

Encountering Alien Otherness

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As if the old struggle to respect all people regardless of differences, and the emerging endeavor to esteem all terrestrial life were not enough to occupy human attention, our species may eventually have to cope with the discovery of radically different others, for example, extraterrestrials (E.T.'s) that may be mentally and technologically superior to humans. Ever since Galileo opened the closed medieval cosmos, people have been both attracted and repelled by the possibility that we not alone in the universe. Although scientists conclude that no reliable evidence has yet been found that E.T.s exist, many people believe that such evidence does exist, in the form of unidentified aircraft sighted by thousands of reliable observers since the 1940s.¹ More striking, however, is the astonishing claim made by thousands of contemporary people that they have been abducted by highly intelligent, non-human aliens.

Accounts of alien abductions differ from one another in some respects, but they also reveal important similarities.² In a typical abduction, a person is (or persons are) taken from a bedroom, car, boat, or footpath, floated into a strange room (sometimes on board a hovering craft that resembles a classic flying saucer), frequently subjected to painful physical examinations, often told momentous information (whose details are usually forgotten) or shown scenes of an ecologically devastated planet, often informed that they will remember their abduction "when it is time," and in most cases returned to the point where the abduction began.³ Though many abductees realize that a period of time is unaccountably missing from memory, they often cannot recall what has happened to them, though about one-fourth of abductees do have conscious memories of their abductions. Other abductees recover memories through hypnotic regression, the trustworthiness of which is the subject of considerable debate. Abduction is usually not a one-time affair, but

begins early in childhood and continues through the reproductive years. A number of abductees report that the aliens remove sperm and egg samples, which are allegedly used to generate "hybrid" babies, half-human, half-alien. Speculation abounds about the possible significance of this bizarre practice, but no one really knows what is taking place.

Sleep disorders, hallucinatory states, fantasy proneness, temporal lobe seizures, and other psychological and/or physiological disorders may shed light on certain aspects of the abduction experience, but no single explanation or group of explanations has yet been able to account for the full range of phenomena associated with it.⁴ Abductees who have undergone psychologically evaluative testing usually score within the "normal" range.⁵ My own discussions with more than two dozen abductees have revealed nothing unusual about their personalities, though tests indicate that some of them suffer both from post traumatic stress disorder, as well as from a measure of inexplicable fear--symptoms that might be expected from people who repeatedly experience being abducted by aliens. Having argued elsewhere that the abduction phenomenon does not seem to be explicable as psychopathology, I take seriously the possibility that the phenomenon is a new one, currently unknown to Western science.⁶

According to the exclusionary either/or that prevails in modern Western thought, however, the abduction phenomenon must either be psychological in nature, and thus subjective, or physical in nature, and thus objective.⁷ Even though conceding that most abductees are sincere in claiming that they had an abduction "experience," skeptics insist that this experience must be intrapsychic, i.e., the alleged aliens have no more independent otherness than do the figures encountered in dreams and hallucinations. In contrast, literalists believe that abductions are the work of real, flesh-and-blood extraterrestrials, whose intentions are either sinister or beneficent, depending in part on the projections the interpreters.

Still other researchers, however, caution that abductees may be encountering a strange otherness that resists being adequately explained in terms of these mutually

exclusive conceptual categories--either mental or physical. Such speculation disturbs defenders of modern rationalism, who fear that both the phenomenon itself and widespread interest in it are signs of an outbreak of irrationalism that threatens the hard-won achievements of science and democratic politics. Some abduction researchers, however, suggest that the phenomenon does not involve irrationalism and psychological-social regression, but instead is a process of psychic integration necessary for the evolution of consciousness. Understanding this process, should it in fact be taking place, would obviously alter prevailing views about the nature and meaning of human existence. What may be needed to understand the abduction phenomenon, then, is an expansion and transformation of current views about rationality, reality, and consciousness.

Driven by complex motivations, including the desire to free inquiry from religious dogmatism and the urge to understand the world in terms of physical sciences that best promote prediction and control of nature, modern "man" has either denied altogether, or explained away as psychopathology, dimensions of consciousness, planes of reality, and spiritual (non-material and non-psychological) beings, that have long been taken for granted by the great majority of human cultures.⁸ For these reasons, even more disturbing to modern thinking than the two possibilities that the aliens are either flesh-and-blood E.T.s or merely psychological phenomena is the possibility that they come from a different dimension than the space-time realm of modern science.

Obviously, alien abduction is usually not taken seriously in "better" academic neighborhoods. This is so partly because researchers fear being ridiculed for openly investigating the seemingly preposterous allegations that people are being abducted by non-human aliens, and partly because verifiable discovery of highly intelligent non-human beings—whether flesh-and-blood E.T.s or beings from other dimensions--could have a devastating effect on many people, perhaps especially on academics adhering to the view that humankind alone is the source of all meaning, purpose, and value. Academics concerned with the plight of immigrants and the consequences of colonialism, however, have

something to learn from examining the psychological consequences that occur when people experience abduction by apparently non-human others, whatever may be the nature or origin of such perceived others. In addition to helping to alleviate the suffering and isolation experienced by so many abductees, academic study of the abduction phenomenon would help to shed light on the universal human fear of and attraction to otherness. Finally, research needs to be done on the social, cultural, and political consequences of widespread public belief that the government knows far more about UFOs, E.T.s, and alien abduction than it is willing to admit. To what extent does official ignorance about the abduction phenomenon fuel the fires of right-wing paranoia about government support of and intrigue with "aliens" of all kinds?⁹

Recently, concern about foreign immigrants has grown in Western countries to which people from poorer countries (including former colonies) are flocking to escape political oppression and to find work. For many tourists, encountering otherness--distinctive clothing, different skin color, odd cultural practices, unusual cuisines--is the whole point of traveling. Having those exotic others immigrating to one's own country is another matter altogether, however. Politicians frequently try to gain political power by turning foreigners--and even citizens who can be portrayed as sufficiently other--into scapegoats for the country's woes. In the U.S., for example, immigrant-bashers play on the fears that some people have about losing their jobs to immigrants, even though job loss is more often due to decisions taken by powerful transnational economic interests. Even people not immediately threatened by outsiders will often join in disparaging or expelling them. People tend to project mortality and evil onto outsiders, aliens, others. By dominating or even destroying the death- and evil-bearing other, the dominant group feels as if it has conquered death and evil.¹⁰ Due to surging human populations, rapid shifts in capital investment and economic structures, environmental degradation, and greater ease of travel, mass migrations will only increase. Given the destructive capacity of current weapons, humanity may either have come to terms with otherness, or else risk destroying itself.

Just as people have used differences in skin color, religion, gender, cultural practices, language, ideology, and economics to justify violence against other humans, people have also used differences between humans and other life forms to justify needless violence against plants, animals, and entire ecosystems. For centuries, people have claimed that one trait or another--from tool using to linguistic ability--demonstrates human superiority over other life. The nineteenth century doctrine of Manifest Destiny proclaimed that a united American people (white, of European descent) was bound to "develop" the continent's natural resources from coast to coast. Modernity's ideology of anthropocentric humanism, which "others" nature by depicting it solely as an instrument for human ends, generates enormous ecological problems. In recent decades, the "dark side" of modernity has come in for deserved criticism. Despite its undeniable problems, however, modernity has also made possible great improvements in political freedom, material well-being, scientific knowledge, and human lifespan.

Unfortunately, modernity's efforts to elevate humankind to the top of the cosmic heap have generally come at the expense of other life forms. Even if humans are more fully conscious or intelligent than (most) other animals, this fact does not justify insensitive treatment of so-called "lower" species. The capacity for greater awareness brings with it an obligation to exhibit care and respect for all sentient life. Just as many religious and democratic traditions have called for an end to dehumanizing attitudes found in racism, sexism, and xenophobic nationalism, many environmentalists now urge humankind to acknowledge its kinship with and dependence on the rest of terrestrial life. Attempts to "dominate" both nature and other human beings remain attractive, however, partly because they alleviate anxiety about personal and social mortality and evil. Success in curbing the human urge to dominate domination hinges on increased psychological and social integration, which leads individuals and groups to face up to, instead of projecting, their own mortality and proclivity toward evil. A constructive postmodernity will make such integration a top priority.

The first part of this essay briefly studies how colonial Westerners reacted to their encounter with technologically inferior non-Europeans, and how those non-Europeans reacted to their encounter with the technologically superior Europeans. We know that in non-Europeans often suffered from that encounter, but what is less well known is the extent to which European culture never quite recovered from the culturally decentering blow of contact with native peoples in the New World, even though those people were colonized and often enslaved. Descartes' search for an indubitable foundation for truth was motivated partly by the skepticism that arose after discovery of New World peoples. Arguably, the brutal cultural and ecological practices involved in Western colonialism reflects Western man's desperate effort to reassure himself about his own cultural centrality. Having treated allegedly inferior human others so ferociously a few centuries ago, how might Westerners expect to be treated if discovered and colonized by technologically superior others?

The second part of the essay investigates the extent to which the phenomenon of alien abduction can shed light on human experience of the foreign, the other, the "alien." Temporarily bracketing the question of the ontological status of these aliens, I focus on the experience reported by abductees. Even if such experience is ultimately explicable in terms of complex psychological processes, and thus even if the aliens turn out not to be "objectively" present, much can be learned by examining the experience involved in encountering what at least seemed to be radically other. Moreover, study of such experience may suggest that mainstream views of "reality" may need to be expanded. Because the abduction experience is too complex to be studied exhaustively in an essay of this length, I will focus on one particular aspect of it: the experience of being apprehended by the alien gaze.

Finally, I speculate briefly about possible parallels between how native American cultures were affected by contact with technologically-advanced European others and how contemporary American culture might be affected by contact with technologically-advanced non-humans.

I. Western Anthropocentrism and Radical Otherness

In using hyperbolic doubt methodologically to establish an indubitable foundation for certainty, Descartes maintained that the doctrine of solipsism is difficult to refute. For all I know, so he argued in his Meditations, the "people" whom I encounter are really complex automata, lacking the self-consciousness that characterizes my own existence. Only the goodness of a non-deceiving and necessarily existing God justifies concluding that there are others who are endowed with rational intelligence similar to my own. Many of Descartes' contemporaries denied the validity of his proofs for the existence of God. Hence, they had to find different ways of overcoming skepticism in general and solipsism in particular, i.e., skepticism about the reality of minds other than one's own.

Addressing the problems of skepticism and solipsism led many philosophers into an epistemological thicket, but others dealt with these problems either by arguing that individual mind cannot be understood apart from the social interaction that gives rise to it, or simply by assuming that other people do have minds of one sort or another. Some of the latter doubted, however, whether commoners, women, and New World natives possessed rational minds, that is to say, minds like those of modern, educated, male Europeans. Contemporary critics charge that those thinkers ratified an ethno-logo-theo-phallo-centrism that justified subordination of non-Western peoples, women, and lower class males, whose subjectivity allegedly lacks the rationality necessary for inclusion in the class of fully human beings.

Here, it may be useful to remind ourselves that in seeking an indubitable basis for certainty, Descartes sought to overcome the skepticism generated by the discovery of New World peoples whose dramatically different cosmological framework, customs, and religious beliefs made them seem other than human: either noble savages or brutal beasts. In affirming the universal rationality of humankind, and in thus putting a particular spin on the Christian doctrine that all people are children of God, Descartes was attempting to do something besides privileging a certain kind of subjectivity. He was trying to restore

coherence to a world shattered by contact with the other, even though in so doing he provided some other Europeans with a category--rationality--that was misused to marginalize non-Europeans and other social groups who were allegedly less than rational and thus not fully human.

Extant firsthand accounts show a variety of native American responses to first encounters with the European others, who were often mounted on horseback, arrayed in metal armor, equipped with advanced technology, and often driven by goals (e.g., lust for gold) that the natives often either could not comprehend or regarded with contempt. Many native Americans, exhibiting a nearly universal human response, regarded the powerful aliens with a mixture of "hope and fear."¹¹ According to James Axtell, "The Indians regarded the Europeans' ability to fashion incredible objects and make them work less as mechanical aptitude than as spiritual power."¹² Many natives interpreted mass deaths in villages (unintentionally actually caused by diseases introduced by colonists) as a sign that Europeans had shamanic powers, capable of slaying from a distance without visible weapons. Though such apparently godlike powers led to worldview collapse for some native cultures, others remained convinced of their superiority in comparison with European greed and selfishness.¹³

Since the voyages of Columbus, Westerners have never encountered a technologically more advanced culture. In view of the deleterious consequences that colonization had on New World cultures, some people are concerned about the potential repercussions of human contact with technologically superior aliens. Aware of the frequently deleterious consequences of Western colonization, contemporary science fiction writers often describe the "prime directive" of future interstellar exploration as non-interference in the development of technologically less-developed cultures. Although encountering morally and technically superior aliens might be a boon for humankind, many people are understandably concerned about the religious and political repercussion of such an encounter. Hence, in 1961, federally-funded researchers concluded that NASA should

consider concealing from the public any discovery of non-human intelligent life, whether existing or extinct.¹⁴

In fact, even though New World cultures were obviously profoundly influenced and often destroyed by contact, Old World civilization was hardly left unscathed. The discovery of alien cultures on continents that were not even supposed to be there posed an enormous challenge to Occidental self-understanding. Though conquests brought wealth, discovery of native others also caused Western man a narcissistic trauma perhaps even more serious than that brought about by the Copernican revolution, and later by those of Darwin and Freud. Far from being at the center of the universe and thus the main preoccupation of divine Providence, contact with New World peoples suggested that European civilization was simply one among many others. Cultural foundations tottered as the attention of Europeans was drawn to maps on which vast new lands were being inked in as fast as explorers could survey them. What critics of modernity describe as the West's hegemonic drive to transform the other into the same, to incorporate difference into self-identity, has complex roots. In part, however, it involves an obsessive attempt to digest what ethnocentric and anthropocentric Westerners could not assimilate: the possibility that Occidental culture is not the culmination of human life, not the goal of Creation, and not the source of all truth, value, and meaning.¹⁵

Western man is hardly alone in thinking that he and his culture stand at the center of the cosmos. Claude Lévi-Strauss, who helped to fuel anti-colonialism in the postwar West by criticizing the pretension that only European "mind" is rational, maintains that the vast majority of cultures regard themselves as standing at the center of the cosmos. Combating the skepticism generated by discovery of New World peoples, Descartes maintained that scientific method--exemplified by mathematical physics--was a reliable method for gaining universally valid truths. But the success of scientific method promoted mechanistic materialism, which further undermined the European cosmology already damaged by contact with New World cultures. If New World cosmologies collapsed soon after contact,

later medieval European cosmology disintegrated in slow motion. The successes of modern science, the capital provided by precious metals stolen from colonized peoples, and the wealth generated by applying industrial manufacturing methods to raw materials extracted from New World colonies, helped to cushion the wounded pride of European man as he left behind the comfortable medieval world and entered a brave new world that was bereft of theological and metaphysical comforts, and that defined man as a clever animal bent on furthering his own power and security.

Many Enlightenment thinkers, showing the influence of the Biblical tradition, emphasized that man was special because he alone was endowed with reason and moral freedom, by virtue of which (so concluded a number of lumières) he has the right to dominate the planet to further human progress. Following Nietzsche, however, who warned of the nihilism resulting from a scientific-utilitarian cosmology, Heidegger argued that technological man frames the world such that entities can reveal themselves only in terms amenable to his own categories and instrumental goals. Instead of being the object of the gaze of the classical gods or the Biblical creator, modern man elevated himself to the status of all-seeing subject, for whom the world is merely an object to be known and controlled for human ends. Eventually interpreting even himself as a complex natural entity, technological man becomes the laborer who is disciplined for and consumed in the process of gaining control of the planet, and eventually of the universe.¹⁶ The truculent character of this project suggests that technological man is "acting out," so as to conceal something from himself, namely, that the technological project will not succeed in achieving Western man's goal of immortality.¹⁷

In this discussion of Western anthropocentrism, I hasten to add that many educated moderns, including Enlightenment philosopher-scientists such as Kant, have been enthralled by the possibility extraterrestrial intelligence. Progressive thinkers believed that discovery of E.T.s would show that the cosmos is in fact everywhere evolving toward greater complexity, differentiation, and freedom. Neo-Darwinists such as Stephen Jay Gould are far

more skeptical about the existence of E.T.s, however, because evolutionary processes are allegedly so subject to random events, that life would probably never again emerge even on Earth, should life be extinguished here, much less on other planets. By devising a cosmology in which human life is a weird accident, modern science has not only discouraged belief in God and cosmic purpose, but has also encouraged people to conceive of human life primarily in terms of survival, for which the acquisition of power over others is essential. Contrary to such Darwinism, however, some contemporary cosmologists maintain that the basic structures of the universe tend to promote the progressive emergence of ever more complex systems, including intelligent life. Physicist Paul Davies opines that

the most important upshot of the discovery of extraterrestrial life would be to restore to human beings something of the dignity of which science has robbed them. Far from exposing Homo sapiens as an inferior creature in the vast cosmos, the certain existence of alien beings would give us cause to believe that we, in our humble way, are part of a larger, majestic process of cosmic self-knowledge.¹⁸

Despite significant modern interest in E.T.s, and despite the fact that a constructive and integrative postmodern cosmology is beginning to come into its own, Western institutions, ideologies, and philosophies, including much of contemporary continental philosophy, remain anthropocentric. Elements of anthropocentrism (or at least terracentrism) is discernible not only in the work of outspoken humanists like Sartre, but also in the writings of such post-humanists as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. Most continental philosophers have agreed (though often in highly qualified and indirect ways) that humans are the most intelligent (or linguistically endowed, ontologically open, guilty, creative/productive, self-conscious) of all beings.

Early Heidegger, for example, radically distinguished between human Dasein and other entities. Lacking human language, he maintained, animals cannot constitute a "world" in which entities can be encountered as entities. Describing solipsism as a pseudo-problem,

he insisted that human Dasein is always already "with" others in a world of shared concern. Even in later years, as he sought to overcome a residual anthropocentrism, Heidegger insisted that an abyss lies between animals and humans, who alone are appropriated capable of "dwelling on the earth."¹⁹ Hence, he ignored the possibility that other beings--including dolphins and whales, not to mention --may be endowed with ontologically disclosive capacities analogous to and possibly even superior to our own. Opposed to space exploration, he was horrified by photos taken of the hidden side of the Moon by a space probe.²⁰

Until recently, the status of non-human others was only infrequently addressed by continental philosophers, including those, such as Levinas and Derrida, who have explored in much greater depth than did Heidegger the moral claims that the other makes upon me, the socio-linguistic constitution of self and other, and how the binary of majority ("self") vs. minority ("other") is used to justify oppression. In his ethics of heteronomy, Levinas argues that the look of the other makes upon me a moral claim, obligating me to intervene on behalf of the weak and oppressed. Though such attempts to emphasize the other are laudable, they have assumed that only human beings constitute the class of the "other".²¹

This assumption has legitimated harsh and even contemptuous treatment of living nature. Recently, however, some continental philosophers have begun questioning the anthropocentric assumptions which deny that animals can be "other" to humankind, and which thereby routinely exclude animals from the moral landscape. In Daimon Life, for example, David Krell challenges Heidegger's suggestive, but tendentious analysis of the being of animals.²² Further, Derrida has begun speaking critically of the Jewish-Greek-Christian "carno-phallogocentrism," a "sacrificial economy" that involves human-centered, meat-eating acts of slaughter.²³ Commenting on Derrida, John D. Caputo notes that Heidegger and Levinas, despite their great differences, share "a common devalorizing of the animal...." Attempts sharply to discriminate between humans and animals ultimately fail, Caputo asserts. "Killing tends to generalize itself. Killing (other) animals bleeds into

killing other people. The dominant scheme is a generalized anthropophagic, man-eating violence."²⁴

Though challenging one assumption of anthropocentrism, namely, that humans are "above" animals, Caputo is not ready to challenge another assumption, namely, that there are no entities "above" humankind. Echoing the despair associated with Western nihilism, reinforced a century ago by the conclusion that our entropic universe will eventually suffer "heat death," Caputo maintains that Kant's "starry sky" fills him not with awe, but instead reminds him that the cosmos--"so much will to power,... a veritable monster of energy, decreasing here, increasing there, blessing itself in its sheer innocence"--is indifferent to "our fragile mortal fates."²⁵ Caputo writes that "No one we know of knows we are here, on the little star. We are like orphans--and widows and strangers. The stars do not care, do not take care of us. We are disasters all."²⁶ Lost in a monstrous, dying universe from which the gods have fled, we frail humans feel ourselves to be suffering "others," but there is no one--no higher "self"--to affirm our humanity and to intercede on our behalf. Though emphasizing human weakness, Caputo seems to think that human intelligence--even if less grandiose than as customarily envisioned by anthropocentric humanists--still leaves us alone at the top of the dying, meaningless cosmic heap.

In echoing in certain (but by no means all) respects Nietzsche's fatalism and fin de siècle despondency, Caputo ignores the postmodern cosmology that, as we discussed earlier, maintains that the universe exhibits a *nisus* toward ever greater complexity, differentiation, and consciousness.²⁷ That the universe may be evolving so as to become self-conscious suggests that there is meaning in cosmic history.²⁸ Far from being a sheer accident, human life may be only one of many instances of self-conscious life have evolved in the universe, the number of whose galaxies has been increased tenfold according to photos taken by the Hubble Telescope. Quite probably, then, we are not alone.²⁹ But would be so dramatically different from us that communication with them would be virtually impossible?

If Heidegger was right that meaningful encounters, including those involving foreigners, can occur only because humans exist in "worlds" articulated by language and shared practices, the question becomes: Will "being-in-the-world" be a feature of E.T.s? Since E.T.s might possess vastly superior technology, questions about their mode of being would have to be posed from a perspective different than that adopted by colonists inquiring into the mental and moral capacities of New World others. Most people seem to presuppose that humans could understand alien intentions. Science fiction typically portrays those intentions in terms that are consistent with the projections governing initial human encounters with foreigners: the aliens are either threatening or helpful, evil or good. Some people are simply indifferent to the prospect of contact with non-human intelligence, because they consider such contact so unlikely. Most people, however, are either horrified at or excited by that prospect.

On the one hand, fear of being colonized by aliens (indisputably other) leads some people to be concerned about running into someone "out there," or about letting them know that we are "here." On the other hand, hope that technologically superior aliens would also be morally advanced leads other people eagerly to anticipate contact. In the event of a verifiable manifestation of alien presence, such powerful projections (sinister invaders vs. benevolent space brothers) would prevent most people from being able to perceive the aliens competently, much less to discern their intentions (assuming that "intentions" could be ascribed to such non-human intelligence).

The binary projections of "evil alien" and "good alien" may influence the perception both of abductees and of researchers persuaded that the abduction phenomenon involves an encounter with alien otherness. Often emphasizing the remarkable power of the alien gaze, some abductees claim that it terrifies and depersonalizes them; others maintain, however, that by stripping them of egoic subjectivity, the alien gaze challenges abductees to achieve a higher level of consciousness. Based on typical responses to encounters with sufficiently different human others, it is not surprising that some people view the aliens as pernicious

invaders, others view them as benign beings trying to assist humankind. If films like Close Encounters, E.T., and Star Man portrayed aliens as beneficent superior beings, more recent films such as The Arrival and Independence Day depict aliens as intent upon destroying humankind. That so many accounts of the alien gaze fall into one or the other of these projective categories suggests that caution must be exercised in evaluating the truth value of such interpretations.

Nevertheless, because the experiences reported by abductees are so robust, I believe that it is reasonable to maintain that abductees are encountering some kind of otherness, even if such encounters are at least partially shaped by projections. Regardless of the ontological status of alien otherness, abduction narratives reveal how contemporary people react to what they themselves experience as radical alterity. In future centuries, today's abduction narratives may be regarded as first-person accounts of humanity's initial reaction to contact with others whose appearance is stranger, whose technology is more advanced, and whose intentions may be more incomprehensible to contemporary humans than were the conquistadores to native Americans five centuries ago.

In the next part of this essay, I examine the alien gaze, first in terms of Sartre's dismal view that the "look of the other" deprives a person of her subjectivity and freedom. Then, I explore the possibility that the alien gaze constitutes a challenge and opportunity to move beyond the limits of ordinary egoic consciousness. Finally, I examine the kinds of questions that the abduction experience raises with regard to the human encounter with the Other.

II. Encountering the Alien Gaze.

The Objectifying Gaze

Abductees report encountering several different kinds of aliens, especially gray-colored ones (short and tall) who can evoke abject terror. So bizarre are the aliens and so advanced are their technological capacities, that some abductees report experiencing an almost complete worldview collapse, whether it be secular humanism or some traditional religion, as well as a crushing blow to the personal identity connected with and dependent on that worldview. Many abductees report that the aliens treat them indifferently and with cold efficiency, as if abductees were little more than laboratory animals. Apparently, being paralyzed, floated through walls into a nonhuman aircraft, and physically probed by strange life forms is frightening enough, but an extraordinary terror often arises when abductees are forced to look into the large, almond-shaped, intensely black, and seemingly impenetrable eyes of the aliens. The overpowering alien gaze often leaves one feeling drained of personhood and agency.

In Being and Nothingness, Sartre offered a devastating account of the dehumanizing, objectifying "look of the other" (le regard de l'autrui). Influenced at least as much by Cartesian solipsism as by Hegel's social ontology, Sartre wrote that human interaction involves a constant struggle for supremacy. This struggle culminates not in mutual self-recognition, as Hegel argued, but rather in a binary opposition: one of the contesting parties becomes a free subject, while the other is reduced to an object held captive in the gaze of the victorious other. As a subject, I experience freedom to initiate activity within the world. But as objectified and frozen in the gaze of the other, e.g., when I hear footsteps in the hallway as I am peering through a keyhole, I lose that freedom. If I am sitting in a park alone, Sartre added, I feel myself to be a free subject, the central figure in terms of which the whole world takes on significance. When someone else comes on the scene and sees me, however, his subjectivity becomes an abyss toward which my freedom and subjectivity begin to drain away from me. Hence, for Sartre a reciprocating subjectivity would seem impossible.

Analogously, so it would seem, the alien gaze sometimes deprives people of their subjectivity, so that no reciprocal social recognition is possible between human and alien. Readers unwilling to accept the possibility that aliens involve genuine "otherness" of one kind or another, may hypothesize that abductions are very intense nightmares that reflect an individual's feeling of powerlessness in social relationships. Feminists, African Americans, and formerly colonized people, for example, have asserted that the arrogant gaze of the powerful other can objectify individuals, thus depriving them of personhood. By studying abduction "nightmares," then, we may learn something about human responses to particularly powerful experiences of the objectifying gaze. Of course, even if thousands of people were having nothing more than remarkably similar, vivid, life-changing, persistently occurring nightmares about being abducted by aliens, this fact alone merits serious investigation.

The "nightmares-reflecting-everyday-powerlessness" hypothesis, however, must take into account the fact that minority groups are not disproportionately represented in abductions, that about half of abductees are men, and that many abductees have relatively high social status and education. The reader might reply that virtually everyone in contemporary society feels powerless in the face of threats such as nuclear war, ecological devastation, and economic dislocation associated with globalization. For decades, the U.S. was threatened with nuclear annihilation by "the evil empire," the former USSR. Moreover, ever since the 1960s, many people have become increasingly concerned that industrialization and human population growth will irreparably damage the biosphere on which all life depends. Finally, globalization and economic downsizing have undermined the confidence of Americans, previously accustomed to greater economic security. Could such widespread cultural factors explain why so many people are having "nightmares" in which they are being oppressed and colonized by technologically-superior aliens? Are these "dreams" a "return of the repressed," in which Americans experience the powerlessness once felt by Native Americans at the hands of invading Europeans? Moreover, does the widespread

sense of personal helplessness lead many abductees to generate a compensatory fantasy, in which they are singled out to give birth to a new cosmic race? Or does this alleged fantasy play within the dream itself the compensatory role of ameliorating the horror involved in the abduction itself? Though answers to these questions are worth pursuing, doing so would require careful interviewing of abductees, not simply drawing conclusions based on a cursory examination of published narratives.

Another objection to the nightmare hypothesis is that the abduction experience is sometimes said to be more "real" than anything abductees have ever experienced, whether in dreams or in waking life. Further, the alien gaze is reported to be devastatingly powerful, apparently far more so than any imaginable human gaze. Hence, the alien gaze does not seem to be a nightmare appearance of the "big Other," representing what Lacan calls the "law of the father." After all, the big Other demands that an individual remain a subject, however unsatisfying and alienating such a condition may be, by conforming to the norms of the symbolic order. Abductees often report, however, that they are deprived of human subjectivity when looking into the huge, slanted, almond-shaped, and intensely black eyes of the "greasy."

Interviewed by Temple University professor David Jacobs, abductee Lydia Goldman describes being spellbound by alien eyes:

[Lydia Goldman]: I'm looking into those eyes. I can't believe that I'm looking into eyes that big.... Once you look into those eyes, you're gone. You're just gone.

[David Jacobs]: How do you mean that?

[L.G.]: I can't think of anything but those eyes. It's like the eyes overwhelm me. How do they do that? It goes inside you, their eyes go inside you. You just are held. You can't stop looking. If you wanted to, you couldn't look away. You are drawn into them, and they sort of come into you.

[D.J.] Are your eyes open or closed?

[L.G.] My eyes are open, but my mind is sort of gone. I have no will.

I have no will. I am absorbed and I'm not fighting it.³⁰

The fact that many abductees report being dehumanized by the alien gaze suggests some parallels with Sartre's account of the look of the human other. After all, the aliens usually exhibit a humanoid appearance, with heads, eyes, torsos, bodies, and legs.³¹ But the benumbing alien gaze is often followed by an appalling procedure, "mindscanning," that has no analogue in Sartre's paranoid study of the human gaze. According to Jacobs,

This 'Mindscan' procedure involves a taller [alien] being staring deeply and penetratingly into the abductee's eyes from a distance of roughly six inches to actually touching foreheads. During this agonizing procedure, the abductee cannot close his eyes, nor can he look away.³²

While undergoing mindscanning, "Abductees commonly feel that data of some sort is being extracted from their minds."³³ According to Jacobs,

One person said that he had the feeling that his mind was being played back like a video tape recorder. Often abductees will say that specific emotions can be elicited during the Mindscan. The aliens can bring out profound feelings of fear, terror, anger, rage, shame, guilt, and the like.³⁴

If the alien gaze can call forth profoundly disturbing negative emotions, it can also alleviate terror, assuage sharp physical pain, and even generate powerful feelings of love. Indeed, some abductees claim that after initially experiencing rage and terror, they have never felt so completely loved and understood as they do when being gazed upon by the aliens. Does the experience of such deep love correspond to genuinely loving intentions on the part of the aliens? Or are abductees so depersonalized by the gaze, that they regress to infantile status, in which they ultimately experience the gaze as the all-encompassing, loving look of their mothers? That abductees can quickly shift from fearing and hating their abductors, to loving and feeling cared for by them, suggests that abductees may project onto

their captors the same ambivalent feelings that natives project onto unexpected and very strange foreigners. On the one hand, suspicion, fear, hostility; on the other hand, trust, curiosity, and love.

The situation is made more complex by the fact that "The aliens will also generate sexual feelings."³⁵ Before concluding that such feelings are consistent with an infant's erotic attraction to his or her mother, we should note that abductees often report that their "involuntarily increasing sexual feelings can be embarrassing, and when they lead to orgasm, they can be humiliating and enraging."³⁶ Replying to the claim that sexually-oriented "abductions" are nothing but apparitions generated by fantasy-prone masochists seeking to surrender their selfhood, psychologist Caroline McCleod argues that the emotional intensity of abduction experiences far outstrips that involved in masochistic experiences; moreover, abductees rarely say that they obtain any of the sexual satisfaction that a masochist receives in the process of being humiliated or dominated in connection with masochist sexual activity.³⁷

Although fear is a significant component in some abduction experiences, many abductees report a minimal amount of fear, while still others say that by staying with and passing through the fear, they undergo a psychological expansion that makes possible a developing relationship with the aliens. As we shall see in the next section, such accounts lead some investigators to read the abduction phenomenon in positive terms, as an opportunity for humankind to move beyond the ancient fear of otherness that generates persecution, war, and genocide. Of course, researchers with a dark reading of alien intentions, such as Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs, Karla Turner, and others, regard such beneficial psychological developments as an unintended by-product of interacting with beings who intend nothing good for humankind.³⁸ The disparity between these two views suggests that in dealing with the radically other, researchers may be casting projections ("evil invaders" vs. "benevolent space brothers") that are misleading enough when projected onto human others.

The Challenging Alien Gaze

So far we have examined three kinds of alien gazes: 1) the cold, efficient, but relatively indifferent gaze of a researcher studying a laboratory animal; 2) the malevolent gaze of an enormously powerful other seeking to dominate and enslave; 3) the loving gaze of a benevolent being. The first and second gazes have certain similarities with Sartre's account of the objectifying look of the other, though the alien gaze is reportedly far more powerful than any human gaze. The third kind of gaze, however, the loving gaze, has no Sartrean parallel. Among other things, this gaze may either be a projection by abductees who have regressed to an infantile state, or a ruse designed to mislead the abductee about the alien's dark intentions, or a manifestation of genuine benevolence by the alien other. According to researchers with a positive view of the abduction phenomenon, the loving gaze reflects that aliens are deeply concerned about the fate of humanity. Hence, even though human encounters with aliens often evoke terror, such terror might constitute a challenge which, if successfully met, may enable humankind to develop the higher form of awareness needed to alleviate social strife and ecological destruction.

Researchers such as John Mack, Kenneth Ring, and Whitley Strieber, who focus on the potentially positive aspects of the alien gaze maintain that a skewed sample population leads Jacobs and Hopkins to overemphasize the unpleasant aspects of the abduction experience. In other words, Jacobs and Hopkins attract abductees who have been particularly terrified by their experience. Strieber, author of best-selling books about his own abduction experiences, reports receiving tens of thousand of letters from abductees, the great majority of whom report a positive account of and attitude toward their experience.³⁹ As might be expected, Jacobs and Hopkins retort that Strieber, Mack, and Ring not only attract abductees with a positive outlook, but also encourage them to interpret their experience in terms consistent with the idea that the aliens are a positive force encouraging human spiritual evolution.⁴⁰

But Strieber, Mack, and Ring insist that their optimistic reading is more consistent with what abductees actually say. Although projections may influence that reading, it does have the advantage of exhibiting a nuanced stance toward the ontological status of the "aliens." Regarding them neither as flesh-and-blood E.T.s literally inventing a hybrid race, nor as complex mass hallucinations, Strieber, Mack, and Ring search for vocabulary adequate to describe not only the "high strangeness" of the encounter with alien otherness, but also the personal and spiritual growth that at least sometimes accompanies such encounters. For many abductees, as Mack has explained on several occasions, being apprehended in the gaze of apparent non-human otherness generates "ontological shock" on the part of abductees, who have a very difficult time integrating this finding into their conventional Western ideas about the limits of "reality." Mack maintains that while it is appropriate to alleviate the trauma suffered by some abductees, researchers must also recognize that psychological and spiritual development often follows for abductees who can go beyond their original shock and terror. The abduction experience may be akin to shamanistic initiation procedure that leads not only to a higher, more integrated, less ego-constricted mode of awareness, but also to a vastly expanded conception of reality. Such an initiation is particularly terrifying, insofar as it dismantles both the world-view and the ego-structure with which people identify so closely.⁴¹

The alien gaze does reveal the finitude of the ego-structure, but it may also trigger off powerful emotions in which the ego has such an investment (whether in clinging to or fleeing from them). Spiritual traditions such as Buddhism encourage meditative practices in which one is forced both to confront the insubstantiality of the ego-structure, while experiencing fully but dis-identifying with the ever-changing emotions associated with that structure. The spiritual aspirant must experience his or her darkest fear and deepest shame, as well as his or her most alluring fantasies and desires. By undergoing such disillusioning experiences, portrayed symbolically in spiritual traditions as the fierce

"guardians" blocking the gateway to higher consciousness, the aspirant may be freed from the ignorance that leads to suffering.

Strieber has described his own changing attitudes toward abduction experiences. Originally, his fear during an abduction experience was so great that he considered calling his first abduction book Body Terror, but changed the title to Communion in order to emphasize the potentially transformative dimension of his encounters with non-human intelligence. In a more recent book, The Secret School (1997), he discusses the drawbacks involved in viewing the alien others as either evil or benevolent:

We tell ourselves that the visitors are evil and to be hated, that we are justified in not trying to understand. Conversely, we call them saviors, which is equally an illusion. In any event, we tell ourselves that we know what they are; we make them concrete as aliens and even give them names. About all we really know is that something very different from us--or that wishes to appear that way--is hiding in the shadows of the night and the depths of the mind.⁴²

Strieber recognizes the moral issues involved in the fact that the "visitors" take him against his will. Once, he told his captors that they had no right to take him. Much to his astonishment, a low voice replied: "We do have a right."⁴³ A decade later, seeking to understand this reply, Strieber notes that even though compulsion is incompatible with the ideal of autonomy, people do use compulsion appropriately in some situations, e.g., in dealing with children, with people judged to be dangerous to themselves or society, and with patients who (perhaps because of impairment connected with their illness or injury) resist treatment necessary to save their lives.⁴⁴ Strieber speculates that rough treatment by the aliens is partly an effort to awaken people from "soul blindness," which "is a disease incalculably worse than cancer, and we are all, to some degree, victims."⁴⁵ He concludes:

So maybe the violence and the coercion are really an attempt to get us to notice something that we want very badly not to see. If this is true, the

ferocity may be a kind of demand for a response. They could be so far outside our expectations--so unreal, as it were--that only the most intense effort on their part will enable us even to become aware of their presence. They may be in the bizarre position of literally swarming through our world--and yet being unable to get us to notice them.⁴⁶

Regarding Strieber's approach, two comments are in order. First, some people object strongly to his conclusion that abduction, rape, and humiliation constitute "tough love" aimed at provoking growth in transpersonal awareness, psychic ability, and a sense of "cosmic purpose" in hard-hearted, benighted humans. Psychological or spiritual developments may simply be unintended byproducts of practices, such as abduction and rape, that ought not to be portrayed as acceptable means, however good the alleged "end" might be.

Second, given the superior power of the aliens, we cannot interpret what Strieber calls their "demand for a response" as analogous to Hegel's famous account of the challenge involved in the life and death struggle for recognition. The preindividuated humans involved in that struggle were roughly equal in strength, but this is evidently not the case with aliens and humans. Indeed, in view of the sometimes cold, physically painful, or humiliating treatment that some abductees reportedly receive, the alien-human encounter may more readily call to mind Hegel's account of the master-slave relationship. In that relationship, however, the master demands work, not recognition, from the slave. Eventually, the slave displaces the master, who has become dependent on the slave's productive activity. In view of the remarkable powers exhibited by the alleged aliens, however, some researchers maintain that the outcome of the alien-human relationship would not be the same as the outcome of the master-slave relation. That is, humanity would not eventually displace the aliens, but would be permanently subjugated to them.

Although taking such considerations into account, researchers like Mack take the position that the aliens seem to demand something besides compliance, namely, a

psychological and spiritual awakening necessary for humankind to enter into a more equal relationship with the aliens.⁴⁷ Abductees report that the aliens themselves seem to need things that humans possess, namely, vitality, personality, and emotional range. Perhaps the "breeding" program is to be read not literally, but symbolically, as a process of mutual exchange, in the course of which humans will achieve higher consciousness, while aliens will receive greater emotional range and personality. It would seem, however, that the aliens are the agents of change in this relationship. Perhaps they are prodding humankind to grow psychologically and spiritually in ways needed for mutual and reciprocal exchange to take place, assuming of course that the aliens, however they are to be understood, have such exchange in mind.

Many of Mack's clients see a connection between their awakening concern about terrestrial environmental problems, on the one hand, and the personal and spiritual growth that the abduction experience seems to promote, on the other. Some abductees have developed a complex cosmology that portrays the universe as an interrelated whole with many different levels of "reality," in addition to the material and psychological planes, which are the only ones recognized by modernists and most postmodernists. The evolutionary interpretation of abduction would be met with suspicion not only by abduction researchers with a dimmer view of the abduction phenomenon, but also by postmodernists who deny that humankind has any telos. Convinced that one can do no more than tweak at the boundaries of the repressive regimes of modernity, many postmodernists lack both a cosmology and a conception of human potential capable of envisioning non-human others whose "gaze" might prompt a transformation of human self-understanding.

Following an ancient tradition, Robert M. Torrance describes humankind as "the questing animal" striving to transcend its given circumstances. Behind the tribal "vision quest" lies the same creative impulse that leads the spiritual aspirant to meditate, the artist to explore new possibilities of expression, and the scientist to understand the workings of empirical phenomena. Commenting on William James' remark that all religions "suggest a

possible salvation through 'making proper connection with the higher powers,'" Torrance asserts:

The "objective" truth of religious experience thus lies not in a changeless entity outside or beyond the human but in the continuity or interrelation between the individual and a kindred other--call it futurity, potentiality, or spirit--through which the individual self is expanded; this very transcendence is the object of a spiritual quest continually engendered by uneasiness or dissatisfaction with the given.⁴⁸

The abduction phenomenon occurs in connection with widespread dissatisfaction with anthropocentric modernity, which forces everything to show up in terms of human categories, i.e., as either material or psychological phenomena within an apparently meaningless universe.⁴⁹ Unwilling to live in this spiritual desert, countless people are reporting encounters with extraordinary realms and entities long regarded as the products of primitive imagination. Instead of concluding that near-death experiences, past-life regressions, encounters with angels, and alien abductions are instances of escapism, delusional thinking, irrationality, or psychosis, we might entertain the possibility--as did William James--that these phenomena reveal dimensions of reality that are hidden to ordinary consciousness, and that invite spiritual and personal development on the part of those who encounter them.

According to unapologetic modernists like the late Carl Sagan, however, by suggesting that abduction reports reveal aspects of reality not acknowledged by natural science, researchers are contributing to a dangerous eruption of irrationalism that may seem relatively impotent if viewed merely as an aspect of New Age frivolity, but that takes on a far more ominous cast if regarded as a contemporary reprise of the irrationalism and cultism that helped to give rise to National Socialism in Germany. Of course, one should be concerned about the social and political consequences of a wholesale renunciation of rational inquiry in favor of rank superstition. Most abduction researchers, however, are not

irrationalists; indeed, they call on scientists to expand their horizons, in order to make room for studying anomalous phenomena being reported by reliable observers. For those whose very identity depends on the vision of man as conqueror of nature, however, paranormal phenomena are threatening, because they suggest that there are realms not charted and controlled by discursive intelligence. A modernist may be willing to speculate about the possibility of intelligent extraterrestrial life somewhere in this enormous cosmos, but he or she may reject the possibility that non-human intelligence may be already interacting with human beings. Hence, Sagan's a priori assumption that alien abductions are explicable in terms either of human imagination or of psychopathology, even though he did not undertake any empirical research into the phenomenon.⁵⁰

To be sure, cultural and psychological categories should be brought into play when analyzing the abduction phenomenon, for novel experiences are usually described in terms of categories available to the experiencer. Hence, Carl Jung attributed the Cold War flying saucer craze in part to the psychological need for humans to project into the heavens the healing mandala symbol--the saucer-shaped UFO--that promised to integrate a fractured world. Jung was careful to add, however, that flying saucers could not be adequately interpreted as a psychological projections, because such projections cannot be photographed and tracked on radar at 6000 miles per hour. "Something is seen," Jung wrote, "but we know not what it is."⁵¹ Analogously, abductees seem to encounter something, though we don't know what it is.

Jung's concept of "synchronicity" (an acausal process involving meaningful coincidence) enables us to acknowledge that the behavior of alien abductors is morally reprehensible, while also agreeing that abductions may contribute to psychological and spiritual advancement for humankind. Even if we suppose that the aliens have no regard for human advancement, there may be something more than accidental about their arrival at this particular moment, in which humanity is arguably in such dire need of transformation.⁵² The alien-human encounter may have arisen through cosmic processes or patterns that are

not discernible in terms of the history, causal trajectory, or self-understanding of either aliens or humanity. Nevertheless, through this unanticipated human encounter with a powerful and possibly evil alien adversary, humankind may rise to a more integrated consciousness.

Hence, Michael Grosso argues that whatever the aliens may be, they are playing some role in the attempt by "mind at large" to correct today's dangerous cultural imbalance.⁵³ Terence McKenna maintains that the alien presence should be understood in terms of "the human oversoul," an enormously intelligent "organism" that regulates "human culture through the release of ideas out of eternity and into the continuum of history."⁵⁴ Finally, Carl Raschke asserts that aliens and UFOs may be remolding "not just peripheral religious or metaphysical ideas, but entire constellations of culture and social knowledge. In this connection, UFOs can be depicted as what I would call ultraterrestrial agents of cultural deconstruction."⁵⁵

In concluding it may be useful briefly to compare and to evaluate such speculation about the possibly positive effects of such cultural deconstruction with the historical effects of the destruction of native American cultures by European conquistadores. There is no point in adopting a romantic view of pre-contact American cultures, including the Aztec and Inca empires, the cruelty of which was not necessarily bested by that of the European empire-builders.⁵⁶ Indeed, Cortéz was able to recruit many native Americans to help him overthrow the oppressive Aztecs. Another reason for Cortez's astonishing victory over the Aztecs, however, was the fact that an ancient prophecy had predicted the return of a bearded, white-skinned man who would transform society. His men's horses and firearms confirmed his status as an extraordinary other to be greeted less with fear than with awe, and perhaps with hope for a brighter future. The experience of suspicion and wonder, fear and hope, were played out countless times throughout North and South America during the centuries of contact and conquest. Many hundreds of tribal cultures were destroyed in the process,

partly as the result of the introduction of new diseases against which native populations had no immunity, partly as a the result of the imposition of new social and economic practices, and partly as the result of the "ontological shock" associated with having their own world-views dramatically challenged by the arrival of others who possessed not only a new cosmology, but also the weapons to enforce acceptance of it.

In the best-case scenario, surviving members of native cultures adapted to their new circumstances and ultimately benefited—along with everyone else—from technological advances, economic development, and political democratization. In such circumstances, nostalgia for the "old ways" is tempered by recognition that the new ways have a lot going for them, including longer life spans and modes of self-consciousness that were probably not widely available in tribal situations. On the other hand, losing the languages, cultural practices, beliefs, and natural settings of so many hundreds of tribal cultures is something to be mourned, even if some "good" came out of such grievous losses. Moreover, for millions of native Americans, the best-case scenario mentioned above has not come to pass. As second-class citizens in the countries established by European colonizers, their self-consciousness can scarcely be said to have been improved by the deconstruction of the cultures of their ancestors.

Assuming for a moment that contact is now occurring between aliens and some humans, we would do well to ask whether its consequences would parallel those that characterized contact between Europeans and native Americans. Would some humans ultimately benefit from a kind of transformation or evolution of consciousness, and would others experience personal disorientation and cultural destruction? What can we learn from the experience of native Americans who most successfully negotiated the terms of their new status in and relationship to the alien cultures imposed upon them? What can we learn from spiritual seekers who have undergone egoic-deconstruction when encountering non-human powers, but who reportedly gained a more encompassing mode of awareness in the process? In view of the stakes involved in the possibility of an alien-human encounter, such

questions, and many others, need to be addressed by everyone concerned about the fate of humankind. Even if the present wave of "alien abductions" proves to be explicable in terms of previously unknown psychological mechanisms, alien-human encounter of some kind seems increasingly likely, as more and more scientists conclude that the universe is hospitable to the evolution of life and intelligent life. Even if the "aliens" ultimately arrive not from another dimension or the soul-plane, but from another planet, when they do arrive, humankind must begin now to prepare itself for this encounter with a most extraordinary kind of otherness.

¹ For an analysis of the postwar UFO controversy by a well-known astronomer and historian, see Steven J. Dick, The Biological Universe: The Twentieth-Century Extraterrestrial Debate and the Limits of Science (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² “Literalist” researchers, who minimize differences in abduction narratives, may conceal the extent to which psychological and cultural factors are not incidental, but perhaps central aspects of it.

³ Sometimes abductees are returned to the wrong spot, however, or at least find themselves inexplicably far from their homes.

⁴ An excellent review of these accounts is to be found in David Jacobs, Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992). Psychological Inquiry, 7, 8, No. 2 (1996) devotes its entire issue to the abduction phenomenon.

⁵ Most recently, see the essay by research psychologist Caroline McLeod, "Anomalous Experience, Psychopathology of Socially Constructed Reality: The Example of Alien Abduction" (in preparation for publication). Based on a comparison of forty reporting abduction experiencers with a control group of forty individuals recruited from the general community, this study indicates that "more complex mechanisms" than psychopathology and fantasy proneness are needed to understand the alien abduction phenomenon.

⁶ See Michael E. Zimmerman, "Forbidden Knowledge of Hidden Events: The Strange Phenomenon of Alien Abduction," Philosophy Today, 41, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), 235-254. In Abduction, revised edition (New York: Ballantine, 1995), Harvard Psychiatrist John E. Mack argues that alien abduction cannot be diagnosed in terms of our current knowledge of psychopathology. See also Mack's latest book, Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformations and Alien Encounters (New York: Crown Publishers, 1999). For

other insightful approaches to this phenomenon, see Michael Craft, Alien Impact: A Comprehensive Look at the Evidence of Human/Alien Contact (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) and Patrick Harpur, Daimonic Reality: Understanding Otherworldly Encounters (New York: Arkana, 1994).

⁷ For an excellent analysis of the limits of this either/or approach to UFOs and , see Keith Thompson, Angels and Aliens: UFOs and the Mythic Imagination (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1991).

⁸ Whenever I use the term “man,” I do so advisedly, in order to stress patriarchal dimensions of Western culture.

⁹ See Jodi Dean, Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ See Ken Wilber, Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution (Boston: Shambhala, 1981), and René Girard, Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978).

¹¹ See James Axtell, After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chapter eight, “Through Another Glass Darkly: Early Indian Views of Europeans,” 131.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 135.

¹⁴ The relevant portions of this report, “Proposed Studies of the Implications of Peaceful Space Activities for Human Affairs,” are cited in Stanley J. McDaniel, The McDaniel Report (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1993), 160.

¹⁵ On this topic, see Jean-François Lyotard, Heidegger and the Jews, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

¹⁶ See Michael E. Zimmerman, Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹⁷ See Michael E. Zimmerman, "Ontical Craving vs. Ontological Desire," in From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire, ed. Babette Babich (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995), 503-525.

¹⁸ Paul Davies, Are We Alone? (New York: BasicBooks, 1995), 129.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," Basic Writings, ed., David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

²⁰ Martin Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us: Der Spiegel's Interview with Martin Heidegger," trans. Maria P. Alter and John D. Caputo, Philosophy Today, 20 (Winter, 1976), 267-284.

²¹ Unfortunately, Levinas has said that only a member of one's own people can be considered an other who has a claim on me. In this way, he excluded Palestinians from inclusion in the class of morally significant beings. See The Levinas Reader, ed. Sean Hand (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 294-295.

²² David Farrell Krell, Daimon Life (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

²³ Jacques Derrida, "'Eating Well,' Or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in Who Comes After the Subject?, eds. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Conner, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991).

²⁴ John D. Caputo, Against Ethics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 198.

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Ibid., 225.

²⁷ See David Ray Griffin, The Reenchantment of Science (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989).

²⁸ See M. A. Corey, God and the New Cosmology: The Anthropic Design Argument (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993).

²⁹ For a dissenting view, see Robert Naeye, "OK, Where Are They?" Astronomy, 24, No. 7 (July, 1996), 36-43.

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- ³⁰ Jacobs, Secret Life, 98-99.
- ³¹ Some aliens, however, are said to resemble giant insects and reptiles.
- ³² David Jacobs, "Medical Examination and Subsequent Procedures," in Alien Discussions, ed. Andre Pritchard, David E. Pritchard, John E. Mack, Pam Kasey, and Claudia Yapp (Cambridge: North Cambridge Press, 1994), 54.
- ³³ Jacobs, Secret Life, 97.
- ³⁴ Jacobs, "Medical Examination and Subsequent Procedures," 54.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ See Caroline C. McLeod, Barbara Corbisier, and John E. Mack, "A More Parsimonious Explanation for UFO Abductions," Psychological Inquiry, 7, No. 2 (1996), 156-167.
- ³⁸ Jacobs, Secret Life; Budd Hopkins, Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987); Karla Turner, Into the Fringe: A True Story of Alien Abduction (New York: Berkley Books, 1991) and Taken: Inside the Alien-Human Abduction Agenda (Roland, Arkansas: Kelt Works, 1994).
- ³⁹ Whitley Strieber, Breakthrough (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). See also Richard J. Boylan and Lee K. Boylan, Close Extraterrestrial Encounters (Tigard, Oregon: Wild Flower Press, 1994); Raymond Fowler, The Watchers (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); Kenneth Ring, The Omega Project (New York: William Morrow, 1992); and Mack, Abduction.
- ⁴⁰ See David Jacobs, "Are Abductions Positive?" International UFO Reporter, 21, No. 2 (Summer, 1996), 21-25. See also Jacobs's book, The Threat (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), for a particularly dark assessment of the plans that the aliens allegedly have for humankind.
- ⁴¹ There are numerous Western counterparts to such a viewpoint. For example, early in this century Karl Jaspers argued that "limit situations" (e.g., close calls on the

battlefield) provide the opportunity for transformation of a previously constricted and taken-for-granted personal existence. Jaspers' views, along with those of St. Paul, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, profoundly shaped Martin Heidegger's concept of authenticity. See Michael E. Zimmerman, Eclipse of the Self (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986).

⁴² Whitley Strieber, The Secret School: Preparing for Contact (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 82.

⁴³ Whitley Strieber, Communion (New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987), 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116-117.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁷ Mack, Abduction. Regarding such spiritual growth, Keith Thompson writes: "It's possible that UFO's, the near-death experience, apparitions of the Virgin Mary, and other shamanic visionary encounters are as much of a prod to our next level of consciousness as rapidly blooming sexual urges are a prod to a teenager's move from childhood to adolescence." Cited by Kenneth Ring in "Near-Death and UFO Encounters are Shamanic Initiations: Some Conceptual and Evolutionary Implications," ReVision, 11, No. 3 (Winter, 1989), 20. For further development of this theme, see Thompson, Angels and Aliens.

⁴⁸ Robert M. Torrance, The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion, and Science (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 285.

⁴⁹ See Harpur, Daimonic Reality.

⁵⁰ Carl Sagan, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark (New York: Random House, 1995).

⁵¹ Carl G. Jung, Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton/Bollingen, 1959).

⁵² See Jung, Flying Saucers, and Gregory L. Little, The Archetype Experience (Moore Haven, Florida: Rainbow Books, 1984).

⁵³ Michael Grosso, The Final Choice (Walpole, New Hampshire: Stillpoint, 1985); Grosso, "UFOs and the Myth of the New Age," ReVision, 11, No. 3 (Winter, 1989), 5-13.

⁵⁴ Terrence McKenna, cited in Ring, The Omega Project, 245.

⁵⁵ Carl Raschke, "UFOs: Ultraterrestrial Agents of Cultural Deconstruction," in Dennis Stillings, ed., Cyberbiological Studies of the Imaginal Component in the UFO Contact Experience (St. Paul: Archaeus Project, 1989), 81-98.

⁵⁶ On the problems that characterize many small-scale, tribal societies, see Robert B. Edgerton, Sick Societies : Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony (New York : Free Press, 1992).