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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Drake's Equation

From: **Greg Sandow** <GSANDOW@prodigy.net>
Date: Sat, 04 Jan 1997 10:15:08 -0500
Fwd Date: Sat, 04 Jan 1997 11:53:32 -0500
Subject: Re: Drake's Equation

First Stan Friedman writes:

> > *Re: The Drake Equation, it should be noted that it*
> > *totally ignores colonization and migration, the 2*
> > *major factors in determining the distribution of*
> > *intelligent life on earth.*

And Glen Alevy responds:

> *Must be sheer coincidence <grin>.*

> *Funny Dr. Drake should omit these significant factors; well documented*
> *throughout the history of mankind. They have even been hashed and*
> *rehashed in the science fiction literature for nn number of years.*

> *I think it is fair to posit that the omission of these factors does not*
> *spring from the lofty ideals of science. Could Dr. Drake have a hidden*
> *agenda?*

I wouldn't form that conclusion myself.

I've read pretty widely in the SETI literature, and Drake isn't alone in omitting these factors, or, for that matter, many others that might easily occur to any well-read, educated observer.

Carl Sagan, for instance, argues that we couldn't possibly have even a fraction of the interstellar visitors UFO reports seem to suggest. (Am I allowed, a decent interval after his death, to say something critical?) In his book *The Cosmic Connection*, he offers an argument to that effect, based on guesswork about how many civilizations there are in the galaxy, and how many places they might decide are "interesting" to visit. He concludes that we could expect a visitor once every ten thousand years.

But there are two elementary possibilities he doesn't consider. The first, and most obvious, is that people might be seeing the same craft over and over again. Or (a la *Independence Day*) we might have been visited by a huge "mother ship" that disgorges many smaller scouts.

The second is that we might be located on the fringe of a densely populated sector of the galaxy. That makes us much more likely to be visited, I'd think, than if we sat in an empty galactic waste. Sagan assumes, without acknowledging the assumption, that all "interesting" places are equally likely to be visited, or in other words that visitors arrive more or less at random. That's hardly likely to be true.

Generally, the SETI literature is marked by rabid lack of imagination. You can see this when the scientists involved speculate on exactly how an advanced alien race would differ from us. Drake, falling into a

spectacular cliché, thinks advanced aliens might be immortal. Ronald Bracewell (who stands out among the SETI scientists because he's willing to believe that robot probes might travel the galaxy) wonders if alien women might go into heat just once a year, the way female animals do on earth.

But these are relatively minor differences. What not one of the SETI scientists seems to have conceived are spiritual, emotional, or perceptual differences, of the kind that actually exist among cultures on earth. There are bigger differences between European, Tibetan, and Japanese culture than anything the SETI scientists have imagined might exist between alien races in different parts of the galaxy. (Even Paul Davies, who imagines that aliens might be more spiritual than we are, minimizes the actual difference by imagining that many of us might want to convert to their religion, in the unlikely event that they should visit. This assumes that their spirituality would be enough like ours to be comprehensible.)

And as for really large differences, I offer two possibilities. One is from literature. Borges, the Argentinian fantasist, has a lovely story about a planet whose language has no nouns. His fantasies are wonderfully cerebral. He speculates on the philosophy that would evolve in such a culture. They and we would find it almost impossible to converse. Everything we sense as static, they sense as process. His example, of one of their sentences: "Upwards, beyond the on-streaming, it mooned." (This means, in English: "The moon rose over the river.")

My second example comes from a channeler, Lissa Royale. Laugh if you must, but I find one of her ideas astounding, and all the more so because I've never seen it suggested before, not even in science fiction. She believes she channels extraterrestrials. (Though when I've spoken to her about it, she's very modest, and says that she has absolutely no proof that she's in fact doing that.) In any case, one thing she's said is that the ETs don't have conscious and unconscious thoughts the way we do; they have conscious awareness of all their mental processes. Put aside the source of this speculation, if channeling bothers you. Consider it simply as an idea. It goes far, far beyond anything the SETI scientists have imagined, and suggests that communication with an alien race would be far more difficult than they've conceived.

Greg Sandow

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