

Toward a Second-Degree Extraterrestrial Theory of UFOs: A Response to Dr. Wood and Prof. Bozhich

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Abstract—Counter-arguments to the views expressed by this author in a previous article questioning the extraterrestrial nature of unidentified flying objects have been presented by Dr. Robert Wood, an American aerospace expert, and by Prof. Serge Bozhich, a Soviet mathematician. These counter-arguments propose alternative explanations for five major inconsistencies we had noted in the ETH theory. In this response, it is shown that such explanations represent a significant alteration of the basic tenets of the ETH, and that they do introduce useful new insights for future research on UFOs. However, some of the contradictions remain, especially when the matter of "abductions" is brought under close scrutiny.

Introduction

The most common interpretation of UFOs is the extraterrestrial theory or "ETH." Under this hypothesis, such objects are physical devices controlled by intelligent beings from another planet who have been visiting the earth as part of a scientific survey begun at the time of World War Two. In a previous article, the author offered five arguments drawn from the current UFO data that contradicted this theory, suggesting that the ETH had become obsolete, that it should be updated, and that other hypotheses should be considered (Vallee, 1990).

In his thoughtful article responding to these arguments, Dr. Wood has contributed an important clarification to a long-overdue debate which addresses the core issues of UFO research (Wood, 1991).

In the past, efforts by various researchers to broaden the spectrum of hypotheses have met with strong protests and occasionally strident opposition from most US ufologists. Thus, it is refreshing to read an article that places the discussion firmly on scientific rather than emotional grounds, while restating and clarifying the basic tenets of the extraterrestrial theory.

In a related effort, a Soviet mathematician, Prof. Serge Bozhich, has articulated his own counter-arguments from the perspective of Soviet UFO data. Our purpose here is to examine both of these attempts to broaden the ETH while preserving its basic assumptions.

Wood's Counter-Arguments

It is appropriate to consider Dr. Wood's points one by one, in the manner he has used to discuss my own article, to which the reader is referred. He

approaches the subject equipped with a set of four assumptions, namely (1) the removal of the speed of light as an interplanetary speed limit, (2) alien knowledge of the location of civilizations such as ours, (3) an alien policy of noninterference, and (4) historical genetic interaction with homo sapiens. Since Wood's counter-arguments are based on theoretical considerations rather than on UFO observations and report statistics, it is difficult to refute them, but it is useful to examine their relevance and their possible limitations.

Argument One: Close Encounter Frequency

There is good agreement between Wood and myself on the problem statement to be tackled here, since he does not challenge the estimated number of close encounters, perhaps as large as several million in 40 years. Our differences only have to do with the probability of the proposed explanations. Wood finds it plausible to assume that several thousand different extraterrestrial civilizations have each authorized up to 1,000 visits by their members over that time period. This is already in sharp contrast with the first-degree ETH, which generally assumes that a single race or, possibly, only a few races of aliens, began visiting the earth after World War Two, with the Kenneth Arnold sighting of June 1947 as the often quoted starting point. In other words, the high frequency of close encounters does demand that the commonly held view of visiting aliens as interplanetary scientists be abandoned.

Argument Two: Physiology

The humanoid body structure of the alleged "aliens" can be explained, according to Wood, if the human shape turns out to be a cosmic optimum, or if evolution has not proceeded in independent fashion on other planetary bodies, at least in the solar neighborhood.

While the panspermia theory is supported (or at least, not negated) by recent discoveries about the presence of complex molecules in space and the frequency of meteoritic and cometary impact on our planet, Wood may be underestimating the difficulties of survival for a humanoid in a foreign planetary environment. Many of the points I brought up in this regard are not addressed in his response. In particular, one does have to explain why aliens, even if they do have a humanoid form, would have eyes adapted to the particular set of light frequencies we happen to recognize, why they could breathe our air (especially if the hypothesis of genetic manipulation is set aside, as Wood proposes to do), and why they should happen to be adapted to our gravity and especially to our culture.

One difficulty in this discussion may come from the fact that most of the experts consulted on this point by ufologists have been medical doctors rather than zoologists. Understandably, medical specialists will generally be tempted to take the human body as their standard when discussing evolution

and intelligence. In the last few months, the author had an opportunity to discuss the probability of humanoid shapes among interplanetary beings with French biologist Remy Chauvin, who brought up some neglected points. In particular, he noted that the common assumption that higher intelligence was necessarily vested in bipeds who had opposable thumbs (hence, capable of developing a complex brain in connection with the building and handling of tools), could be seriously challenged.

In a recent publication, Prof. Chauvin has offered two specific counter-examples in this regard. The first one concerns birds such as the orthotomus of Ceylon, which build sophisticated nests by sewing large leaves together using long vegetal fibers. If the female does not find suitable fibers she manufactures them by twisting spiderwebs. A precise beak, he proposed, might be as desirable an instrument in some environments as an opposable thumb. In fact, whenever humans need to perform a delicate task in electronics, we use special pliers shaped like bird beaks rather than our fingers, or any other tool (Chauvin, 1990).

The second example concerns the octopus, which is quite capable of grabbing, examining, and removing the tops of glass jars containing food using his highly sensitive, powerful tentacles in connection with its eyes and brain. As appendages go, tentacles are equally as versatile and better endowed in sensory and prehensile abilities than hands. Such examples abound in zoology, and they should make us pause when we are tempted to assume that the human shape is always the most desirable one for a higher being. Right here on earth, nature had many options, it seems, for the development of a complex brain.

By the same token, if nature has evolved a cosmic form able to survive and adapt in a variety of planetary environments, it is rash to assume that such a form would necessarily follow a humanoid model. As for the human body being the end product of optimization, this assumption is contradicted every day by the observations of modern medicine. The emerging science of gene therapy is predicated on the notion that specific human diseases can best be overcome by altering the genetic makeup of susceptible individuals, and theory now opens up the exciting but frightening temptation to modify the DNA code itself, at least in lower-level species such as plants or insects. We should assume that at least some proportion of Wood's thousands of visiting civilizations would already have gone beyond this level, and would have evolved into much more comfortable, durable, and competent shapes than the humanoid form allows.

Argument Three: Abductions

Here again, there is agreement on the problem statement. Wood and I concur to observe that the reported abductions exhibit a level of "crudity" that would be unnecessary to a scientifically sophisticated civilization of space explorers.

Wood leans once again toward an explanation in terms of the wide variety he expects to find among aliens, including some with high technology and low ethics. But in this respect he contradicts his own third basic assumption, namely the alien rule of noninterference in lower-level cultures such as ours.

We cannot have it both ways. If the aliens do have such a law, we should never have been able to detect them in the first place, just as the aborigines of Australia are unable to detect the hundreds of surveillance satellites that pass over their location every day, except perhaps as mere points of light. On the other hand, if the aliens do not have such a law, then Wood cannot go on to argue that the variety of UFO shapes throughout history are used to make their craft unobtrusive. The very fact that we have such a large number of published records of close encounters flies in the face of the noninterference assumption. Thousands of books, hundreds of magazines, and many movies have been inspired by such sightings and they have made a deep impact on human cultures. If there is a noninterference law in force in the solar neighborhood it is applied very poorly indeed.

This contradiction in Wood's reasoning leaves the behavior of aliens in alleged abductions unexplained, and I believe my argument still stands. Furthermore, a wide variety of alien forms and behaviors is not what the abductees seem to be reporting, according to those who have made a specialty of interviewing such witnesses under hypnosis. If we are to believe the results of this admittedly dubious practice, the typical abductor is a short, bald being with elongated eyes, and the process of abduction always goes through the same standardized phases, in clear contradiction to Wood's expectation of a variety of abducting and contacting civilizations.

Argument Four: History

Here, Dr. Wood may be the victim of a frequent misrepresentation of my views when he speaks of *Passport to Magonia* as expressing the notion that "the whole thing is an illusion." This was, perhaps, the way my book was misinterpreted by those American ufologists for whom *any theory* that deviated from the ETH was automatically heretical. I believe that if Wood read the book again from the perspective of the two decades that have elapsed since its publication he would see that I never argued that the phenomena—including their most ancient forms—were illusionary at all (Vallee, 1969).

Magonia was written in reaction to the fact that in the United States "the material that pertains to the landings of the craft . . . (had) been generally ignored." Using this material, and specifically the "occupant" cases, I sought to demonstrate that modern-day UFO phenomena were merely an extension of a centuries-old historical tradition that blended myth and physical reality. It is not my fault if **hardcore** ufologists chose to hear only half of that message. The book agrees fully with Wood's conjecture that "the fact that most cultures on earth have an ancient tradition of little people who fly

through the sky and abduct humans" could be "consistent with the idea that that is precisely what has been happening." Wood and I have no difference on this point.

If he follows this line of speculation much further, however, Wood will find that acceptance of such ancient traditions is anathema in the context of the ETH as it is generally understood. Far from being hailed as a champion of the extraterrestrial theory, he may find himself at odds, as I have, with many contemporary American ufologists, who have repeatedly taken violent issue with the parallels that have been drawn between modern-time ufonauts and the elves, angels, and flying demons of old. Indeed, Hopkins has summarily denounced such references as "folklore of obviously uncertain authenticity" (Hopkins, 1990). Other researchers committed to the ETH, such as David Jacobs, have asserted that abductions were a brand new piece in the UFO puzzle. Jacobs has come to the firm conclusion that "what we have here is a systematic program of exploitation of human beings for sperm and eggs," and that it began relatively recently. He added that "no alternative theory accounts for all the data." In particular, he stressed that invoking folklore and legend would demand that "every single case is going to be qualitatively different" (Jacobs, 1990, p. 9). Other researchers, such as Meheust in France and Evans in England, have argued the opposite point, namely that it is precisely the qualitative consistency in abduction stories that should make one suspect a strong link to the constant themes of popular imagination and folklore.

That particular controversy aside, what Jacobs and others have articulated is a strongly held belief among ETH proponents today, and it excludes any consideration of "ancient traditions of little people who fly through the sky and abduct humans," to quote Wood's words. Such a position is understandable: If abductions, as we know them today, have been experienced by people not for a few years but for centuries, does it really make sense to assume that the "aliens" are extraterrestrial visitors conducting a scientific survey or taking biological samples to improve their race's survival chances, to overcome degenerative disorders, or to produce hybrids, as the abductionists hold? Wood has not resolved this contradiction.

Argument Five: Physics

The often-quoted remark by Arthur Clarke that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" is invoked here by Wood to account for the extraordinary observations of UFOs that disappear on the spot or materialize inside closed spaces such as witnesses' bedrooms.

It is perhaps in this regard that Wood and I have our greatest differences. It is unfair to argue one minute that observed UFO phenomena are nicely behaved and consistent with modern physics, perhaps assuming a few extensions such as the removal of the light speed limit and the use of a zero-point

drive, and to throw all constraints to the wind the next minute by stating that any advanced technology would look magical anyway, hence anything goes. *If anything goes, then other theories, such as those invoking other dimensions beyond spacetime, the theory of a psychic control system, or the Wormhole travel hypothesis will work just as well or better than the first-degree ETH Wood is defending*, as I pointed out in the original article. In fact, they may be more parsimonious, since they also get around some of the other arguments we have reviewed.

Under such an alternate theory UFOs could be physical devices acting upon our spacetime environment without necessarily originating on a different planetary body, and their occupants could be closely related to the human race.

It seems to me that Wood should remain in line with his stated objective, namely demonstrating that "if the speed of light can either be raised or exceeded . . . , then the pattern of UFO reports is consistent with the ETH," and magic should be left aside while we pursue this exercise to its logical, scientific consequences.

The witnesses to whom I speak in the field tell me of a variety of remarkable effects that are not easily explained simply by assuming that UFOs can travel at arbitrarily high speeds through conventional spacetime. For instance, they describe individual beings or entities that appear on the spot, "flat" beings that lack one dimension, and craft that either merge slowly with identical objects or even sink inside the solid earth. While some of the objects are luminous, as a zero-point vacuum energy model would appear to suggest, many others are perfectly dull or even dark. It is the totality of these reports that we should attempt to explain, rather than a selected subset that matches a particular theory.

Bozhich's Counter-Arguments

Another useful line of discussion has recently been added to this debate from the perspective of Soviet UFO data. In a letter dated 9 November 1990, following up on a round-table discussion we both attended in Moscow in January 1990, Soviet mathematician Serge Bozhich has sent me his own set of counter-arguments against the first four of my "Five Arguments" (Bozhich, 1990). Bozhich's views can be summarized as follows:

1. On the very large number of close encounters: the greatest frequency of visits to the earth may well be made by tourists rather than scientists. In this regard, he matches Wood's opinion that we should relax the assumptions regarding space-traveling aliens.
2. On the absurdity of the humanoid appearance of alleged aliens: Simple speculation on the physiology and possible general appearance of rational beings from other planets cannot approximate the truth. By this, I

assume Prof. Bozhich means that we should refrain from speculating in the absence of stronger data. I would then answer that, by the same token, we must refrain from assuming that such beings are necessarily extraterrestrials.

3. On the reported behavior of ufonauts during abductions: Abduction stories should not be taken into account, according to Bozhich, because they probably belong to the fantasy world of the witnesses. In support of this, he points out that contactees tend to report that ufonauts are interested in the same topics as the contactees themselves, namely, the fear of nuclear war, ecology, and the price of goods. Bozhich notes further that the descriptions of aliens made by contactees (or abductees) cover the entire range of entities found in human dreams, fantasies, religious apparitions, folklore, and in our science fiction literature. Thus, "all these tales are psychological phenomena characteristic of the contactees themselves and not of metal craft generating traces and visible to everyone." Like children, he writes, abductees are not liars because they believe their own stories and "cannot distinguish reality from fantasy." In this respect, he takes the opposite view from that of Wood and of most American abduction researchers. I find myself somewhere in the middle in this argument, since I regard the abduction as a genuine experience which is distorted beyond recognition by the unfortunate lack of standards that characterizes such research.
4. On the historical extension of the alleged craft, Bozhich claims that appearance and kinematics of modern flying saucers are different from those of UFOs seen in the sky before the 20th century. It may be possible to prove that flying saucers have an extraterrestrial origin, but this cannot be proven for ancient UFOs separated from modern ones, he says. Thus, Bozhich sees no factual reason to unite them into a single phenomenon.

This last statement is interesting and provocative, but it is not currently supported by specific references or by clear statistics arguing against a continuum of kinematic and physical properties across time. However, it does suggest an avenue of research that could and should be checked using the existing database.

Discussion

The original article that triggered this discussion was not meant to eliminate the ETH from the list of explanations for UFOs. Indeed, it observed that "until the nature and origin of UFO phenomena can be firmly established it will naturally be possible to hypothesize that extraterrestrial factors, including undiscovered forms of consciousness, are playing a role in its manifestations." But, it sought to clarify the difficulties with such a theory and to advance other, equally attractive hypotheses. It also urged that the idea of

extraterrestrial intervention be "updated to include current theoretical speculation about other models of the physical universe."

In his well-articulated response Dr. Wood has proposed just such an update, in terms that are both scientifically sound and intellectually appealing. In the process of saving it, however, he has been forced to stretch the "first-level ETH" to such an extent that it may no longer be recognizable by most ufologists. While it would be a pleasure, indeed, to welcome him into the ranks of the heretics, I doubt that such a distortion was part of Wood's plans when he wrote his rebuttal. But, what are we to make of a model involving 14,000 different civilizations, all of them humanoid in shape, which travel throughout the universe in ships that can pass through solid objects, yet feel it necessary to stop in the remote countryside to terrify human victims, performing crude operations upon their bodies? While this revised ETH model does account for some of the observed facts which the first-level ETH had overlooked, it does not really overcome the five arguments that contradict the extraterrestrial theory.

It is my hope that the debate we have initiated here will continue, and that other scientists will join us with their own contributions. In the process of exploring these issues we may well shed new light on critical factors of the phenomenon that have not been previously recognized.

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