

PART 5: UFOs -- HOW TO PROCEED AND WHY

We are so far from knowing all the forces of Nature and the various modes of their action that it is not worthy of a philosopher to deny phenomena only because they are inexplicable in the present state of our knowledge. The harder it is to acknowledge the existence of phenomena, the more we are bound to investigate them with increasing care.

Laplace

Laplace's remarks are certainly as true and significant for us today as for his contemporaries. In the preceding essays I have suggested that there exists a class of phenomena rather widely occurring today (and perhaps since earliest times) that is elusive, puzzling and often at variance with known scientific and technical experience. What are we going to do about it? What should we, what can we do about it?

J. F. MacDonald suggests that the UFO phenomena lie somewhere in the following categories of explanation:

1. Hoaxes, fabrications, and frauds. Report files contain examples of these; investigators believe about 5 percent of all reports made are in this category. Detailed study, however, usually uncovers such reports.
2. Hallucinations, mass hysteria, and rumor phenomena. Present understanding of psychology does not admit many of the significant reports to be explained in this way.
3. Misinterpretations of well known physical phenomena (meteorological, astronomical, optical, etc.). By far the largest percentage of reports fall in this category. Study by an experienced investigator can usually identify these.
4. Poorly understood physical phenomena (rare electrical or meteorological effects, plasmas). Certainly a distinct possibility in a number of cases, it is a category worthy of careful study. Some of the most interesting cases, however have sufficient observational detail to eliminate this possibility (I am referring to reports of unambiguously machine-like objects).