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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

From: Greg Sandow <GSANDOW@prodigy.net>
Date: Sun, 05 Jan 1997 10:59:56 -0500
Fwd Date: Mon, 06 Jan 1997 05:57:33 -0500
Subject: Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

John Powell, wondering how SETI scientists imagine they could recognize an alien signal, notes:

> SETI listens not for the one part of one signal that may be an alien
> version of Starsky & Hutch, but instead listens for the whole signal
> and requires it to be the SAME signal from the SAME place.

John's question, of course, is why we'd think aliens would be likely to send such a signal. Our own TV broadcasts, he notes -- along with other electronic debris wafting outward from our great green earth -- isn't nearly as organized as that.

Actually, John, the SETI crowd believes that aliens are sending coherent signals intentionally, in order to catch our attention. (And, of course, the attention of other beings.) It's worth reading the SETI literature, if only to see how large and detailed an edifice can be built on pure speculation.

SETI scientists have satisfied themselves that interstellar travel is impossible. Yet, they believe, any intelligent race knows it's not alone. Races long to reach out. How else to do that, but with radio? (A curious assumption, that races a billion years ahead of us would still use radio, but let it pass.)

The next question would be what kind of signal they'd broadcast. SETI scientists have ideas on that, too -- on the frequency that alien races would use, and on what the signal would look like. So they don't look for a needle in a haystack; they've actually formed definite ideas of what they're looking for.

As I say, it makes for fascinating reading, even if it makes me wonder, sometimes, whether the SETI folks ever examine their assumptions with any kind of critical eye.

Greg Sandow

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