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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Are We Alone?

From: **Greg Sandow** <gsandow@prodigy.net>
Date: Sat, 13 Nov 1999 11:49:18 -0500
Fwd Date: Sun, 14 Nov 1999 00:42:16 -0500
Subject: Re: Are We Alone?

I've learned a lot from this thread. For one thing, I've realized that there's an ideological -- and emotional -- bias many people have toward believing that intelligence is the goal of evolution. (Maybe it's a bias our culture has.) Dennis has done us all a favor by reminding us that this is not a scientific position -- or at least that it hasn't yet been scientifically justified.

I'm reminded of my high school history classes, where we were taught that American democracy was the goal of all history. It's true that Mark Cashman gave a good scientific reason for expecting development of some sort in evolution, given enough time (he said that evolution allows successful traits to add up cumulatively). But we still need to look at our intellectual, ideological, emotional, and (as Peter Brookesmith pointed out) our religious biases, before we draw what we think are scientific conclusions.

But here's the second thing I've learned from this debate. People are taking positions that are suspiciously related to their position on UFOs. Peter, a skeptic, and Dennis -- who gives most of his energy these days to skeptical arguments -- argue that intelligent life might be rare in the universe. Weighing in more or less on the other side are David Rudiak, who's often seen here supporting the Roswell alien-crash scenario; Mark Cashman, who says the UFO evidence points to some "objectively existing" phenomenon; and myself. I'm often seen here arguing against abduction skeptics.

So maybe we're lining up in emotional ranks. Those of us who favor (even a little) the idea that UFOs might be alien also find ourselves favoring the idea that alien life might be common. And some of us who don't think there's much evidence that UFOs are alien also find ourselves fascinated by reasons to believe there might not even be any alien life out there. Coincidence?

These positions aren't necessarily linked -- SETI scientists believe alien life is widespread but laugh at UFO reports. But even here there's an emotional component to their beliefs. They more or less have to believe alien life is common, since they're spending their time, prestige, and funding to search for it. Meanwhile, a smaller group of scientists who support space colonization find it helpful to believe that there aren't any other intelligent beings out there to get in our way.

None of this is big news, really. In all walks of life, almost all of us find ourselves believing things that satisfy us emotionally. But the obvious distribution of biases in our current debate about life in the universe ought to teach us something -- it should encourage all of us to examine our

preconceptions about everything we think about.

Greg Sandow

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