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### The Case For Humanoids

From: Mark Pilkington <[m.pilkington@virgin.net](mailto:m.pilkington@virgin.net)>  
Date: Thu, 09 Jul 1998 22:59:19 +0100  
Fwd Date: Thu, 09 Jul 1998 21:44:33 -0400  
Subject: The Case For Humanoids

The P.L.A. Driftwood International Conspiracy Cartel's computer is temporarily out of action, so Mark Pilkington has kindly agreed to post this on our behalf.

John Rimmer writes:

In recent postings on this list, Jerry Clark has made a great deal of noise about the work of Michael Swords. Swords argument is that any extraterrestrial intelligences which are likely to visit earth will be generally humanoid in shape and have similar social motivations as humans. For some reason Jerry seems to think that this theory is supportive of ETH speculations about UFO origins. Dennis Stacy describes being at the 1991 MUFON symposium when Swords gave one of his first public expositions of his exobiological speculations.

It is puzzling that Jerry should think that Swords' work is either groundbreaking or supportive of the ETH. I attach an extract from a short article, "The Case for Humanoids" by psycho-social bogeyman John Harney, which was published in MUFON (the earlier name of Magonia) new series no.6, Spring 1977. Jerry did receive this magazine at the time, but no doubt it is filed away beneath the wealth of other publications which he is constantly urging us to read.

THE CASE FOR HUMANOIDS

John Harney

Is it likely that there are intelligent beings on other planets? Would they resemble us, or would they be totally different in appearance and behaviour?

Many scientists today believe that life will eventually evolve where it is physically possible for it to do so, and given sufficient time and favourable conditions, intelligent being will eventually emerge. New discoveries in biology are taking place almost daily but the question of the origin of life is still controversial. Some experts believe that the origin of life of Earth was a singular event, the result of an extremely unlikely chain of chemical reactions, an event so improbable as to be unlikely to be repeated anywhere else in the universe at any time. According to Jacques Monod:

"...the biosphere does not contain a predictable class of objects or events but is a particular event, certainly compatible indeed with first principles, but not \*deducible\* from those principles, and therefore unpredictable." (1)

However, many scientists would argue that it would be possible to predict the occurrence of life, if only we knew enough about biology. Those who believe that life is quite common in the universe often say that it is unlikely to be much like life on Earth:

"Some scientists have been especially impressed by the number of individually unlikely events which are together responsible for the development of man and human intelligence. They have emphasised that even if the Earth were starting out again from scratch, and only random factors allowed to operate, the development of anything like a human being would be highly unlikely." (2)

Such opinions seem very plausible, but they fail to take into account the various constraints imposed by the laws of nature. For example: "...silicon compounds might replace carbon molecules as structural biochemicals". (3) The notion that there could be forms of life based on silicon rather than carbon crops up again and again in the literature. It should not be taken seriously, as such an idea betrays an ignorance of elementary chemistry. Some writers assume that because silicon is the nearest neighbour to carbon in the periodic table and also has a valency of four, then it can form bonds with hydrogen, oxygen, etc., to produce compounds analogous to compounds based on carbon and having similar properties. This is not true. The bond energies involved in the links between silicon and other elements, and carbon and other elements, have different values. The Si-Si bond is weaker than the C-C bond, but the Si-O bond is stronger than the C-O bond. To see what this means in practice we can compare the gas that bubbles out of fizzy drinks, carbon dioxide, with a lump of quartz, silicon dioxide. I maintain that anyone who takes the trouble to consult the appropriate chemistry text-books will be readily convinced that a biochemistry based on silicon is impossible.

So here we have a basic constraint on the nature of any living creature, imposed by the laws of chemistry. Observational evidence indicates that these laws are the same throughout the observable universe, so there would seem to be no way of avoiding this conclusion.

Assuming that intelligent beings have evolved on other planets, what would they look like? It is tempting to speculate that they would look like 'nothing on Earth', but we must not let our imaginations run wild. The laws of nature impose many constraints on the size and shape of living organisms, and even on the social behavior of intelligent creatures.

If we wish to design a hypothetical intelligent being, where do we start? Well, it would need a brain, and a very elaborate one at that. Thus it will need to be big enough to support a large brain, and this delicate organ will need some sort of protection. How about a skull? The brain will also need sensory inputs to tell it what is happening in the outside world. It will need eyes, of only to avoid such disasters as falling off cliffs or walking under buses. Yes, but would those eyes necessarily see the same wavelengths as our eyes? Undoubtedly so, because planetary atmospheres are most transparent to those wavelengths which we detect as visible light. What about 'seeing' with radio waves? Well, with radio waves:

"In order to have any useful resolution - that is, detection of fine visual detail - the effective collecting area must be enormous. To have the same resolving power at 5cm wavelengths that the eye has at 5000Å wavelength, an extraterrestrial microwave 'eyeball' would have to be roughly half a mile in diameter." (4)

We could go on to fill a full-length book with similar arguments, but the whole question is neatly summed up in the words of Professor M R House:

"Typical gross form associated with ecological habit for a given animal size and mode of life, suggests that there is a 'paradigm' or theoretically appropriate form for given circumstances, and that selection pressures tend to work towards this by eliminating those organisms least approximating to it". (5)

House points to various examples of evolutionary convergence

such as gross similarities between swimming reptiles, mammals and fish, and the fact that "sabre-tooth tigers of the Tertiary, of South Africa were marsupial mammals, whilst the present-day tigers are placental mammals".

In other words, where there is an ecological niche it will eventually be filled, by the processes of evolution, with the appropriate animal or plant. Because of the natural constraints imposed by the laws of physics and chemistry, ecological niches on other planets must bear some resemblance to those with which we are familiar on Earth . . .

Harney continues with speculation that extraterrestrial intelligences would also tend to similarities in aspects of social organization and behaviour, concluding that "they would undoubtedly have to face and find answers to similar problems to ours - technical, economic, political and philosophical".

1. Jacques Monod, 'Chance and Necessity', translated by Austryn Wainhouse, Collins, London 1972
2. I.S.Shklovskii and Carl Sagan, 'Intelligent Life in the Universe', Dell, NY, 1968
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. M.R.House, 'Evolution and the Fossil Record', in 'Understanding the Earth', Artemis Press/OU Press, 2nd. ed., 1974.

It seems to me that much of Swords' speculation can be accepted almost as a given by both ETH advocates and PSH proponents. It has little to do with the reality of whether any potential ET craft has ever visited this planet. For that we are inevitably brought back to the investigation of individual cases, which really is where we came in, with the ten or fifty, (or even one) best cases.

John Rimmer  
Magonia (still On-Line) at [www.magonia.demon.co.uk](http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk)  
Mark Pilkington

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