

INTRODUCTION

Common sense is the quintessence of the experiences and prejudices of its time. It is a most unreliable advisor when one is confronted with a perfectly new situation.

Gustav Naan

UFOs -- unidentified flying objects, or flying saucers as they are often called -- have been on the mind of the public for at least the last 22 years. For a number of reasons, we know little more about them now than we did at the outset. There exists a great amount of misinformation about the phenomenon not only in the minds of the public, but among educated groups such as scientists as well. It is the purpose of this series of essays to describe various aspects of the phenomenon, make clear my prejudices and the reasons for them, and to suggest a means of proceeding on this interesting and potentially very significant problem.

But first, a few words about the term UFO. J. A. Hynek, an astronomer having continuous involvement with UFO study for over 20 years, defines UFOs as "any reported aerial or surface visual sighting or radar return which remains unexplained by conventional means even after examination by competent persons. This definition...specifies neither flying nor objects."⁽¹⁾ I would agree, but would prefer to replace "or radar return" with "or instrumental observation" and "even after examination by competent persons" to "even after competent examination by qualified persons." This, then, is the definition I have adopted in the five essays that follow.