



School of Childhood and Education Sciences

MA in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred

**Spirit and Psyche**

## **The UFO as *Daimon***

### **A Neoplatonic discussion of Charles Upton's *Cracks in the Great Wall***

#### **Answering the question:**

UFOs have been described as the Grail, the soul, God-images, and messengers from the anima mundi or the unus mundus, but also as demons and disinformation. What are UFOs?

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## Introduction

When I set out to write this essay I wanted to write an original answer to the question “what are UFOs” but a quick glance through the literature completely shattered my intentions. UFOs have been the focus of so much attention by such interesting researchers that it is hard to say anything innovative about them. There are all kinds of approaches, from literal to symbolic and it is hard to find something that has *not* been said. The fact that so many opinions are thrown around and not many authors try to build on each other’s work made me think that something that could be interesting to do in this essay would be to choose a specific perspective on what UFOs are and discuss it from a critical point of view. In order to be faithful to my original suspicions about UFOs, I wanted to look at an author that thought about the UFO phenomenon from a metaphysical perspective, particularly if it had Platonic undertones.

For this reason I decided to discuss the argument made by Charles Upton in his book *Cracks in the Great Wall: UFOs and Traditional Metaphysics*, (2005) which attempts to place the UFO phenomenon within a well defined metaphysical scheme. In this book Upton tries to explain the UFO phenomenon according to the movement of traditional metaphysics, in particular René Guénon. (Ibid. 3%) Traditional metaphysicians tend to share the idea that certain perennial metaphysical truths are common to all of the world’s great religious traditions, and many of these ideas draw heavily on Platonic concepts like the “great chain of being”. (Ibid. 7%) Despite the fact that I have not read deeply into this particular tradition, I am convinced that some of the arguments Upton presents are flawed or in need of further justification, and therefore I am suspicious of his whole approach to UFOs.

It is worth noting that Upton’s book is not academic, and what I intend to do here is an exercise, a thought experiment perhaps, where I use Platonic philosophy to answer his arguments. In order to do this I will draw heavily on Platonic metaphysical literature. The reason for this is that I believe that many of Upton’s apprehensions towards UFOs result from a biased or incongruent reading of the Platonic contribution to metaphysics, and perhaps even from wider problems found in some readings of Platonism made by writers of the Abrahamic traditions. The

essay will be divided in two sections - the first will expose Upton's main arguments and the second will discuss these points from a Platonic point of view.

## The UFO as *Jinn*

If one had to explain Upton's ideas in a single sentence one could say that UFOs are *Jinn* and therefore should not be trusted. (Upton, 2005, 21%) However, the first thing we need to clarify in order to understand Upton's ontology of the UFOs is the concept of the "great chain of being". Arthur Lovejoy, a historian of ideas, suggests that although some proto-version of this chain can already be found in Plato, the idea of the great chain of being is concretely formulated for the first time by Aristotle in *De Anima*. (2001, p.58) This chain "is based on the "powers of soul" possessed by [different organisms], (...) each higher order possessing all the powers of those below it in the scale, and an additional differentiating one of its own." (Ibid. p.58-9)

What is fundamental to understand here is the idea that being is organized vertically in the universe and not horizontally. Depending on the inclinations of each philosopher we will find different versions of this concept, but generally at the top of the chain we find God (Upton, 2005, 19%). This idea is very different from our conceptions of being nowadays, but it implies that some entities are *truer* than others. The word true here does not refer to a scientific notion of "facts" but to a specific nature of being. This immediately tells us that, once we accept this idea, we must trust the authority of certain entities more than others depending on their specific position in the hierarchy.

Upton divides the great chain of being in eight categories that start in the divine, the Platonic *One* beyond all conceptualization and discursive thought, and proceed from there until the material world. (Ibid. 19%-20%) He divides reality into four different realms: The Divine, the Spiritual, the Psychic and the Material worlds. (Ibid.) Each of these categories serves as a link between the immediately preceding and following category and each of them is "less true" than the category above. (Ibid.) We need not concern ourselves with each subdivision Upton makes, but we need to know that he specifically places *Jinni* in the material world, at the penultimate level. He says:

The seventh level is the Etheric. This is the realm of the 'soul of matter', the hidden face of nature, the world of the Celtic Fairies, the Muslim Jinn, the world of 'bioplasma', of auras, of elemental spirits and subtle energies. It is the World Soul... (Ibid. 20%)

Later on he justifies placing the UFOs here because of their liminal nature, saying that they behave not quite as psychic entities, but not quite as material either. In his own words:

If UFOs are physically real, we say, then they must be spaceships. If they are psychic, then they must either be the product of mass hysteria, or real psychic entities. But if they are ‘staged’, then how can they be either? (...) Father Seraphim Rose, an American-born Eastern Orthodox priest who died in 1982, gives perhaps the best explanation of the UFO phenomenon that we possess: Simply speaking, they are demons. They do what demons have always done. Their ‘craft’ are products of a demonic ‘technology’ which begins in the subtle realm and impinges on this one. (Ibid. 21%-22%)

So far I have exposed the place of UFOs in the great chain of being according to Upton, and this is perhaps the most fundamental element of his argument, but he still needs to take things further. He needs to justify that despite the UFOs’ low place in the chain they should really be called demons (and not fairies, for example, since he suggests both share the same level of the hierarchy), and why we should keep away from them. This is especially important because Upton is talking from a Sufi point of view, and despite the fact that he uses the terms *Jinn* and demon more or less interchangeably, he himself admits that “not all *Jinn* are evil”. (Ibid. 28%)

The first line of argument Upton uses when justifying this is that the relationship between humans and *Jinni* may always present a danger because these entities “are fundamentally less real (...) than human beings” (Ibid. 26%) and therefore “as the adulterous affair destroys marriage by diverting erotic energy, so the ‘alien’ and the ‘entity’ destroy our relationship to God by diverting spiritual energy.” (Ibid.) The important lines of argument here are that we are above the *Jinni* in the great chain of being and by diverting the attention that should only be placed in the chain’s higher levels we are behaving like adulterers and losing our spiritual energy.

But he takes his argument further to justify that UFOs are not good *Jinni* to begin with. They are evil demons who are now manifesting to “prepare us for the religion of the Antichrist” (Ibid.) The main arguments for this position are “the breaking of one’s will” through violence in UFO encounters; (Ibid. 76%) the idea that we do not need UFOs as intermediaries with the

divine because they are very low in the chain of being and that there is no way to the “Godhead except through the second level, through the personal God.” (Allah or Yahweh); (Ibid. 77%) the argument that any ecstatic experience resulting from a UFO phenomenon is a falsehood “[b]ecause the aliens have access to the psychic plane, [therefore] they can of course produce intense psychic experiences”; (Ibid.) and finally the idea that the kind of cosmological sense of identification abductees have after their experiences is actually “a mark of psychic dissolution, not spiritual development.” (Ibid. 78%)

The book makes many other arguments that are not as relevant for the scope of this essay but some of them are worth mentioning briefly. The whole text is permeated by a very critical approach to a magical world view as a “vicious circle of materialism attempting to access and control the Spirit for materialistic purposes” (Ibid. 39%) and a certain criticism of the Anima Mundi as a place to invest your spiritual energies. (Ibid. 61%) There is also a dread of contradiction and paradox as an intellectual device employed by the demons or demon worshippers to confuse the believer. (Ibid. 52%) Lastly, there is a strong sense of a conspiracy to bring about the Apocalypse, that even includes great Hollywood names like Steven Spielberg and his famous *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. (Ibid. 49%)

I believe we can discern three arguments underlying every point Upton makes. These are the three arguments I wish to challenge from a Platonic perspective:

- (1) Contact with UFOs is impious because of their low place in the chain of being.
- (2) UFOs are evil because of the violence we find in abduction experiences.
- (3) UFOs are deceptive and therefore not even transcendental experiences with them should be trusted.

## A Platonic Answer

*(1) Contact with UFOs is impious because of their low place in the chain of being.*

In order to address this first argument by Upton, I will have to take a long detour through the Christian re-imagining of the great chain of being. Accepting that UFOs are indeed demons, we need to analyse their corresponding position in the Platonic version of the chain of being, probably that of the daimon. The first thing we must consider when thinking about concepts like the great chain of being is that they actually were developed by pagan philosophers (like Aristotle or Iamblichus) and were later on used by theologians in the context of the Abrahamic traditions that still respected some of these figures as thinkers. (Lovejoy, 2001, p.67) I have come to believe that this appropriation, for lack of a better word, has created serious problems for the concept itself, which is dependent on a specifically pagan cosmology. The reason why I say this is that in the hierarchy of being as conceptualized by Platonic philosophers, for example Iamblichus, human souls tend to be at the very bottom of the spiritual hierarchy (Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, I.1). This idea places humans in a very specific metaphysical scheme that serves the purpose of justifying their relationship with other beings in the chain. Naturally, if daimones are above humans in the hierarchy, they are more divine even if subject to passions. (Ibid. I.7) This makes clear Socrates' willingness to listen to the voice of his daimon, an entity he describes as "something divine". (Plato, *Apology*, 31c-d)

Things change drastically with the adaptation of the great chain of being to Abrahamic thought. One of the reasons for this, I believe, is that the Abrahamic texts have a fundamentally different ontology of the human being and do not place it as the lowest spiritual category in the hierarchy. An example of this is the passage of Qur'an where the angels are commanded to prostrate before Adam. (17:61) In order to conciliate these two views, philosophers had to take great leaps to justify their positions. One good illustration of that leap is St. Augustine's attempt to justify the low place of demons in the chain of being as an ontological depromotion resulting

from their revolt against God, as Gregory Wiebe shows in his PhD thesis. In Augustine's own words:

If we may follow the opinion according to which the angels that sinned inhabited this highest [celestial] region before their fall . . . it is not surprising that after their lapse into sin they were driven down into the misty atmosphere below. (...) They were then permitted to occupy not the pure realm of air above but this misty air near earth, and this is a sort of prison house for them, in keeping with their nature, until the day of judgment. (Wiebe, 2015, p.114)

The intellectual problem here is that Abrahamic thinkers are attempting to use a system that was originally incompatible with their own basic beliefs. How to justify the theological position of demons if humans are inferior to them in the chain of being, especially if humans live even nearer to earth than demons? St. Augustine directly addresses Platonism and justifies his position by saying that we should not “suppose that demons are better than men, because they have better bodies”, (St. Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.15) allowing himself to put a material body like the human's above an aerial body like the daimon's. The final blow comes from the fact that daimones are grossly attached to passions, worse even than those of animals

For if anything of this kind appears in beasts, it is not perturbation, because it is not contrary to reason, of which they are devoid. Now it is foolishness or misery which is the cause of these perturbations in the case of men, for we are not yet blessed in the possession of that perfection of wisdom which is promised to us at last, when we shall be set free from our present mortality (...) it remains that the demons, like men, are subject to perturbations because they are not blessed but miserable animals. (...) What folly, therefore, or rather what madness, to submit ourselves through any sentiment of religion to demons, when it belongs to the true religion to deliver us from that depravity which makes us like to them! (Ibid. VIII.17)

St. Augustine quite cleverly escapes the true platonic argument here, that addresses these entities as classes. The dichotomy presented is false because for a Platonist daimones are not wholly bad or wholly subjected to passions. They are indeed a kind of spirit lower than the gods and subjected to passions, but their immateriality is witness to their higher ontological status.

(Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, I.8) Despite the fact that Augustine dismisses the compositions of the demons' body by saying that other animals also have better bodies than humans (St. Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.15), the real question is that, as Iamblichus says, the matter and form bestowed to an entity reflects the role of said entity and its proximity to God. (*De Mysteriis*, I.8) It is not that demons have better bodies, their bodies are composed of a different kind of matter altogether. One can say that St. Augustine has a point when he says that worshipping certain good daimones should not be done because the class as a whole is subject to passions, but that immediately would tear apart the religious honors given to saints by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, since humans as a category are subject to passions and have denser bodies than daimones.

Gregory Shaw even suggests that from a late Neoplatonic point of view, "the daemon that alienates us from the god is the vehicle through which we become the god." (Shaw, 2016, p.193) From a Platonic perspective, this particular Abrahamic position we are discussing attempts to eliminate our closest link to the divine and completely takes out of the picture the need to use daimones as a vehicle to the divine. I believe it is possible to speculate that this move is the onset of all subsequent moves that eliminate middle layers in Christianity, culminating in certain forms of protestantism where there can be no intermediaries between God and humans. Iamblichus would have thought this move to be disastrous since he firmly believed that not all souls were ready to directly contemplate the God beyond all reason and needed more materialistic styles of worship, (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, V.15) something more or less obvious in a recent study that shows Americans picture God as a white young man who looks like a popstar. (Jackson et al., 2018)

It is in the midst of this muddled discussion that Upton places his critique of communication with UFOs. He repeats several times throughout the book that UFOs are less real than humans, but fails to place humans anywhere in the chain of being. As inhabitants of the material world we should actually be below them and *less* real in his scheme, unless he does not intend to correlate the quality of the being with the layer it inhabits. I seriously doubt that this is what he meant, because then he has no justification for the UFO as *Jinn* thesis either. The only thing we know is that he mentions humans are above UFOs without further commentary.

The Platonic arguments I briefly presented against St. Augustine are enough to deconstruct Upton's first argument. A Platonist would not agree that you should worship a UFO as if it was the ultimate God, but Iamblichus believed that worshipping the ultimate God through the daimones was a fundamental part of the process of embodiment. (Shaw, 2016, p.193) And in order for Upton to show that UFOs should be below us in the hierarchy of being, he would have to clearly define our place first.

*(2) UFOs are evil because of the violence we find in abduction experiences and*

*(3) Transcendental experiences with UFOs should not be trusted because the nature of the events suggests they are deceptive.*

The first argument was certainly the hardest to address and this section will be somewhat shorter and less dense. I decided to join the two last arguments in one subsection because my answer naturally flows from one to the other. The idea that we find expressed in Upton's book that the psychological violence of many abduction cases is proof that these entities are evil is rather unconvincing. First we should establish that initiation generally bears a level of trauma. James Hillman, who identifies himself as a Platonist, (1996, p.271) makes it quite clear in this passage: "The suffering in our tale has something to do with initiation, with changing the structure of consciousness". (Hillman, 1991, p.270) This idea is already present in the admission of ignorance that is so fundamental for Platonism. (Plato, *Apology*, 23a-b) Gregory Shaw even shows that for Iamblichus the admission of our incapacity (aporia) is an integral part of our relationship with the gods, (Shaw, 2000, p.58) and this may relate to the breaking of one's will during UFO experiences.

Upton is prepared for this counter argument and says "in the words of Jesus of Nazareth: 'There needs be evil, but woe to him through whom evil comes.'" (2005, 75%) This position is perhaps more nuanced than what I presented as argument (2). Although Upton is able to recognise that an abductee may be transformed for the better because of the abduction, the aliens who made them suffer are still bad. We cannot enable the actions of bad people and beings just because these bad actions may be transformative. We can, although, be suspicious of the idea

that just because an experience is met with fear or anguish it should immediately be labelled demoniacal in the Christian sense. Does not the Bible itself tell us that fear is the legitimate answer to the presence of God and that this is the beginning of wisdom? (Proverbs 9:10) Was not Jacob's fight with the Angel violent? (Genesis, 32:22-32) Was not the entire experience of Job traumatic, painful, terrifying? It is not enough for someone who comes from an Abrahamic cosmology to establish that a hurtful experience must necessarily come from an evil spirit. Hillman even wonders about the possibility that fear may be the only possible answer when a mortal faces an immortal: "... remember: most of the Greek gods, goddesses, and heroes had a snake form (...) Is our terror of the snake the appropriate response of a mortal to an immortal?" (Hillman, 2008, 36%)

The other problem here is that Upton does not allow for perceptual evidence to be considered, since he is utterly convinced of the evil status of the UFOs. If someone says the experience was traumatizing, he will quote them as evidence for the evil nature of the phenomenon, (Upton, 2005, 69%) however, if someone describes the experience as beautiful and transcendent he will argue that UFOs are deceptive and this person has been fooled. (Ibid. 77%) Sometimes he seems to be frustrated because people do not follow their intuitions that UFOs are evil, at other times he criticizes those who follow their intuitions that UFOs are good and therefore renders his argument circular.

Even if one decides to ignore Hillman's stance, since he is a rather modern and unconventional Platonist, the fact that UFO experiences seem to vary between terrifying experiences and amazing transcendental ones is actually one more argument in favour of the daimonic hypothesis in the Neoplatonic sense. Some UFOs are evil, and some are not, since daimones, just like people, can be good and bad (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, III.31). Once again, as long as we are able to argue against the exclusion of the whole daimonic category, Upton's thesis falls apart.

There is something else that should be said about deception in the Platonic tradition. Deception plays a great role in Platonic thought and this is quite clear in the allegory of the cave. (Plato, *Republic*, 514a-518c) Plato establishes an ontological difference between the world of the senses and the intelligible world, and postulates that the mission of the soul is to see the

difference between these two worlds. (Plato, *Phaedo*, 81b-c) Later Neoplatonists like Plotinus tend to be monist and postulate a God immanent at every level of the great chain of being. (Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.2) This means all the levels partake in the nature of The One to some degree all the way down to the material world. Proclus even speculates that only through the observation of nature can the priests and philosophers learn about the gods and the One. (Proclus, *On the Sacred Art*, p.1) Not only that, but for Proclus the entirety of the cosmos prays in its own manner, as explicit in this beautiful quote about the sunflower:

How else could it be that the sunflower (hêliotropia) moves in accordance with the sun and the moonflower (selênotropia) with the moon, each, according to its ability, turning around with the luminaries of the world? For all things pray according to the rank they occupy and hymn the Leaders who preside over the whole of their 'chains' (tôn seirôn), either spiritually (noerôs), rationally, naturally (phusikôs) or in a sensory manner (aisthêtôs) So the sunflower moves with what makes it open as much as it can, and if one could hear how it makes the air vibrate (plêssontos) as it turns around, one would realise from the sound that it is making a hymn to its King, of the kind that a plant can sing. (Ibid.)

What this approach heavily implies is that despite the idea that the world of our senses is a deception, we can find our way to the divine truth *through* this deception. Plato puts it beautifully on the *Republic* when he says that the visible world is the “offspring of the Good”. (508b) If this was not so, the philosopher would not be able to discern the true forms by studying the particular instantiations of that form. This is important because it allows the UFO phenomenon to be deceptive, without immediately making it evil. Everything we apprehend through the senses is ultimately a deception from the Platonic point of view, but this does not mean that it cannot be used to produce true theophanies. This also turns around the adultery argument where Upton says that directing our energy to lower tiers in the great chain of being snatches out spiritual energy away from God. We can now ask “how else are we supposed to understand God if we turn away everything from which They emanate, afraid that it might be deceptive?” As long as one does not believe that the UFOs are God and we are able to locate

them within a precise metaphysical scheme, we are not diverting energy away from God, we are catalysing said energy through the phenomenon.

## Conclusion

I hope to have been able to address some of Upton's arguments in this rather short essay. My purpose is not to suggest that what I have said here is true, I wanted to experiment with the idea of a Platonic answer to Upton's thesis. I am sympathetic to the idea of reading this sort of phenomenon through a well defined metaphysical framework, and that was the most interesting thing that Upton has brought to the table. I feel however that some of his arguments were weak because of a strong bias towards the idea that UFOs are evil and also because of the inherent tensions in the adaptation of Platonic concepts to the Abrahamic traditions. Going back to the very beginning of the essay, to the question "What are UFOs", I tend to agree with the idea that they stand at a liminal place between the literal world and some other plane, and this perfectly agrees with Upton's *Jinn* hypothesis. The great question that we are left with is: "what to do". I hope to have planted some seeds to answer that question from a Platonic point of view, so that we can, like sunflowers, find a way to pray that is aligned with our own deepest nature.

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