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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Are We Alone?

From: David Rudiak <DRudiak@aol.com>
Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1999 20:02:08 EST
Fwd Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1999 00:46:32 -0500
Subject: Re: Are We Alone?

>From: Dennis Stacy <dstacy@texas.net>
>Date: Thu, 11 Nov 1999 10:20:33 -0600
>Fwd Date: Fri, 12 Nov 1999 09:45:26 -0500
>Subject: Re: British Ufology Has Been Reborn!

>>From: Brian Straight <brians@mdbs.com>
>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>Subject: Re: British Ufology Has Been Reborn!
>>Date: Wed, 10 Nov 1999 09:43:23 -0500

>>>>From: Dennis Stacy <dstacy@texas.net>
>>>>Date: Sat, 06 Nov 1999 14:32:21 -0600
>>>>Fwd Date: Sun, 07 Nov 1999 06:44:41 -0500
>>>>Subject: Re: British Ufology Has Been Reborn!

>>>Agreed. But it also relies upon something astronomers call "The
>>>Copernican Principle," which, in essence, states that there is
>>>nothing particularly special about our celestial
>>>neighborhood - that is, all places in the universe are pretty
>>>much like all other places (a sort of cosmic Frankfurt, if you
>>>will).

>Point was, the Earth is vastly different from all the other
>planets in the solar system. Evolution is not some vital force
>that spreads itself throughout the universe. It is something
>that happens to the degree that it does when local conditions
>permit it.

Thus it is very likely happening many, many places elsewhere in
the Universe where local conditions permit, maybe even elsewhere
in our own solar system (Mars? Europa?)

>There was no guarantee, for example, that the mammals
>would have survived the asteroid impact some 65 million years
>ago. Had the asteroid been large enough, it could have killed
>virtually everything on the planet. Had it been bigger than the
>Earth, in fact, it would have destroyed the entire planet,
>ending the local experiment in evolving lifeforms then and
>there.

OK, but what does this have to do with whether there is
intelligent life somewhere else? All you are saying is that a
certain set of circumstances led to human kind, which is little
more than a truism. But there could be many, many combinations
of different circumstances which could lead to intelligent life
elsewhere, or could have led to a different form of intelligent
life here on planet Earth.

>The fact that chemistry and physics operate the same throughout
>the universe has nothing to do with the meaning of history over
>billions of years. The Earth and Moon are not different because
>of chemistry or physics (and no one's arguing that they are),
>they're different because they have different _histories_, a
>concept that seems to be hard to grasp for some.

People don't have any trouble grasping that the Earth and Moon
are different, or that intelligent life will not evolve on
Jupiter or Venus. What I think people are finding difficult to
grasp is your ultimate point.

>The implication of this line of reasoning is that life must be
>pretty common throughout the universe. If it's not, then you
>have to start arguing about human exceptionality, and most
>scientists are uncomfortable pursuing such arguments.

>Every planet in our solar system has demonstrably had a uniquely
>different _history_ that can be easily evidenced simply by
>looking at them in their present states. No two are even
>remotely alike, in other words.

Your point Dennis, your point?

>History is simply the present sum of a series of countless
>contingent events (over billions of years), -- any single one of
>which could have turned out differently. In the Earth's case, it
>could have been murdered in its cradle, or completely destroyed
>65 million years ago when it collided with an asteroid.

Yes, quite true. But the discussion isn't about whether
histories are unique. ALL histories are unique. The question
is whether ONLY one history can lead to intelligent life (i.e.,
we are alone), or whether a zillion different histories could
lead to intelligent life (they're out there).

So your real point is

>There's nothing that said it had to have sufficient gravity to maintain
>an atmosphere,

Once a planet gets beyond a certain size, it would be pretty hard NOT to
maintain an atmosphere. Earth happens to be big enough to keep its
atmosphere. That's not too surprising. Seven out of nine of the planets
have atmospheres of one form or another, and even a few larger moons like
Titan.

I fail to see where your argument is leading. It seems to be
that if Earth didn't have this or that condition, we wouldn't be
here tossing insults at one another. OK, but so what? If not
Earth, then some other planet, or some zillions of planets,
would have the proper conditions and histories. Your argument
always seems to be that Earth could be the ONLY place that could
possibly have the proper conditions and history to produce
intelligent life. OK, so it's true of our solar system, but
that's not much of a statistical sample, is it? It's a very BIG
Universe out there.

>or any laws imposing the current percentage of
>oxygen in the atmosphere that we do have.

We have free oxygen because of plant life and photosynthesis.
Free oxygen is a hallmark of life. The level is controlled by
the plant life and fires (and probably other things like
oxygenation of rocks and decay of organic matter), and therefore
is not accidental, but a self-regulated system. This does not
mean that it is "conscious," just that there are feedback
systems that keep things in a relatively narrow zone. It's
like an air-conditioning system with a thermostat to provide
feedback, which keeps the temperature within a small range.

>We could have developed an atmosphere too rich in oxygen, in which case the
>first caveman striking flint together in an effort to build a
>fire would have ended things rather badly for all of us.

And that is one reason why the amount of oxygen doesn't become
too rich. If it's too rich, the forest fires burn out of
control. That consumes atmospheric oxygen and also kills off
plant life that produces oxygen. The vast clouds of smoke
raised would also reduce sunlight all over the planet, which

would again reduce levels of photosynthesis on land and in the water. The net effect is to drop the level of oxygen in the atmosphere. The reason our atmosphere is relatively stable is because there are negative feedback systems that maintain the level of gasses in a fairly narrow range.

If the level of oxygen starts to drop too low, the fires have more trouble burning. Photosynthetic organisms can flourish unimpeded by disastrous fires, producing more oxygen, etc.

Thus life resulted in oxygen, and life helps regulate the level of oxygen. That is part of the principle of "Gaia." There are mechanistic feedback systems that maintain our biosphere, of which living organisms are a part. It's not just chance. Exactly how they might function or how they came into being is still being worked out and a subject of much heated debate.

>Everything about the Earth's present state of being, if you want
>to call it that, is the culmination of a long series of utter
>accidents -- according to the operation of physical, chemical
>and biological actions.

Truisms, Dennis, truisms. Just about EVERYTHING, everywhere is a culmination of a long series of utter accidents -- you, me, the rock you kick on the street, my delapidated Volvo. That's not the point. The question remains whether only one unique sequence leads to intelligent life or whether a vast multitude of sequences can get you there. I think the former position is unbelievably parochial. There isn't just my delapidated Volvo. There are delapidated Volvos everywhere, each with its own unique history.

>Unless, of course, you want to invoke a Creator. But that's
>another post.

No need. The law of large numbers and rolling the dice seems to do pretty much the same thing. Eventually somebody always wins the lottery.

David Rudiak

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