Letters

Analysis of UFO Reports

I am pleased to see that a few scientists are offering comments on the subject of UFO's (Letters, 2 Dec., 23 Dec., and 27 Jan.). These support Hynek's contention (Letters, 21 Oct.) that lack of scientific attention is both cause and effect of the disrepute in which UFO's are held. Burke-Gaffney said that UFO reports do not furnish evidence of extraterrestrial intellectual beings. Of course, it is the fact that our best five or six hundred reports, if taken at face value, all point precisely to this conclusion which has caused otherwise respectable scientists to bother with UFO's and to search for a way to determine the truth or falsity of this subclass of reports. One does not get the impression that the good reports are so explicit from reading the morning newspaper; one must go to the original documents and talk to the witnesses directly.

Cannon's contribution of the Dunbar sighting of 1800 will add to the hundreds of other reports from before 1900. The effects of contemporary technology on interpretation as mentioned by Cannon have been discussed several times; Ezekiel saw a flying throne, and in the Middle Ages, peasants saw glowing spherical chariots landing, spewing forth angels. In the great wave of 1896–97, thousands of people from San Francisco to the Midwest saw "airships," with gondolas, paddle wheels, and fins. One would like to know whether technology has the unfortunate result of breeding mass hallucinations, or if we are safe in pushing on further.

Cannon's suggestion that UFO's are the result of visual "reflexes" may apply to some sightings—he is certainly not the first to suggest this possibility—but to make the hypothesis serve for all sightings is impossible. When one studies original reports and interviews witnesses, he becomes aware that UFO's fall into classes, and that an explanation that might apply to one class does not apply to the others. After all, there are other manifestations besides things that look like spaceships which could baffle a person with an average education. Any attempt to explain all UFO reports as satellites and meteors, or as hallucinations, or as misinterpretations of ordinary phenomena, or as plasma, or as hoaxes must fail. The UFO phenomenon is not homogeneous. In 1954, over 200 reports over the whole world concerned landings of objects, many with occupants. Of these, about 51 percent were observed by more than one person. In fact, in all these sightings at least 624 persons were involved, and only 98 of these people were alone. In 18 multiple-witness cases, some witnesses were not aware that anyone else had seen the same thing at the same time and place. In 13 cases, there were more than 10 witnesses (*1*). How do we deal with reports like these? One fact is clear: we cannot shrug them off.

WILLIAM T. POWERS
Dearborn Observatory,
Northwestern University,
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Reference

1. J. Vallee, *Challenge to Science* (Regnery, Chicago, 1966).

Biology and the Human Condition

Morison's hypothesis that sex and reproduction are becoming separate functions relies too heavily upon observed structural distinctions ("Where is biology taking us?" 27 Jan., p. 429). Conceiving, bearing, and rearing children are integrated components of female sexuality. Men share in the gratification, sometimes as much as their mates, but not from biological necessity. Women will have children, in spite of the availability of contraceptives or abortions, and with or without husbands. If the importance of the family diminishes, and mothers must take solitary responsibility for their offspring, society will regress to a primitive matriarchy. No matter how selective the genetic controls become, life under such a minimal economy would offset the intended advantages of heightened natural ability.

Since the population explosion is an immediate threat, it deserves consideration. Deprived people, the hopeless, frightened ones are the most likely to be overgenerous biologically. It may be possible to effect a humane stability by assisting these people to rear their children in environments which offer the expectations, the stresses, and the rewards of complex communities. When the future is too forbidding, there can be no planning at any level; reproduction then repeats its cycle within basic biological limits without the braking influence of stressful human goals. It could be that our efforts to improve the world economy are now contributing to moderation in population increase.

HARRIET MOSS
5928 Anniston Road,
Bethesda, Maryland 20034

As a historian I deem it essential that your readers who heard Robert S. Morison, the biologist, should also harken to the voice of historian Elting E. Morison, his brother.

> . . . I believe . . . that the intelligence is one of the determining things about man. I am with Whitehead where he said that today the rule is absolute, the society that does not value the trained intelligence will die . . . I [also] believe that man is a creature distinguished not only by the intelligence but by the affections as well, which means I guess, that he is a creature of rapture and despair. But which means also that the affections have an existence, an identity, a set of needs and claims, a shaping influence in the life of man that is their independent own. Man is, not only because he thinks but because he feels, and it is the interaction between these two impressive energies that establishes what people today love to call the human condition . . . we must examine with care whether the rule is not equally absolute: the society that does not value the educated heart—or wherever the seat of the affections is—will also die (*1*, p. 82).

He also said this to scientists who love to use computers:

> I think we may have more difficulty in exploring the full limits of the computer than we have had with earlier gadgets. I think there may be more danger in the period of trial and error than there has been with earlier devices. These earlier devices—looms, engines, generators—resisted at critical points human ignorance and stupidity. Overloaded, abused, they stopped work, stalled, broke down, blew up, and there was the end of it. Thus they set clear limits to man's ineptitudes. For the computer the limits, I believe, are not so obvious. Used in ignorance or stupidity,