

nineteenth-century German philosopher and theologian: "Should the knot of history so part that Christianity goes with barbarism and science with unbelief?"

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Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens by John E. Mack. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1994. 433 pp. \$22 (c). ISBN: 0-684-19539-9

Shortly after its publication, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* became the subject of a strange letter in *The New York Times Book Review*. Submitted by one James T. Anderson of Oakland, California, who identified himself as a long-time student of UFOs, the letter denounces the *Times'* review as a "signal failure in assessing the book." What made Anderson's remark so remarkable is that in his very next sentence he admits: "I have not yet read Dr. Mack's work."

I suspect Mr. Anderson has a great deal in common with the dozens of radio and television talk-show hosts who are leading the public debate on the abduction phenomenon. Looking at the "selling copy" inside the book's dust-jacket leads me to suspect the list of non-readers may also include everyone in the Scribner's publicity department. *Abduction* is not, as their sales hype claims, a book about "human encounters with aliens." Rather, as its author very clearly points out, it is a book about "our understanding of reality."

The fact that Dr. Mack sees his assignment in a more metaphysical than astrophysical light may deeply disappoint everyone who has awaited the book's arrival. Abductees will be disappointed because it falls considerably short of validating their belief in abduction as a *bona fide* physical event. Skeptics will be equally unhappy that the author has failed to banish ET to the same intellectual dung-heap as ghosts, goblins, and other things that go bump in the night.

If *Abduction* is less than its readers might have hoped for, it may be that the reputation of the book's author led us to expect too much. To those who have yet to be introduced, John E. Mack, M.D., is one of a handful of psychiatrists who takes seriously the claims of those who believe they have been spirited aboard alien spacecraft. His medical credentials, which include being a co-founder of the clinical psychiatry department at Cambridge Hospital, carry with them sufficient cachet to make even reluctant skeptics such as myself snap on their reality suspenders.

Then there are Dr. Mack's literary credentials. They tell us that even if his exploration of alien terrain leads to a dead end the trip will be a first-class journey, what my friends in publishing call "a good read." Dr. Mack is the author of several excellent books. They include his superbly crafted biography of the

legendary Lawrence of Arabia, titled *A Prince of Our Disorder*, for which he won a 1977 Pulitzer Prize.

In researching *Abduction*, Dr. Mack conducted several hundred hours of interviews with dozens of abductees. More than 300 pages of his book comprises case studies of thirteen of these individuals, whose experiences he characterizes as representative. For psychologists unfamiliar with the abduction experience, the case studies will be enlightening. Fans of talk radio and tabloid television will find no surprises.

Those who believe they are abductees will be disappointed with these choices. Dr. Mack assures us each subject is sane. However, in the course of reading the individual case-studies it becomes equally clear that each subject carries sad baggage from childhood or early adulthood that might also account for his traumatic memories. Mack does less than a satisfactory job of explaining his reasons for dismissing the possibility that his subjects' hypnotically reconstructed recollections are not the product of drug use or suppressed memories of abusive relationships.

Skeptics will undoubtedly rejoice in the flimsiness of Dr. Mack's case-studies. But, I suspect will be furious with his analysis. Dr. Mack has decided to change the rules of the game by abandoning the King's English in discussing his patient's-experiences. To his credit he provides a sort of Surgeon-General's warning in the book's preface: "Terms like 'abduction,' 'alien,' 'happening,' and even 'reality' itself need re-definition lest subtle distinctions be lost.... thinking of memory too literally as 'true' or 'false' may restrict what we can learn about human consciousness from the abduction experiences..."

So, after sticking with Mack for 422 pages of case studies and analysis what, exactly, have we learned? Not much. *Abduction* is perhaps more complete and less emotionally charged than previous visits to the subject by Fuller, Streiber, and others. But it does not move forward the investigation in any meaningful way. For example, Dr. Mack made no attempt to extract from his subjects information that might be useful in constructing a police-type composite drawing of the interior of an alien space-craft. Nor has he explored the possibility, raised in this *Journal*, that abduction experiences might be recollections of surgical experiences.

Students of pre-literate religions who suspected abduction experiences are shamanic journeys played out on a high-tech stage with characters dressed in metaphorically more familiar garb will find ample examples to support their opinion. One of Dr. Mack's subjects, Carlos, comes right out and tells us he believes the aliens have made him a shaman. As for the recurring theme that aliens have come to provide earthlings with important knowledge needed for our continued survival, that too has a familiar ring about it. Anthropologists will recognize its similarities to the beliefs of the cargo cults that flourished in isolated Pacific Islands after World War II. It would have been instructive to see Dr. Mack press his investigations further into each of these areas.

Pending the submission of physical evidence, *Abduction* will likely remain, more through default than excellence, one of the definitive works on the abduction phenomenon.

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Prometheus Bound: Science in a Dynamic Steady State by John Ziman.
Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 1994. ix + 289 pp. \$24.95.

Desperate competition for grants; scarcity of academic positions for Ph.D.s (especially in physics); funding of research via the pork-barrel rather than peer review; rising overhead charges and disputes about them; fascination with technology transfer and university-industry cooperation; professional misconduct by scientists. All these have been widely noted in recent times; but they have been regarded as unconnected and temporary, singular occurrences or perhaps cyclic ones. John Ziman shows us, to the contrary, that these and more are but divers symptoms of "a radical, irreversible, world-wide transformation in the way that science is organized and performed" (7). "Knowledge-creation, the acme of individual enterprise, is being collectivized" (vii).

That some such change had to come was adumbrated decades ago by Derek Price. Science — numbers of scientists, numbers of research papers, numbers of journals — had been doubling every 15 years in an amazingly steady way since the 17th century, Price noted; and this could not continue indefinitely. No one disagreed, but neither did anyone seem to worry much about this vague, surely quite distant prospect; yet symptoms of ebbing growth were beginning to appear even as Price wrote.

Now the circumstance of exponential growth is deeply ingrained in our view of how basic science is *and should* be done. Each discovery opens more than one new direction, *and we think it right and proper that all of them be pursued*. Professors are able to accomplish so much in research because they train so many graduate students, and expect that opportunities to do basic research will become available for most of the good ones. Successful professors have left several dozen intellectual heirs to carry on their approach and style, and those who seek success as professors want to do the same; yet in a "steady state," there will be opportunities for only a bare handful of successors from each major professorial stable.

Reflect on how just this change alone will influence professorial life: expectations for the amount of research that one can accomplish; criteria for tenure and promotion; attitudes toward recruiting graduate students (even fiercer competition among colleagues than now — if one can imagine that! — for who gets to train them). Academic life is changing *profoundly*, in other words: its very nature and therefore also the attitudes of the people engaged in it (168).