

Four Types of Explanations of CE IV UFO Reports

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Abstract – Based on a review of recent CE IV explanations in the literature the author distinguishes, from the point of view of the analytic philosophy of the social sciences, four different types of hypotheses: The first, *naive-realistic* hypothesis of actual alien abductions seems indefensible due to a lack of evidence. If – from a pragmatic point of view – a multi-faceted explanation is considered, the second, *psychoreductionist* hypothesis could serve as an explanation for the neurophysiological mechanisms of the experience. This mode of explanation could apply to personality traits of experiencers. The third, *constructionist* hypothesis – with concepts such as archetypal imagery, synchronicity and imaginal realm – includes the sociocultural dimension (actualization of depth-psychological potential) and societal situation of the mainly Anglo-Saxon experiencers. The fourth hypothesis, that of a ‘*Universal Consciousness*’, or a ‘Mind at Large’, is not scientific but metaphysical and therefore untestable.

Vier Erklärungsmuster für CE IV UFO-Berichte

Zusammenfassung – Basierend auf einem Literaturüberblick zu kürzlichen Erklärungsversuchen für CE IV-Fälle differenziert der Autor aus der Perspektive einer analytischen Philosophie der Sozialwissenschaften vier typische Erklärungsmuster: Das erste – die *naiv-realistische* Hypothese von tatsächlichen Entführungen durch Außerirdische – scheint unhaltbar, da hierfür die Belege fehlen. Wendet man sich pragmatisch vielgestaltigeren Erklärungen zu, könnte die *psychoreduktionistische* Hypothese als das zweite Erklärungsmuster zum Verständnis der neurophysiologischen Mechanismen der Erfahrung dienen. Dieser Erklärungstyp nimmt Bezug auf die Persönlichkeitseigenschaften der die Erfahrungen berichtenden Personen. Als drittes Erklärungsmuster bezieht die *konstruktivistische* Hypothese mit Konzepten wie archetypischen Vorstellungen, Synchronizität und eigenständigen Imagination die soziokulturelle Dimension (Aktualisierungen tiefenpsychologischer Potentiale) und die gesellschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen der fast ausschließlich angloamerikanischen Erfahrenden mit ein. Die vierte Hypothese eines „Universalen Bewusstseins“, eines „globalen Weltgeistes“, ist keine wissenschaftliche sondern metaphysische und deshalb untestbar.

Introduction

» *For many years, UFO phenomena have served as a support for human imagination, a framework for human tragedy, a fabric of human dreams ... The phenomena function like an operational system of symbolic communication at a global level. ... They are part of the environment, part of the control system for human evolution* « (Vallée 1979, p. 239).

These words of J. Vallée, one of the most important initiators of serious UFO research, have lost none of their validity. There still is no adequate explanation, although thousands of scientific papers have appeared since then. As a social scientist committed to the analytic philosophy of the social sciences, I would like to discuss some of the contributions presented in recent years as examples for major philosophies: naive realism, psychosocial reductionism, psychosocial constructionism, and metaphysical hypotheses.

The "abducted by aliens" hypothesis

This is a *naive-realistic* hypothesis, with accounts of landing traces and psychosomatic changes in experiencers (post-traumatic stress disorder – PTSD), scars ranging from a few millimeters to several centimeters in size (Pritchard et al. 1994, p. 83), nosebleed due to alleged surgery by aliens (Pritchard et al. 1994, pp. 50, 60, 71), inexplicably interrupted pregnancies ('abortions', 'missing fetus syndrome' etc.) (Miller 1994, p. 262-269). Along with PTSD, conversion experiences are often reported which lead to drastic changes in the personality and life goals of the abductee. In the 'interplanetary influence hypothesis' there is talk about 'remote control' and 'invasion of the consciousness', although no empirical indicators can be named. Already, US\$ 1,000,000 have been offered for 'alien artefacts' (their origin to be proven incontestably by isotope analysis). With regard to implants, it was ascertained at the MIT Conference 1994 (Pritchard et al. 1994, pp. 54-55, 180, 273, 279) that there was no evidence for the extraterrestrial origin of any of them¹.

On the other hand the American psychiatrist J. E Mack, who obviously tends strongly toward belief in alien abduction, has reservations regarding the naive-realistic hypothesis. He states: "I think that should be beyond the question of event level reality" (Bauer 1992, p. 4). He also emphasizes that this explanation model involves a "leap of faith into another dimension of reality" (Mack 1995, p. 326).

The naive realistic explanation hypothesis is not only imbued with the spirit of science fiction, it is also most probably derived from it. The existence of other dimensions, solar systems and times (visitors from the future) is accepted. In the opinion of most experts evidence to support this naturalistic explanation is not sufficient; it is a maximalistic explanation which, in view of Occam's Razor, can be discarded².

The most important and most compact discussion of the naive-realistic explanation for CE IV is S. Appelle's "Arguments in support of the ET explanation" (1995/96). The logic of this kind of thinking should be investigated (I use his classification):

¹ It is striking that such implants have been mentioned only since minimal invasive surgery became public knowledge.

² In addition, this view is based on inadequate methods of investigation: When Mack mentions that some of the abducted persons have actually disappeared (Mack 1995, p. 424), the logical conclusion is that this was not so in the majority of cases, and all the less so in the case of persons who reported repeated abductions. Here the physical-technical control devices which have been customary at mediumistic seances since the beginning of our century would be essential.

1. ***Abduction accounts are consistent*** (p. 60). This is certainly an important aspect with any of the explanations. However, consistency is not a characteristic of theories with empirical content, but one of logically consistent systems or narratively consistent texts.
2. ***Physical symptoms are indicative of actual abduction.*** Appelle mentions the plausible objection that "most of these 'symptoms' can be easily dismissed as having mundane origin" (p.60). He correctly speaks of "forgotten scars", whose occurrence in the population of experiencers as compared with that of the general population should be further investigated.
3. ***Abduction experiences show signs of PTSD.*** Appelle observes that "it may be impossible to determine whether such experiences are objectively real or imaginary", and concludes that "the presence of PTSD symptomatology is not evidence that abduction experiences are veridical" (p. 61).
4. ***The abduction experience explains the covert nature of UFO activity.*** Since the existence of UFOs is deduced from the abductions, but also, conversely, the plausibility of abductions are deduced from UFOs, this argument must "be rejected on logical grounds" (p. 61).
5. ***Abduction experiences are subjectively valid and emotionally compelling*** Naturally it holds true here "that emotional validity is not an accurate criterion of objective validity" (p. 61).
6. ***Abduction experiences are shared within families and across generations.*** There are two reasons why this cannot be regarded as proof of the veridicality of such experiences. Firstly, the reliability of such correlations is difficult to establish. Secondly, family linkages exist also for personality, psychopathology, sleep disorders and environments.
7. ***Abduction experiences are not random.*** They are repeatedly experienced by the same individuals. This argument is not sound since "other suggested causes of the abduction experience could also lead to multiple experiences for the same individual" (p. 61).
8. ***Children's abduction experiences suggest veridicality.*** Although children are not subject to many of adults' prejudices they show, as every psychologist specialised in child development knows, other peculiarities which cannot be found in adults. Therefore Appelle concludes convincingly: "In any case, the argument that children's abduction testimony is somehow less assailable than that of adults does not seem to be defensible on scientific grounds" (p. 62).
9. ***Multiple-witness cases indicate a real event*** (p. 63). I list three cases.

The "extremely well documented ... Buff Ledge incident" becomes less convincing upon closer investigation: At a summer camp two witnesses, a 16- and a 19-year-old boy, who are "never publicly identified", report on an abduction experience. "Unfortunately none of the potentially confirming witnesses ... provided anything but vague memories of UFOs seen that summer", and the testimony of both the youngsters was obtained only under hypnosis (Clark 1996a, p. 63).

The famous Betty and Barney Hill case, an often quoted perfect example of a multiple abduction report, also leaves questions unanswered. The married couple initially made statements of a fragmentary nature, while under hypnosis the gaps were filled in very nicely. Under hypnosis "the end of the first encounter (consciously recalled) flowed smoothly into the beginning of the second encounter ... and the end of the second encounter flowed into that portion of the trip where the witnesses were once again consciously aware" (Clark 1996b, p. 247). Regarding hypnosis, Lawson's research is most important: in case studies, he

has produced evidence that in experiments hypnotically induced experiencer reports do not significantly differ from alleged 'authentic' reports (Lawson 1977).

As for the celestial chart sketched by Betty Hill which had been shown to her by the supposed abductors, the prominent astronomer Carl Sagan stated after critical examination "that the apparent pattern was in fact the product of chance". After the couple's first reports the Boston psychiatrist B. Simon already expressed the opinion "that the UFO experience had more to do with Barney's problems than Barney was willing to acknowledge". Simon referred to the fact that Barney "had had problems with alcohol in the past, and now he was drinking again" (Clark 1996b, p. 241).

In the case of Betty and Barney Hill, Appelle assumes: "Such relationships could allow for Shared Psychotic Disorder, a psychiatric condition described in the DSM IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) as the adoption of the delusional (psychotic) beliefs of one individual by another individual with whom a close relationship exists" (p. 63). Other authors, according to J. Clark, speak of a 'collective hallucination'; a classical mainstream psychiatrist would be inclined to classify both cases as 'folie à deux'.

In view of these circumstances, a critical social scientist will have difficulty in agreeing with the following statement of Appelle: "Such experiences cannot readily be attributed to hoax, susceptibility to suggestion, or psychopathology. These cases may provide the greatest challenge to prosaic explanations of the abduction experience." (p. 63)³.

The abduction of Linda Napolitano, described in great detail by Hopkins (Pritchard et al. 1994, p. 254-261) can, after critical investigation, no longer be designated as credible (Stefula and Butler 1993). Probably for this reason it does not appear in Appelle's survey⁴.

Unfortunately, the sensational change in the EEGs of more than 100 Brazilian target persons cannot be traced back to experiences with UFOs involving contact or abduction, since these claims could not be investigated (Don and Moura 1997, p. 435).

However, the death blow for the naive realistic hypothesis to me appears to lie in factual findings scarcely discussed until now. Astoundingly A. Druffel (1994, p. 508-511) mentions a series of cases in which people cornered by UFO occupants have succeeded in warding them off, in one case by throwing a book. The comments following this, including the remark, "throw a bigger book !" (p. 512) will remind theologians and historians of the Luther

³ Appelle's remark that authors such as Haines "have provided content analysis of other multiple abduction reports" (p. 63) reveals surprisingly little substance. Reading Haines (1994), the following statement is found to be the hard core: "There isn't an increasing trend for humans to become more proactive toward possible alien visitors, indeed, even to initiate direct contact with them. ... Human initiated contact calls for carefully planned methodology to protect all participants and to establish an absolutely flawless record of events before, during, and after the (hoped for) meeting/abduction. It is vitally important to determine the motivations of all volunteers long before any meeting/abduction occurs. Their emotional stability, intellectual soundness, and spiritual integrity must be assured for obvious reasons" (Haines 1994, p. 244). Here Haines expects of the reader belief in CE V, i.e. encounters with aliens initiated by humans. There is still no evidence for this.

⁴ Unfortunately, a sensational change in the EEGs of more than 100 Brazilian target persons cannot be traced back to experiences with UFOs involving contact or abduction, since these claims could not be investigated (Don and Moura 1997, p. 435-436).

legend: He is supposed to have been beset by the devil on the Wartburg and drove him off by throwing his inkstand at him⁵. Druffel (1994) even names six methods for averting an abduction (p. 509): mental struggle, righteous anger, appeal to spiritual personages, protective rage, physical struggle, and also metaphysical protective techniques.

To conclude, I summarize the naive-realistic explanatory hypothesis⁶: Even decades ago, numerous earthlings of all ages have been abducted by aliens. The aliens undertake pseudo-medical manipulations on them in order to insure their own survival by taking part of their heritage. They elucidate the origin of the cosmos and the condition of our planet in order to save the earth from nuclear or ecological damage. What is the significance of this? Religious overtones cannot be ignored.

The psychosocial reductionist hypothesis

This approach, favored by many authors, is equivalent to *empiricist critical realism* and appears in several variations. An across-the-board 'pathologizing' approach assumes psychoses or borderline conditions; a subtler one takes biographical traumatization as its point of departure, and a further normal psychological one assumes an 'abduction-prone personality' syndrome. While, following repeated estimates, the proportion of psychoses appears to be only about one percent, exploration and test results of European and North American reporters do indeed support the 'encounter-' or 'abduction-prone personality' hypothesis (Keul and Phillips 1987, 1988; Appelle 1995/96, p. 35-37). In Europe the first significant attempt to confirm the psychosocial hypothesis was made in the 1980s by the Austrian astronomer, A. Keul, and the British mathematics teacher, Ken Phillips. In a pilot study they undertook out nearly 100 case studies on the sociology, psychology and psychiatry of CE reporters in Austria and Great Britain. Their most significant published overall findings can be summarized as follows (Keul and Phillips 1988, p. 36-45):

1. The content of UFO reports cannot be statistically distinguished from fantasy.
2. Sociological data support Vallée's view that UFO reporters belong to an average of the general population.
3. UFO reporters differ psychologically from the general population, particularly close encounter (CE) / abduction reporters. The high (but nonsignificant) unemployment rate, combined with a very significant dissatisfaction at the working place and the prevalence of family, social and financial dissatisfaction, forms a 'CE social dissatisfaction cluster'.

The first surprise resulting from this study is the highly significant recall rate of dreams involving flying and UFOs. This means that the average CE reporter has a low threshold between dream and waking states, as well as considerable congruence between what he / she experiences in 'real life', a close encounter, and the contents of his / her unconscious.

⁵ The black stain on the wall of his room in the Wartburg is renewed at regular intervals (Schwiebert 1950, p. 518; Gritsch 1983, p. 43).

⁶ I agree with Donderi (1994, p. 262): "The Roper Poll is reliable, but not valid."

A recent study shows an interesting correlation: "UFO-related beliefs were positively associated with scores on the schizotypy scales. ... (they) were also associated with scores on perceptual aberration, cognitive disorganization, and paranoid ideation" (Chequers et al. 1997, p. 520). Keul's and Phillips' 'CE social dissatisfaction cluster' category appears as 'social anhedonia' (p. 519) here. However, the birth trauma explanation (Lawson 1989), which he negates, should be tested further .

It has come to the attention of some experts that an anamnesis including mental and sexual abuse occurs in an above-average number of reporters (Mack 1995, p. 432; Ring 1992, p. 115). Further, Mack (1995, p. 5) states that extraterrestrials are especially interested in "woundedness". However, he also presents a completely different argument - that people are returned with injuries (p. 395). Unbelievably, he still is of the opinion that anamnesis, psychological diagnosis and physical examination of all abduction reporters is not a worthwhile task (p. 307). Mack even discusses a series of psychopathological explanatory hypotheses for abduction reports such as split personality, epilepsy, mass psychosis, hysteria, hallucination (p. 395), only to discard them as improbable.

Appelle has also discussed pathological psychiatric explanations (p. 31-56) and finds that the available evidence is insufficient for any definite conclusion. Strangely, Appelle never speaks of collective hallucinations, although this explanatory hypothesis is often mentioned. After a thorough investigation of the phenomena of 'mass psychogenic illness' (MPI) and 'mass delusion' (MD), Hall (1994, p. 380) arrives, not surprisingly, at the conclusion that, "if abduction reports are an example of mass hysteria, they are a unique example, not a typical one". Unfortunately, no one at the MIT conference brought up such well-known phenomena as the Indian rope trick or the witnessed apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Fatima, Lourdes and Medjugorje, although Bullard (1994, p. 401) mentions the last-named. For this reason, the investigation into collective experiences of 'folie à deux', or 'folie à beaucoup', i.e. "widely shared delusions" (Hall 1994, p. 377) is especially desirable.

A commitment to the analytic philosophy of social sciences suggests to adherents of the psychosocial reductionist hypothesis that the majority of the reports can be explained as arising from catathymic visualization, whereas the reported implants were fictitious. Here the productivity of often greatly underestimated unconscious elements of the personality should be stressed, as Evans (1987) has done so convincingly under the key-words "internal producer" (p. 267) and "parallel personality" (p. 308).

A component of the second hypothesis which still has to be discussed is the influence on abduction reporters by the mass media and the researchers themselves. The fact that a clear standardization of UFO occupants (little grey men, 'greys', who are psychic etc.) did establish itself only in the USA is probably (again according to the law of parsimony) due to the homogenizing effect of UFO books, films and TV series. In contrast, reports of CE II and CE IV from Europe and Latin America show a greater variety of abductors.

A further explanatory hypothesis based on psychosocial reductionism are environmental theories. Under the heading "Tectonic Stress and 'Earth Lights'", Appelle (1995/96, p. 53-55) discusses the theories of P. Devereux and M. Persinger: "anomalous luminous phenomena' (ALP) are propagated by stresses and strains within the earth's crust, and that these products of tectonic stress are often reported as UFOs. Persinger (1989) has related

this theory of tectonic stress to a theory of neurological susceptibility to electromagnetic fields" (p. 53/54). But Appelle points out that, first of all, Persinger's theory of tectonic stress has been widely questioned. "Second, because the energy characteristics of ALP ... are largely unknown, it is not known whether the hypothesized relationship between ALP and human brain activity is even *possible*" (p. 54). A further empirical testing of Persinger's theory would be extremely important. A positive result could indicate that it offers a stringent psycho-physiological explanation of the experience reports.

The English UFO researcher A. Budden (BUFORA) has proposed the *Electro-Staging Hypothesis* (ESH), based on a large number of mainly British case studies. Its central principles are "that the human unconscious, in response to specific field exposure that produces altered states of consciousness, can present dramatically 'stage' perceptions of interaction with 'aliens and their space craft', and that these perceptions overlap with such psychic experiences as apparitions, poltergeists and visions" (Budden 1995, p. 217).

Finally, Appelle discusses as "psychodynamic theories" contributions by C.G. Jung, M. Grosso, K. Ring and other authors. These theories suggest "that some 'flying saucer' sightings may be a manifestation of *archetypal imagery* associated with the *collective unconscious*" (Appelle 1995/96, p.51), and he aptly remarks that "these notions are abstract theoretical models" which are "highly speculative". I am of the opinion that CE IVs are fragments of religious experiences in the form of manifestations of archetypal imagery, and will discuss this in the next part of my paper.

The psychosocial constructionist hypothesis

In addition to the theories of Jung, Grosso and Ring, the theory of 'altered states of consciousness' has to be mentioned. C.G. Jung's convictions regarding an extraterrestrial or psychological explanation of UFOs, which vacillated over the years, is well presented by J. Clark (1993, p. 211).

K. Ring sees the 'imaginal realm' as "a *third realm* of the imagination ... not as something unreal, but as something *objectively self-existent*, the cumulative product of imaginative thought itself. ... a now-classic distinction between the imaginary and the *imaginal*, originally proposed by a renowned French Islamic scholar named Henry Corbin in 1972" (Ring 1992, p. 219/220). Ring also mentions "certain altered states of consciousness" as an additional condition for the awareness of the imaginal realm or of imaginal symbols. This is a reference to transpersonal psychology, which deals experimentally with trance, dreaming, altered states of consciousness through drugs, and researches "peak experiences" of scientifically and artistically creative individuals.

The folklorist T.E. Bullard views the extraterrestrial explanation hypothesis in the sense of a field theory as a synthesis of C.G. Jung's UFO interpretations (Bullard 1994, p. 400-405). Jung accepts observations of unknown or unidentified flying objects as crystallization points of archetypal phenomena - up to and including his famous synchronicity concept. According to this, the appearance of unidentified flying objects are to be understood as a space- and timeless indicator of pressing depth-psychological problems of individuals or of society. While Jung's first interpretation would indicate a depth-psychological projection, the

synchronicity concept would be purely a construct in the sense of a constructionist theory of knowledge.

The "biogenetic structuralism" of C. Laughlin et al. (1990, 1996) could serve as a neurophysiological basis for this. The theory of this research team is based on the assumption that experience modes are neurophysiologically and genetically anchored in us ('neurognosis'). Dreams, especially archetypes as have been extensively described by C.G. Jung, also belong to these experience modes. But, surprisingly, archetypes also repeatedly appear in reports by the 'UFO-abducted' (Mack 1995, p.434).

Among the psychosocial constructionist theories I also count the narrative explanation of abduction claims. But this theory is excluded by Bullard (1994, p. 390/391) on structural grounds. Reports of sexual abuse by demons or other unearthly entities may remind the historian and theologian of ritual abuse in destructive cults and witchcraft trials. In a meticulous description G. Dean has compared abduction claims and ritual abuse (Pritchard et al. 1994, p. 354-365); this comparison is however much contested (Pritchard et al. 1994, p. 366). The hypothesis suggests that, in reports of UFO abductions as well as of ritual abuse, deviant religious experiences are involved. R. Shaeffer's indication of similarities between contemporary UFO abduction claims and the witchcraft mania (Shaeffer 1994, p.382-386), are, in my opinion, clearly like those between two religions: on one hand black magic, the shady side of Christianity, and on the other hand a modernized 'alien religion' which seems just as magical. The same applies to Dean's startling comparison of UFO abduction claims with ritual abuse. Even *The Economist* (18 January 1997, p.83-85) commented on the correspondence of these phenomena with abduction claims.

I propose the fusing of the psychosocial reductionist and psychosocial constructionist hypotheses into the hypothetical construct 'conscious or unconscious field of imagery'.

T. McKenna's suggested "human oversoul" (Appelle 1995/96, p. 539) and M. Grosso's "Mind at Large" (Pritchard et al. 1994, p. 404) do not form components of a testable scientific theory. T. Bullard's "imaginal realm, an alternate reality that belongs to a wider conception of existence" as a construct also fits into this grouping (1994, p.400). Those arguments belong to the next chapter.

The metaphysical "Universal Consciousness" hypothesis

This kind of thinking is based on the statements of classical Christian mystics such as Meister Eckehart as well as physicist-philosophers (A. Eddington, J. Jeans, K. Gödel, E. Schroedinger). According to a zero-dimensional ontological model of cosmic unity, free of space-time-matter, all ideas would be accessible anywhere, anytime, to every consciousness via 'participation'. This Platonic theory is philosophically *objective idealism*. As a scientific theory it is neither indirect nor partial, i.e., testable in a finite number of steps, and thus can be only described as a metaphysical ad hoc hypothesis. However, since it is untestable, it has to be discounted. Indeed a space-time-mass-free world view that includes a 'mind at large' pattern is the basis not only of a metaphysical but also every religious orientation.

Conclusion

The Spanish UFO researcher V.-J. Ballester Olmos gives the best summary of explanations of CE IV experiences (1994, p. 91): "Abduction narratives seem to proceed from internal sources, representing non-physical experiences of psychological origin inspired by publicized material, plus a significant number of hoaxes." Consequently, Appelle's conclusion must be accepted, that "the abduction experience continues to be a phenomenon in need of an explanation" (Appelle 1995/96, p. 68).

The German sociologist Michael Schetsche (1997) has provided four reasons for the success of the interpretation pattern 'UFO abduction experience':

1. The UFO-pattern corresponds with scientifically recognized explanations of the world.
2. Ambiguities in the scientific worldview such as epistemological restrictions in scientific argumentation impede criticism of the UFO pattern.
3. The role of science as guarantor of rationally oriented explanations of the world continues to diminish.
- 4 The dissolution of the dividing line between reality-oriented and fictional media content is weakening the subjects' sense of reality (Schetsche 1997, p. 272-275).

The result of the first European semiotic analysis of propositions regarding UFOs is hardly a surprise: "As long as no propositions regarding scientific-technical facts are available, UFO reports are - viewed semiotically - statistically interpretable signs for documentation or, respectively, for fiction" (Eberlein and Karger 1997/98, p. 353).

If a sociologist who has studied abduction reports were to formulate his thoughts into one sentence, he would say: "The belief in CE III and IV encountered in an increasing number of Anglo-American persons is an indicator of the modernization of superstition and popular religion in the form of UFOs, their occupants and their supposed intentions and actions." Abduction reports are conversion experiences diverging from traditional religions in a small but growing number of white members of highly modernized Western societies. Recently the arguments of quite dissimilar authors have been pointing into this direction (Whitmore 1993; Saliba 1995; Keul 1997).

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