue it?

Many in our field have stated their belief (wish, I think) that the ETs are good guys. I see no evidence of it. I feel that

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the best we can hope for is that they have relatively benign and temporary interests in us, and that they will go away without doing any permanent damage.

You can invent more theories than I've discussed here. All of the above ideas refer to very advanced ETs, and are tested against the need to explain the 50-year dance we've been seeing. In my view, the theories that survive the test best are the macroscopic societal-manipulation ones (for religious conversion, or anthropological research, or entertainment on a grand scale), and the ultranasty concept that might be called emotional parasitism. All these ideas originate from considering what the ETs want for themselves. The only altruistic theory that seems plausible is the macrosocietal manipulation so that all Earthlings will be conditioned to equally share in whatever goodies the ETs bring. Since this latter seems much more concrete in its goal, i.e., dumping real undeniable stuff on us, it seems to need less subtlety to set up, and perhaps not such a long dance of sightings. The others appear to require much more covert action, as we have experienced.

I realize that speculations are not great contributions to ufological research. Forgive me. I'm doing my part to entertain the aliens. Writing articles such as this is much more pleasant than being victimized by Budd and Dave's "mind scanners." ♦