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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: 'She Blinded Me with Science'

From: "Jerome Clark" <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
Date: Thu, 02 Jul 98 10:26:38 PDT
Fwd Date: Thu, 02 Jul 1998 23:58:56 -0400
Subject: Re: 'She Blinded Me with Science'

> From: RobIrving@aol.com
> Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998 21:53:42 EDT
> To: updates@globalserve.net
> Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Re: 'She Blinded Me with Science'

> > To: "UFO UpDates - Toronto" <updates@globalserve.net>
> > From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
> > Subject: Re: UFO UpDate: Re: 'She Blinded Me with Science'
> > Date: Wed, 01 Jul 98 11:39:34 PDT

> > Unfortunately, "belief" has been reduced in discourse and debate
> > about anomalies into mere rhetoric. You used it in the context
> > of the scoffer, who uses it in this sense (to borrow from David
> > Hufford, who writes amusingly on the subject): "What I know, I
> > KNOW; what you know, you only BELIEVE."

> That's not a fair reflection of what I think. It's just more
> rhetoric... more projection. I doubt that you could sensibly back
> it up with unvarnished examples.

Perhaps you would care to elucidate. If you go back to reread what specifically I was responding to, perhaps you will better understand why I said what I said.

Let me put it this way: Answer yes or no: A reasonable person, without recourse to mere belief (i.e., faith), can look at the UFO evidence and see -- rightly or wrongly -- possible evidence of extraterrestrial visitation. A yes answer will get you an apology from me.

> To more interesting issues...

> > Is this statement based on anything other than his work with
> > Dorothy Martin's group, with which I gather you are largely
> > unfamiliar?

> He doesn't specifically say. Although he does summarise the
> Martin study. In fact I am familiar with Festinger's work on her
> group (only in terms of having read the book a couple of times).
> My guess is that he had a 'thing' about flying saucer enthusiasts
> generally... for whatever reason, I don't know. All I said was
> that he enjoyed using them as an example in support of his
> theories.

There are several major papers refuting Festinger, whose theories have failed replication. (You might say, I guess, that Festinger's prophecies have failed.) As one critic writes, in the course of showing why ideas like Festinger's are simplistic

and reductionistic, "As scholars we should approach religious groups as phenomena to be observed and understood in their own complexity, with at least as much respect for the complexity and integrity of our subject matter as a biologist or a physicist has for the phenomena of nature."

> > > ~ 3. Another way of reducing dissonance between one's own
> > > opinion and the knowledge that someone else holds a different
> > > opinion is to make the other person, in some manner, not
> > > comparable to oneself. Such an allegation can take a number of
> > > forms. One can attribute characteristics, experiences, or
> > > motives to the other person or one can even reject him or
> > > derogate him. ~

> > A pretty good description of the debunker mentality.

> I guess this works both ways. But usually when one is debunking
> all one has to do is focus on the bunk, rather than falsely
> characterize.

In theory, yes. Having done my share of debunking and also having viewed the debunking movement from pretty close range (I have long been a good friend of the co-founder of CSICOP, and I have known CSICOP's chief investigator, on a friendly basis, for years), I think you are right in principle but naive about the practice.

The problem is with those for whom debunking is a first principle. It soon follows that those who don't share that first-principle approach to controversial phenomena become bad people who are not like us good rational people. Thus the rhetorical excesses in which the debunking movement so colorfully indulges. Thus the bizarre characterizations of dissenters I discuss in the IUR editorial I mentioned in my previous posting (March/April 1992 if anybody's interested).

Another good paper on this subject, if you can find it, is the Rockwells' "Irrational Rationalists," Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research 72 (January 1978). I write on the history and mindset of the movement in "Skeptics and the New Age" (in Melton, Clark, and Kelly's New Age Encyclopedia [Gale, 1990].)

> > Ah, would that it were that important. Before I go any further
> > with this, Rob, I want to point out that you are trying to avoid
> > the big issue. You even deleted my reference to it, apparently
> > thinking I wouldn't notice. No such luck. Let me ask you: which
> > whopping historical error do Festinger, et al., make, a mistake
> > bearing directly on their theory?

> No deliberate avoidance Jerry. I like a challenge. So, just to
> clarify the task, I have to read 'When Prophecy Fails' again and
> determine errors relating to which theory, the one concerning
> disconfirmation or that of cognitive dissonance? You read the
> book two weeks ago, for me it's around four years. I'll look
> through it again and get back to you with an answer (or admit

> that I don't have an answer). Do I get a prize, btw?

> > When you've done so, you can send me your regular mail address,
> > and I'll send you Gordon Melton's paper "What Really Hapens When
> > Prophecy Fails" (which, annoyingly, I now discover I've
> > misfiled, after just looking at it a couple of days ago; well,
> > I'll find the damn thing somewhere, and if not, I can ask Melton
> > for another copy).

Found the paper in question and am now seeking to obtain some others in the same vein (one of them, interestingly enough, by Rob Balch, who did all the good scholarly work on The Two before One [Applewhite] morphed into Heaven's Gate).

> That would be interesting, but no prize. A worthwhile prize would
> be the two-volumes of your encyclopedia, delivered to my door.
> That's if I pass the challenge. What's the forfeit if I'm wrong?

I'll ask my publisher to send you a review set if you get the answer right. What can you offer in return, if you get it wrong?

> > I am left wondering why, if Deutsch is such a brilliant guy, you
> > chose such a knuckleheaded quote to cite.

