

The New Story: UFOs, Psychological Research, and Religion ¹

By Michael Grosso, Ph.D.

We hear it from many nowadays: the need for a “new story.” The need, it seems, is for a more inclusive picture of what there is and what it means to be a human being. The newness of the new story takes full account of the importance and the varieties of extraordinary human experience. It is a worldview, a paradigm renewed, driven by an expanded idea of mind and consciousness.

Here are *some* of the motifs that seem to have a place in the new story. (This is, I confess, a mere sketch.) The stress is on phenomena that challenge the old story: accounts of UFOs; of paranormal, mystical, and visionary experiences; and of new conceptions and facts of quantum mechanics, animal psychology, and cosmology. In the new story, as it may be seen, the chief character (and seeming upstart) is mind-and-consciousness; and this, in opposition to the old story, whose chief agent and narrative star is mindless, measurable matter.

A second point about the new story: it’s shrouded in mystery. This induces in us a certain mood of humility. To focus on mind and consciousness is to focus on mystery, the most obvious and most universal mystery. But now, in honor of our ignorance, we may ask: Why is there something rather than nothing? What science tells us is that the universe (along with time and space) popped into existence 13.8 billion years ago, to the consternation of Einstein and others who had assumed a steady-state universe, not one apparently exploding out of nothing and looking suspiciously like some kind of creation. (No surprise that Pope Pious 12 hailed the new scientific discovery with glee.)

So the new story is flanked by mysteries. But there are also progressive elements and new meanings to engage with, not just puzzlement and gasps of wonder. At least two novel features mark the new story that wants to be told: one, a decided leap upward in mental and physical capacity; and two, an enlarged perception of a real but unknown intelligence that seems to originate from outside our physical world. Its operations are not just visible in space but sometimes reportedly they interact with us.

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Our Superpowers

Grant Morrison, author of *Supergods*, writes: “In a secular, scientific, rational culture lacking in any convincing spiritual leadership, superhero stories speak loudly and boldly to our greatest fears, deepest longings, and highest aspirations.” Superman, the 1938 comic creation of Jerry Siegel and Joseph Shuster, is a superhero and Christlike savior of everyday people, “who” promptly became famous around the world—a really good guy with super powers. Superman and all the superheroes that followed, from Batman to Wonder Woman, have for decades been sheer magic for audiences, but most of all, for those in the business of making super money. (Siegel and Shuster sold the rights of their Superman creation for \$130 and died in relative obscurity.)

Morrison’s book is brilliantly written but in the end I am left with a wistful curiosity about super powers. The issue of real superpowers is never quite raised; there is no entry in the index for “superpower.” This is a recurrent problem I keep noticing, an eagerness to flirt with the fantastic without the spirit to confront the real McCoy.

Another example is Serinity Young’s thoughtful study: *Women Who Fly: Goddesses, Witches, Mystics, and Other Airborne Females*. The book is about power and sexuality, but never seriously broaches the issue of actual levitation. St. Teresa, whom she deploys, was a fairly frequent flier (though a tyro compared to the irrepressible mystic, Joseph of Copertino). In the new story, we want to know if any of these women did in fact fly.

Kenneth Woodward’s *The Book of Miracles* is an account of the “meaning” of miracle stories in the great religions. But Woodward states he’s not going to address the reality status of miracles. The entire question is safely tucked away in parentheses. I open at random to a page titled “Jesus Stills a Storm” where a passage is cited (Mark 4:35-41) describing Jesus in a boat with his disciples about to be “swamped” by a sudden windstorm. Jesus says to the sea: “Peace! Be still!” “Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.” We are told by Woodward that the sea is a symbol of chaos and that the message of this miracle story is “that Jesus does what only God can do.” My reaction is a bored shrug. I would like to know if Jesus did in fact paranormally influence the weather; in fact, there are credible reports of weather control in modern times, for example, Black Elk, Padre Pio, and Sai Baba. If Jesus did not perform all the paranormal deeds the Gospels allege he performed, I doubt he would have attracted the followers he did. The question of the possibility of real miracles should at least be open for discussion, especially in light of the existing literature. When it comes to persuasive power, a miracle is always more effective than a moral precept. The sight of some portion of reality transmogrified is a powerfully convincing argument

Accounts of extraordinary phenomena in ancient documents, in modern comics and entertainment venues—images of super-humanity—charm the imagination. But the empirical reality of real superordinary phenomena have been marginalized and pushed into the shadows. The new story will be formed out of information that has been ignored, distorted, and largely crushed out of contemporary culture.

The drift of it is to move beyond physicalist reductionism toward a form of creative idealism. So we are on the lookout for reports of the higher powers of the mind. One step in this direction is to combine into one discipline the explorations of ufology and psychical research. Psychologist Kenneth Ring, in his book, *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large*, was the first to combine these two approaches.

Before I describe the content of Ring's book, I want to mention another of his contributions, also "new story" worthy—*Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind*, a book studying cases of congenitally blind people who had near-death experiences. These were people who never saw the light of day before, but during their near-death epiphany beheld the light and color of the world for the first time in their lives. Something to wonder at! And so theoretically provocative. Another motif to be woven into the new story.

In *Omega Project*, Ring reveals that people who had near-death encounters and people who had unidentified aerial encounters shared an "encounter prone personality," the result of childhood traumas that made them prone to creative dissociation. There were other close similarities; for example, psychophysical changes after the encounter and, above all, profound changes of beliefs and values.

The drift of these shared phenomenologies suggested to Ring the presence of a goal-oriented evolutionary process that Teilhard de Chardin called the Omega Point. That is a rather startling idea. The new story is not just about a growing awareness of the universal mind but it also becomes agitprop for teleology—specifically, for the completion of human evolution. Needless to say, we're a long way from the Omega Point.

The similarity between NDEs and UFO contact is understood. In both, the individual's consciousness is torn from absorption in everyday life. But the wound is also an opening, allowing the influx from the subliminal treasure-trove. Ring offers a precious hint as to why some folk are more receptive to those high-powered near-death inspirations and UFO encounters that transform lives. Being wounded, shocked, riven, may, in the end, enable our access to more exotic spiritual influences. The point seems to be: be glad when life dumps on you; it may be a setup for great times ahead!

At the heart of this new story is the idea of Mind at Large, (phrase borrowed from A. Huxley)—the notion that our seemingly individual and isolated minds are in fact grounded in a greater, deeper one mind. Individuals and traditions keep discovering and rediscovering the great mind, naming, engaging and disengaging from it. The present world, bewitched by science and technology, seems at a low point of living contact with the Mind at Large. The new story is full of rebirth pangs, the sounds of breaking up and breaking through, the strange music of the paradox that near death is near life's renewal.

An Unknown Intelligence

Ring's effort to bring NDEs and UFOs into comparative study bore fruit belatedly with the publication in 2018 of a massive, 800-page tome titled *Beyond UFOs: The Science of Consciousness and Contact with Non-Human Intelligence*, a product of the Edgar Mitchell FREE Foundation, edited by Rey Hernandez, experiencer and lawyer by profession, Jon Klimo, consciousness scholar, and Rudy Schild, Harvard astrophysicist. What is extraordinary about this book is the abundance of reports from all walks of life of all manner of strange life-changing encounters with *agents of unknown origins*. And all this proliferation of strangeness had been piling up in the first two decades of the fateful 21st century. Meandering among the metaphysical wilds of this book, I had to fight off waves of ontological vertigo.

The reports form a bridge between ufology and psychical research; the massive collection includes accounts of near-death experiences (NDEs) alien visitations, galactic tours, angels, great dreams, visions, meeting dead relatives on spaceships, out-of-body states, abductions, and mystical raptures. These are all viewed as using alternate modalities of perception, all avenues to extraordinary modes of consciousness and being. The NDE often awakens and signals the acquisition of healing and other extended mental powers. The new story and the new science will surely double down on research into our extraordinary healing potential, beginning with studies of the placebo effect and the healing miracles of saints, mystics, yogis, and shamans.

In many cases, people having near-death experiences become receptive to extraterrestrial and ultradimensional contact; a connection we might predict in light of Ring's comparative study. The FREE and CCRI researchers are focused on delving into the mysteries of consciousness and bringing in experiencers of all types, academics, scientists, and folks without much formal education. All this seems to be a sign of the widespread pouring out of strange experiences that upset our ordinary reality assumptions. People everywhere are having experiences whose main effect is to break open the ontological boxes they're normally locked down in.

Soon after receiving *Beyond UFOs* I received a phone call from Rey Hernandez. It turned out to be a highly animated exchange. Rey is a lawyer, then living in Florida, and he told me that before his first experience he had zero interest in anything to do with UFOs or the paranormal. That experience altered his sense of reality.

In short, one day a totally unknown light-energy entity entered Rey's home through locked doors and caused his wife and gravely ill dog to vanish before his eyes; when they returned after a short time, the dying dog was healed and lived on for several years. There is a veterinarian's testimony documenting the dog's illness and sudden healing. His wife believed the entity was an angel. Needless to say, the experience blew Rey's lawyer-logical mind. He felt driven to study such extraordinary phenomena, and formed a friendship with Dr. Edgar Mitchell, the Apollo 14 astronaut who had similar interests. His focus was on the various altered modalities of consciousness that make us privy to the wider universe of human potential. His research produced *Beyond UFOs*, to be followed shortly by new volumes on theory and experience that cover the whole spectrum of extraordinary experiences being reported today. I can't imagine a closer kind of encounter with an otherworld event than to witness your wife and your dying dog vanish before your eyes—and when they return, the dog is healed. By my definition, a bona fide miracle.

The new story features agents of intelligence with strange powers to penetrate matter (enter your house), make people disappear, and perform miraculous healing, unless we wish to believe that a sane, down-to-earth lawyer went crazy and paid his vet to lie and pretend his dog was healed. The truth is that Rey Hernandez's story is one among countless inexplicable reports of high strangeness.

Encounters with strange aerial phenomena have been known to vast numbers of people (including myself), for many decades, if not all history; the truth is finally coming out directly from government agencies. An article in *The New York Times* appeared on December 17, 2017 that confirmed that the Pentagon had secretly been studying UFOs: "A 2009 Pentagon briefing summary of the program [Advance Aerospace Threat Identification Program] prepared by its director at the time asserted that 'what was considered science fiction is now science fact.'" Articles on the subject have appeared in the *New Yorker* and other mainstream publications, and on the CBS new magazine *60 Minutes*, where Luis Elizondo, the former director of the secret Pentagon program, stated: "Imagine a technology that can do 6-to-700 g-forces, that can fly at 13,000 miles an hour, that can evade radar and that can fly through air and water and possibly space. And oh, by the way, has no obvious signs of propulsion, no wings, no control surfaces and yet still can defy the natural effects of Earth's gravity. That's precisely what we're seeing." The emotional tonality of the *60 Minutes* segment was more anxious than amazed; more

paranoid about possible danger than thrilled by a great scientific challenge. And perhaps most shocking, the officials gave a clear impression that the Unidentified Aerial Phenomena were showing up everywhere and *every day*.

Another book just published, *Making Contact*, edited by Alan Steinfeld, speaks with force to the need for a new story. The subtitle is timely: *Preparing for the New Realities of Extraterrestrial Existence*. This is a book on UFOs, as was *Beyond UFOs*, at a time when we know we are at last talking about a reality that that seems quite beyond us as to what, why, and how any of it is happening. Alan Steinfeld's introduction would awaken us to something truly epochal. Finally, the U. S. government (since around 2017) seems to admit of the reality of an unknown, supertechnical intelligence in our midst. The book's roster of authors, including Whitley Strieber and John Mack, are all seasoned explorers of a zone of being whose reality status is being affirmed by public officials, a reality whose nature and origin, whether deep within or beyond us, remains unclear.

The revelation, now finally coming to light after decades of torturous secrecy, is that we are in contact with unearthly intelligence and super-technical power. But what, who, and why nobody knows. Each essay in the book contributes to making this momentous claim about the presence of alien otherness and higher forms of power in our world. George Noory, host of Coast to Coast AM, begins with a statement about his years of listening to UFO stories and Alan Steinfeld's excellent introduction provides a detailed account of the latest disclosures from the U.S. government as when the NY Times reported that the astrophysics consultant to the Pentagon's AATIP program, Eric W. Davis, gave a series of classified briefings to members of the 28 Senate Armed Services, Intelligence Committees, and the Defense Department about "*crashed retrievals of unexplained off-world vehicles not made on this earth.*"

I can't resist at this point quoting John Mack, the Harvard psychiatrist nearly crucified for concluding, after years of investigating experiencers, that an unknown force and intelligence is present and active in our world: "I must admit to being a bit perverse for, as a psychiatrist, I believe that anything that can be a big blow to the human ego can only be a good thing in terms of our collective development. Such shocks can perhaps help us to grow as a species." Grant Cameron's chapter is titled, "The Theory of WOW," which is that all the strange encounters, so varied and unpredictable, have one overall purpose, to wake us up, to prepare us, to dilate our personalities.

Steinfeld shows how the mainstream and government are opening up to a truth known by millions: the reality of unidentified intelligences on our planet. The perspectives on the phenomenon are understood to be multiple. Two big assertions may be gleaned from this book; the reports of the unidentified and the physically inexplicable intrusion into our space are true. But who they are, where they are from, and why they are here is unknown. We are faced with a very unusual challenge: forming a relationship to the unknown that will be, we of course hope, to our advantage. With official affirmation

from the U.S. government, we have entered a new epoch of human history. A highly advanced but thoroughly obscure and evasive intelligence is in our midst, and we are being told by Steinfeld and company in *Making Contact*, it is something we had better prepare for.

Psi Phenomena

The new story, as I see it emerging, would incorporate the data of psychical research. There are many ways this might be done, theoretically and practically. I'll mention three categories of psi phenomena and try to imagine how they would transform our mode of being in the world. Call it an exercise in active imagination.

Consider, for example, telepathy. Frederic W. H. Myers, the British poet, classicist, philologist, and a founder of the Society for Psychical Research, linked telepathy to the power of love, and to what we call empathy, the ability to enter into the subjectivity of the other—and not just humans. Imagine for a moment the human species newly endowed with a more robust and reliable faculty of telepathy and empathy. That additional factor alone would, in my opinion, be a major step toward the revival of nature and the joys of civilization. In any concept of a new higher education, this would figure as a major concern, the higher education of social intelligence. What we're imagining is a time when paranormal telepathy evolves into normal empathy.

Now consider a comparable increase of another extraordinary human potential: psychokinesis, PK, (aka telekinesis). The data demonstrates various ways that our mental powers can be physically expressed. One set of capacities would gravely impact the transportation industries, supposing at one point we learn to levitate, bilocate, and teleport ourselves around. In a more radical vein, imagine the impact on the health industries if our amazing healing potentials were fully awakened, activated, and diffused through the whole population. In a more evolved society, every individual would be the chief custodian of her/his own health.

One more example will serve to illustrate. Again, we have the data to justify this futuristic meditation. How would human beings react to the discovery that, quite apart from religion, science has made the case for the reality of postmortem consciousness? In other words, when our bodies die, our inner, subjective, interior selves, not made of material cloth to begin with, survives, continues, according to reports, even flourishes as never before. This, were it a truth laid bare for all to see, would make a dramatic difference living the new story.

The New Human Species

All the changes that would arise from evolving the powers we already possess we could describe as our potential evolutionary future, realizing the gifts we have in germ to grow to full completion. This then we might describe as a model of a new human species.

Many UFO contactees and abductees have messages about the need to get on with human evolution. The higher beings, we're told, are here to speed up the process. They are concerned about our future, especially after we began exploding atomic bombs (see Robert Hastings, *UFOs and Nukes*). So this is part of the needed new story: an agent, in whatever way possible, to move us toward collective transformation. We need to avoid nuclear suicide and climate apocalypse. And the message seems to be: evolve or die! So the question becomes: How do we free up our latent psychospiritual potentials?

Recall that Alfred Russel Wallace co-discovered the basic principles of modern evolution with Charles Darwin. But in contrast to Darwin, Wallace studied and experimented with mediumship and was converted to a spiritualist philosophy of consciousness, entirely due to his own empirical observations. (He tried to get Darwin interested, but failed.) He gives an account of his research, reasoning, and devastating criticisms of the irrational incredulity of fellow scientists who refuse to face facts that contradict their most beloved beliefs. Wallace is emphatic about facts, and describes how he once couldn't bear the term "spirits" but that "facts" forced him to embrace the term (which in Greek just means *wind*). His book, *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1878), lays out evidence and arguments for his case with the verve and clarity of a master scientist. This leads to my concluding comment on what the new story will feature. It will be informed by a powerful blend of science, religion, and art.

One can imagine how paranormal evolution of the personality could bring about improvements in our general mode of being on earth. Suppose, for example, our telepathic sensibilities were enhanced, which would entail an expansion of empathic capacity; surely, a change with much practical potential. (Given the paucity of the stuff in a world of raging hatreds.) It would improve human relations, as well as our relations with other sentient beings, with the living earth we are all nestled in. Empathy for the Earth! An essential item of the New Story.

Finally, we can imagine that our mystical sense begins to unfold and we know joy, love, and freedom as part of the fabric of everyday life. For purely empirical reasons, I believe the extraordinary is possible; the seed of creative evolution is alive in us all. I can imagine this leap of spirit happening in two ways: one by means of a new higher education, designed to liberate our extraordinary potentials. The other, more grim possibility is that it happens spontaneously, as we descend into a long global near-death experience, which in the end sparks the greatest renaissance of all history.

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See his blog: **consciousnessunbound.blogspot.com**. He is also a painter who works at the interface of art and the paranormal.

See his art site: **paintingthepsyche.com**