



THE AMERICAN MUSEUM—HAYDEN PLANETARIUM

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Mr. Arthur Bray
1187 Agincourt Road
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Dear Mr. Bray:

Your January 16th letter (about UFOs) to the Ottawa Journal has been forwarded to me. Every now and then during the two advanced courses I teach in astronomy at The American Museum—Hayden Planetarium in New York, a student will ask if I "believe" in flying saucers. I love such questions because they give me the opportunity to point out something very important, and something that most people—including you if I read you correctly—fail to realize about science.

A scientist does not "believe" or he does not "not believe" in a given phenomenon. His approach is not one of mysticism but of collecting, analyzing, and evaluating data. Although it is true that two scientists examining the same body of data may indeed make somewhat different inferences leading to somewhat different conclusions, it is highly improbable that a dozen scientists will produce a dozen different conclusions. In other words, a consensus is the rule, and just such a consensus exists among scientists who have examined various UFO data. Permit me to quote from a National Academy of Sciences panel appointed to review Professor Condon's ("infamous," as you put it) report based on a two-year study:

"We are unanimous in the opinion that this has been a very creditable effort to apply objectively the relevant techniques of science to the solution of the UFO problem. The Report recognizes that there remain UFO sightings that are not easily explained. The Report does suggest, however, so many reasonable and possible directions in which an explanation may eventually be found that there seems to be no reason to attribute them to an extraterrestrial source without evidence that is much more convincing. The Report also shows how difficult it is to apply scientific methods to the occasional transient sightings with any chance of success. While further study of particular aspects of the topic (e.g., atmospheric phenomena) may be useful, a study of UFOs in general is not a promising way to expand scientific understanding of the phenomena.