

Society for UAP Studies

J. Allen Hynek Distinguished Lecture Series

Brief Address

By: Dr. Michael C. Cifone, Founding Executive Director (CEO) & President

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Welcome everyone to the Society for UAP Studies Annual Distinguished Lecture Series in honor of the pioneering scientist and consummate scholar, J. Allen Hynek, who—we can now say—devoted himself to laying the foundations for the very thing that we, together, are attempting to give birth to today: an independent academic discipline devoted to the many interrelated aspects of UAP. It is a subject about which we still know little, but for which we are gathered in devotion to a common cause: discipline-building.

A few years ago, when I founded the Society and our journal *Limina*, now going strong in its second volume of essays and scientific research articles, I established a number of Distinguished Lectures Series, to honor key figures in our field—both enthusiastic and agnostic or skeptic. The idea I had was that we ought to have a lecture series of distinguished scholars and scientists in our nascent field, not unlike the famous “Gifford Lectures”. Indeed, this Lecture series from long ago was my direct inspiration. To be a place where we exercise radical intellectual freedom and free, open exploration of human knowledge, both inside and outside accepted territorial zones of understanding. Thus the intention was to cover the physical and experiential aspects of UAP, as well as a decided agnosticism or even skepticism about the subject—all of which contributes the growth of human knowledge.

The idea Lord Gifford (who died in 1887) had was for the lectures to be devoted to “natural theology”—but in the widest possible sense, to cover the divine, the infinite and the ultimate questions concerning human existence. My own work recently is inspired by Spinoza, the 17th century radical Enlightenment philosopher whose concept of the divine expanded to include Nature, the natural, as *but an aspect of the infinite whole*. And that is, indeed, what we are studying as we study UAP: some, as-yet indeterminate, aspect of this greater whole—as natural as it may be divine.

The Gifford Lectures ranged, therefore, over a radically interdisciplinary lot. Famously, William James delivered his “Varieties of Religious Experience” (1901-02); Niels Bohr his “Causality and Complementarity” (1949-50); Hannah Arendt her “The Life of the Mind” (1973) and Carl Sagan his “The Varieties of Scientific Experience” (in 1985).

Early in his own seminal text on our subject *The UFO Experience*, Hynek quotes the philosopher William James, whose own Gifford Lectures were a landmark in the study of precisely those

phenomena—profoundly uncanny religious experiences—that continue, even today, to challenge a science committed, for centuries now, to a strictly physicalist/materialist and reductionist framework of explanation and understanding for all the phenomena of nature. The point for Hynek was not to argue that UFOs—today, UAP—are not physical, but rather to embrace James’ wider point, made at the threshold of discovery of the key elements of the landscape of contemporary science (like the quantum and relativity theories, genetics, and the sciences of the mind) that today have not entirely been worked out in all of their profounder implications. He quoted James at length in his “Prologue”:

Whatever else be certain, this at least is certain: that the world of our present natural knowledge *is* enveloped in a larger world of some sort, of whose residual properties we at present can frame no positive idea. (1972, p. x)

And that is the fundamental question to which Hynek, and his seminal text, were devoted, a very basic but foundational one that he often stressed in his writings and lectures: *do UAP constitute truly ‘new empirical observations’?* The conclusion of the infamous Condon Study of 1968, published four years before Hynek’s book, was ‘no’—but only because that analysis, as we know, was aimed at studying *UFO reports*, rather than the phenomena themselves. And that is what is, it seems, decisively changing today.

Dr Knuth, our distinguished speaker for this year’s Hynek Lecture, is exactly part of this change: from the analysis and reliance on mere UAP reports, to the establishment of a *science of the phenomena* that first approaches the question of what physical data can, in fact, be obtained if the proper research system, *informed by those reports*, is conceptualized and finally deployed—no trivial task, either conceptually or practically, as Dr Knuth’s lecture today will likely demonstrate.

Dr Knuth is a true pioneer here, and works directly in the enduring Spirit of Hynek, and all that he represented.

And with this, I hand you over to my distinguished colleague, our host and chair for today’s lecture, Dr Christian Peters, who will introduce our speaker. Dr Peters is one of the Society’s newly-appointed Advisory Council members, charged with steering our organization into this new future of UAP Studies.