

Dr. Jaakko Närvä

ELUSIVE UFOs

– A SOLID MATTER

SCIENTIFIC GROUNDS
OF UFOLOGY
EXPLAINED

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Books on Demand, Helsinki, Finland

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Publisher: BoD – Books on Demand, Helsinki, Finland

Manufacturer: BoD – Books on Demand, Norderstedt, Germany

ISBN: 978-952-80-6096-3

Cover design and layout: Anni Kultajoki

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PREFACE

For a long time now, I have been fascinated by the fundamental ufological question: do UFOs really exist or not? To me, the subject has not been easy, instead, I have experienced a lot of mixed feelings. Are UFOs objective phenomena or not, has been an intriguing challenge for me. I have found the evidence compelling, yet problematic, that is, incoherent and not profound enough. As I see it, the question of whether UFOs are real or not, continues to be scientifically solid – although UFOs seem very elusive. I have tried to understand the big picture pertaining to this question: the relevant natural scientific, psychological and cultural scientific, skeptical and ufological evidence, and what can we infer from this multilayered, complex package. In this book, I go through the relevant information from the point of view of the problem of the objectivity of UFOs and present the outcome. I will show you, with clarity and profoundness, after deep and critical analysis, that UFOs do seem to exist and that ufology should be taken very seriously in the academic world.

A huge and grateful thank you to my family and many friends and colleagues who, in various ways, for example by reading and commenting the manuscript, helped me to write this book!

Jaakko Närvi

INTRODUCTION

UFOS – A SERIOUS SCIENTIFIC QUESTION

In the history of science, fear of authority and the desire not to shake the foundations of existing realities have driven people to oppose new inventions and ideas. Science has been known to be conservative and slow to adopt new, particularly groundbreaking inventions. One of the most famous examples is the opposition to the sun-centered model by Nicolaus Copernicus, Giordano Bruno, Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton in the 16th and 17th centuries. Bruno, a Catholic priest and a doctor in theology was burned at stake for heresy on February 17th, 1600. The fate of the Italian astronomer and physicist Galilei was not quite as harsh, but he was sentenced to a lifelong house arrest. The Catholic Church did not accept the sun-centered model until the 1820's.

People are not burned at stake or condemned to house arrest for making scientific discoveries in the Western world anymore. However, science can be conservative and slow particularly in adopting evidence of the factuality of unlikely assertions. In a way, this is of course how it should be. Science is all about making sure we get information that is as accurate as possible and eliminating the possibility that we could be fooled by nature or ourselves. The more unlikely the assertion the harder and better the evidence must be. Systematic and strict questioning of the assumptions, methods and research results, but also creativity in coming up with methodology and experimentation, are equally essential for providing proof, and time-consuming. People have sometimes noticed and understood the existence of a phenomenon before science has paid any attention to it, let alone substantiated its existence. As an example, folklore has been aware of ball lightnings and meteorites

long before they were scientifically accepted as facts. In some fields of natural science, the cumulation of knowledge has depended on laypeople's observations.

For more than seventy years now, UFOs have been a part of our awareness and a challenge both for the natural scientific and technical scientific community and for our entire society. The so-called modern UFO era is generally considered to have begun with Kenneth Arnold's sighting, after which the term "flying saucer" was coined. Arnold was a 32-year-old successful businessman, an experienced private pilot, a deputy sheriff, and a search and rescue pilot of Idaho. On June 24th 1947, Arnold was on a business trip combined with a search for a missing airplane. While flying near Mount Rainier, Washington, he saw nine flat, somewhat crescent shaped objects amidst the mountain tops. Having discussed his sighting at Pendleton with other pilots, Arnold set out for the local FBI bureau, but it was already closed. He then headed to the *East Oregonian* newspaper. Arnold told Nolan Skiff, the editor of the "End of the Week" column, about his sighting, describing how the objects "flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water". Another reporter, Bill Bequette, sent a dispatch out on the Associated Press wire on June 25th. He used the expression "saucer-like objects", from which a headline writer came up with the moniker "flying saucer". The news spread nationwide the very next day. In July the same year the US Air Force started its UFO research program. According to a survey conducted on August 19th, 1947, ninety per cent of US citizens had heard of "flying saucers".

Observations of flying objects resembling UFOs have been clearly documented since the late 1800s, then called "airships" and now known as "mystery airships" or "phantom airships" (see section 3.5). After this, from about the 1910s till 1945, "ghost airplanes" (ghost fliers; foo-fighters) were spotted in North American and European skies. In 1946 the term "ghost rockets" was used especially in Scandinavia. But it was Arnold's sighting that introduced the idea of these incredible flying machines to the mainstream popular culture. The term "saucer", however, is known to have been used in connection to strange, ethereal objects already on January 24th, 1878. This was when John Martin, a Texan farmer, described his sighting of a flat silvery celestial body travelling with amazing speed using the term "saucer".

After the beginning of the modern UFO era, the US Air Force had an official UFO research project for more than twenty years. General Douglas McArthur referred to UFOs and aliens in his speech at West Point Military Academy on May 12th, 1962. Probably the single most significant UFO study, the Condon Report (1969), carried out by the University of Colorado

(Boulder) and funded by the US Air Force, alludes to the existence of UFOs. The UFO question has been discussed both in the US Congress and the British Parliament. In the early 1990s, both Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan made it publicly known that a threat from outer space could force the Soviet Union and USA into cooperation. Several notable scientists have taken a stand on UFOs. For example, Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of the planetoid Pluto, reported seeing unidentified objects flying in a formation on an August evening in 1949. An important event in more recent modern ufology was the opening of the French State ufology archives in the spring of 2007, after which Great Britain for example also started publishing its UFO reports. UFOs are inseparably related to the question of the existence of extraterrestrial civilizations and notions of how dramatic an effect the affirmation of alien intelligence would have on science and our society as a whole.

UFO experiences and interest in UFOs are a significant part of our collective awareness and international culture. The number of people who believe UFOs exist is in hundreds of millions, and tens of millions have reported sightings. In addition to North America and Europe, ufology exists for example in South America, Australia, China and Japan. The use of UFOs in entertainment industry, movies, TV and cartoons brings them to everyone's living rooms. Popular movies exploiting the UFO theme include for example *Close Encounter of the Third Kind* (1979), *E.T.* (1982), *Independence Day* (1996), *Men in Black* (1997), *Signs* (2002), *Paul* (2011), *Iron Sky* (2012) and *Independence Day 2* (2016). The UFO tradition, which was originally an American phenomenon, is still very much alive in North America.

I myself have also seen a very UFO-like celestial object which first split into two and then merged back to one again. This happened in the spring of 1997. Here is a brief description of what I saw. I am not suggesting my experience is proof of the existence of such phenomena, because it has not been researched (it will remain my personal sighting), but I give it here just as an illustrative example. Let's just say that I have not found an ordinary explanation for my observation.

I saw a strange object in front of a cloud cover, it was small but yet clearly bigger than a dot. It was symmetric and elliptical, pointy at the ends and clearly defined, but it seemed two-dimensional. The object had no parts or protrusions that would have made it seem three-dimensional, and I could not make out whether the surface was curved. The object stood stationary and lopsided in the sky. It seemed to be reflecting the sun's reddish orange glow (or at least it was the same color as the clouds colored by the setting sun). The object

disappeared suddenly, reappeared in a few seconds in another place in the sky, far from the original location – or else a similar object showed up there – lopsided again, but this time it appeared to be slightly bigger. Then its edges started to soften and it divided very smoothly into two balls, which diminished until they disappeared. To my amazement, the balls, with soft edges, reappeared in the same place where they had just disappeared from and merged back into the sharply outlined ellipse.

I immediately thought of the corresponding UFO descriptions I had read about. Regardless of the fact that the topic was quite familiar to me and that I had been interested in UFOs for as long as I can remember, the whole experience was every bit as strange and confusing as it is to any other UFO witness. Although the impression of the object was very real, at the same time the whole experience was very hard to believe and difficult to handle.

I have been studying the UFO subject now for more than two decades. In December 2008, I defended my PhD thesis at the University of Helsinki on *Ufology and UFO experiences as Religious Phenomena*, after which I continued as a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of World Cultures. In this book I will set aside my official academic approach. Instead of exploring strictly the religious aspect of UFOs, my overall viewpoint is ufological. I will be delving into the question of the existence of UFOs and the validity of ufology as a science. Do UFOs really exist and if we think they do, why do we think that?

Has this not been researched enough already? Some are convinced; others are not. Some say there is strong evidence for the existence of UFOs; others say there is nothing to support the claim. Also, is there anything new or substantial to be said about the existence of UFOs? It is indeed possible that nothing novel can be said without innovative, thorough and large-scale examination of the subject.

My intention here is to take a step back, as it were. Many are of the opinion that all kinds of UFO phenomena are without question real and that UFOs and the creatures travelling in them come from other dimensions. They are sure about the intentions of these creatures and about how they operate. They feel that certain official organizations are purposefully withholding dramatic UFO information. I feel that the fundamental problem in ufology continues to be the reasoning concerning the existence of the UFOs. I feel that the evidence on the existence of UFOs has not been itemized and presented systematically enough and in correct relation to the wide array of arguments about them. My intention in this book is to systematically demonstrate why the question of the existence of UFOs should have academic

significance. I feel this is important because ufology has been neglected by the majority of the academic community. With my contribution, I strive to ensure that this remarkable and perhaps even paradigmatic phenomenon gets the academic attention it deserves.

Despite being immensely interesting and scientifically noteworthy, the subject of UFOs is taboo-like and it is widely avoided in the academic community. UFO witnesses and activists are still often unduly frowned upon. It is not at all uncommon that most UFO witnesses tell only their families and close friends about their experiences. Sometimes the witness tells no one or only speaks about the incident a long time after it happened. UFO witnesses are afraid of being ridiculed and stigmatized. The fear is not unfounded; snicker is a common reaction to UFO accounts. The burden of the witnesses is made heavier by the fact that the experiences often confuse and overwhelm them too, regardless of whether the experiences are true or not.

The taboo-like quality of the subject of UFOs is due to various reasons, some of which are historical. In the 1950s, the US Air Force started a campaign to lessen the public interest in UFOs because of security issues. Among other things, the Air Force was afraid that the enemy might exploit the general UFO enthusiasm in psychological warfare. As sociologist Joseph A. Blake has stated, the scientific community followed this policy and did not take UFOs as a serious scientific question. Most ufologists in the 1950s were laypeople which lowered its academic prestige even more, and the chorus of snappy skeptics with sarcastic refrains was enough to make many wary of free expression in this matter. The “flying saucers” were a frequent source of ridicule and snide remarks in the press. One reason for this aversion of UFOs might also be an instinctive fear reaction caused by the off-chance that there are species more intelligent and physically more powerful than we are. I think that another reason why the academia is not interested in UFOs is that they are often linked to even stranger and more unlikely occurrences, such as UFO contacts and abductions, conspiracy theories, all sorts of supernatural phenomena and horror stories. This in addition to the fact that discussion of potentially revolutionary phenomena is always difficult in science.

Before delving into the subject at hand, let us clarify the structure and progress of the book, and also what I am basing this information on. The idea is simple. Interesting arguments for and against the existence of UFOs have been presented. I will first offer the reader key information about the history of the UFO phenomena and the UFO research (chapter 2). Second, I will present the skeptical reasoning, which argues for the non-existence of UFOs

(chapter 3). The rationale behind the skeptical arguments is manifold. Third, after the skeptical arguments I will reason from ufological perspective, demonstrating why the possibility of the existence of UFOs should be taken seriously by the science community (chapter 4). Here I will show you why I feel, despite of all the skeptical reasoning, that there are well-founded arguments for the existence of UFOs. I find it important to go through the skeptical arguments first, so my ufological defense in favor of the existence of UFOs would be as successful as possible. In other words, the ufological argumentation I will present after the skeptical reasoning necessitates that the skeptical counter-arguments are acknowledged and taken into account when necessary. The book ends with the conclusions of the argumentation. If the reader is only interested in the justifications for the existence of UFOs, he can go straight to the ufological argumentation that begins in chapter 4. The ufological chapter is a coherent whole in itself, although the preceding chapters lay the groundwork for a broader understanding of the UFO question.

This is meant to be a book for a popular audience (albeit scientifically sustainable), so there are no references in the text. At the end you will find a bibliography of the material I have used for the book and what I have used to evaluate various arguments and information. However, the reader may, and rightly so, at some point find himself wondering what I base my information on. I have relied on sources I have found to be source-critically reliable. I have critically studied the UFO literature I have used, ufological, skeptical as well as anthropological. My criteria for the reliability of a source have been whether the text is formally academic or seems analytical and thorough, and also what the author's education and expertise is on the subject of UFOs. I have also done comparative analyses on various sources. Determining the truth value of the information and the validity of details in the UFO literature has by no means been easy. I do, however, promise after years of studying this subject that the information presented in this book is predominantly and essentially accurate. Even though I have not listed the specific bibliographical entries, I have not written this book whimsically, but placed great value on the integrity and veracity of the information given here.

CHAPTER 1

RELEVANT CONCEPTS

UFOs themselves are the starting point of ufological research, but the UFO phenomenon or phenomena are also often mentioned. Joseph Allen Hynek, an astrophysicist and perhaps the most significant researcher in the history of ufology, defined a UFO phenomenon as the body of reports of actual UFO and humanoid sightings (*The UFO Experience*, 1972). Hynek drew a distinction between the so-called distant sightings and close encounters. In a close encounter the UFO is seen as a rather large object. It is often described as being the size of a car seen from the distance of hundred meters (330 feet) or even much larger. If you feel a hundred meters is a long way and that a car cannot be seen very clearly from that distance, try it yourself. If the circumstances are otherwise optimal enough, you will find the car is quite visible and many times the size of a dot. In reports about close encounters humanoids are sometimes also described in detail. The average distance to UFOs and/or humanoids in close encounter experiences is typically less than 150 meters (500 feet) according to J. Allen Hynek.

Hynek acted as an adviser for the US Air Force's UFO project for approximately two decades. The Air Force hired Hynek because they needed an astronomer to identify which UFO sightings were in fact astronomical phenomena. The investigation was then focused on Wright-Patterson in Dayton, where the Technical Intelligence Division was located (TID's name was later changed to Air Technical Intelligence Center, ATIC, and it is now known as the National Air and Space Intelligence Center, NASIC). At the time Hynek was the head of the McMill Observatory at University of Ohio.

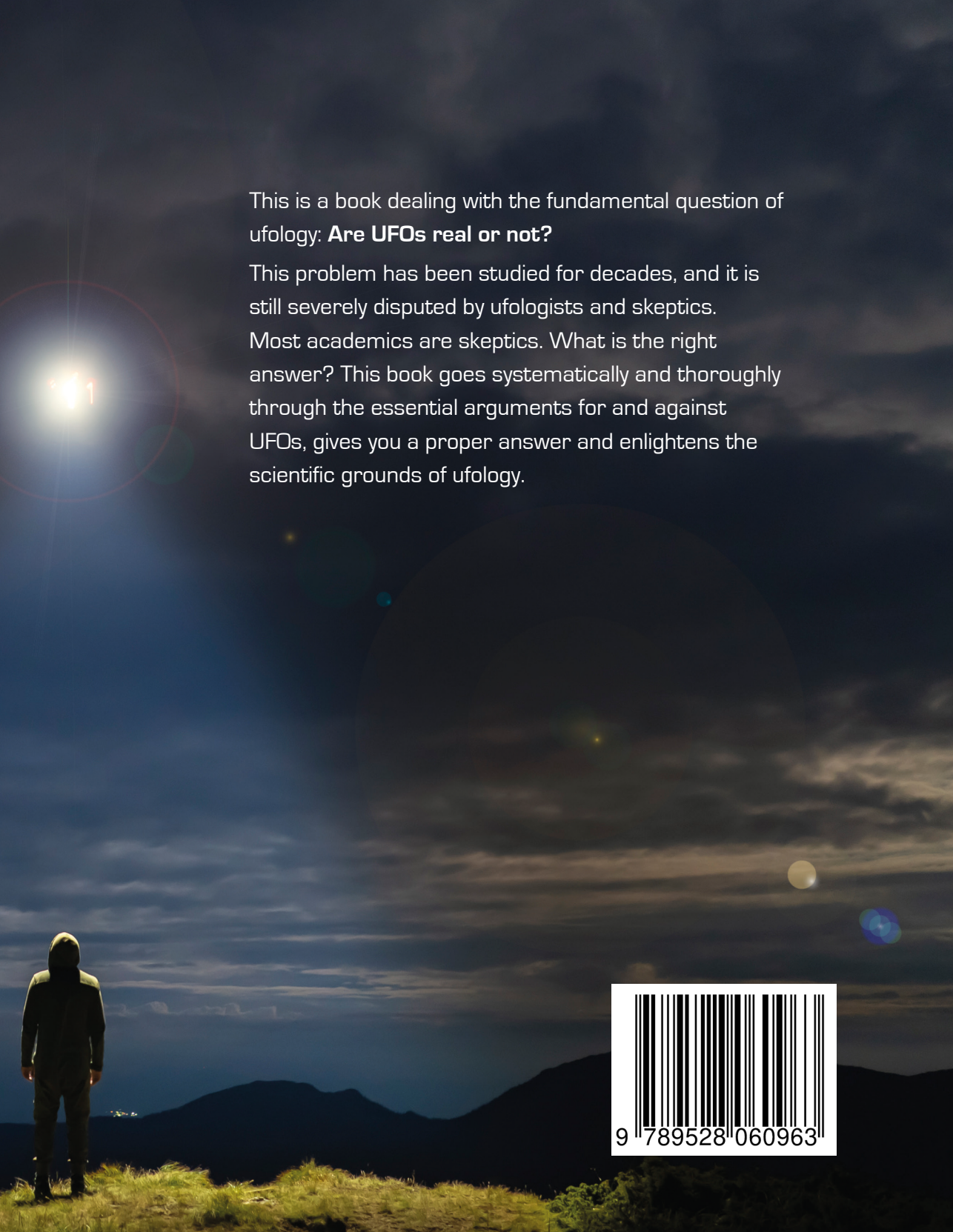
The definitions of ufologists concerning the UFO phenomenon vary depending on what kind of subjects they find ufologically relevant. Hynek for example did not include narratives of esoteric UFO contacts in his definition of the UFO phenomenon, although he did consider encounters with individual humanoids quite possible. Generally speaking at least the

following research subjects have been included in the category of UFO phenomena: UFOs, humanoids, Men in Black, UFO contacts, abductions, cattle mutilations and crop circles. It must be said that in the field of Cultural Studies the terms UFO phenomenon or phenomena often refer not only to the research topics of ufology, but also to ufology itself, as well as to many kinds of UFO-themed social and cultural materials.

What exactly is meant by the term UFO? It is an acronym for Unidentified Flying Object. It is not known who came up with the term and abbreviation. A US Air Force UFO report dated at the start of 1949 uses the term Unidentified *Aerial* Object. According to the aviation and space historian Curtis Peebles of Smithsonian Institute, the acronym UFO was first used in the first part of Sydney Shalett's article in the *Saturday Evening Post* titled "What You Can Believe About Flying Saucers", which was published on April 30th, 1949, during the Air Force's UFO study called *Project Grudge*. The second part came out on May 7th the same year. Shalett was allowed to acquaint himself with the investigations of the Air Force because *Project Grudge* wanted to dispel the general public's concerns about UFOs. Suspicion that officials were hiding information about the existence and nature of the flying saucers had started to surface around this time. The term Unidentified Flying Object was further used in the Air Force's 600-page report dated December 1949. So it may be that Shalett came up with the term UFO. A flying object that can be identified is known in ufology as an IFO (Identified Flying Object).

In the aforementioned closing report of the UFO investigation he headed at the Colorado University (see Introduction), the renowned physicist Edward U. Condon defined a UFO as an airborne or landed object thought to be capable of flight that an eye-witness is not able to identify and therefore reports it to, for example, government officials. I will speak about the so-called Condon Committee more later on. In his book *The UFO Experience*, Hynek defined a UFO as an object seen in the sky or on the ground, or a light phenomenon that cannot be explained in a normal way.

Because scientists are able to identify most objects the witnesses cannot recognize, a UFO (a literally unidentified flying object) is actually according to Condon most often an IFO, an identified flying object or article. Instead, for Hynek a UFO really is a UFO in the sense that it cannot be identified even by study. Like Hynek I think IFOs, identified flying objects, are not as such ufologically interesting and therefore cannot be included in the definition of a UFO.



This is a book dealing with the fundamental question of ufology: **Are UFOs real or not?**

This problem has been studied for decades, and it is still severely disputed by ufologists and skeptics. Most academics are skeptics. What is the right answer? This book goes systematically and thoroughly through the essential arguments for and against UFOs, gives you a proper answer and enlightens the scientific grounds of ufology.



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