

## Aliens! What Aliens?

By Levan Gvelesiani

There are some very important things to consider when it comes to aliens.

Many of us assume there must be intelligent life somewhere in the universe, especially in our Milky Way galaxy. Some have even suggested that these intelligent beings have visited us (Erich von Deniken and others), are visiting us now (the consistent interest in UFOs) or we will establish contact with them in the future.

If you ask SETI-Seth Shostak, he is ready to contact aliens and is looking for them with all of his/our might (<http://setiathome.berkeley.edu> and <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34659/1.html>). Because he is convinced there are aliens and certain the aliens possess the appropriate technology to establish contact with us. It follows that they have the means to do so -- they have a kind of radio, television, telescopes or something similar. They must have eyes, ears and other “interfaces” for contacting distant worlds.

Popular speculation by Carl Sagan, Frank Drake and other renowned scientists regarding the frequency of civilizations in our Milky Way is well known. In the last 20 years the brightest among them has calculated the probability of contact. Many of them have tried to imagine what this contact would be like. They have surmised that we might in fact receive the “WOW” or some other kind of message that would convince us we are not alone in the universe.

Although we have not received such a signal, we continue to hope we will soon.

Despite all of our best efforts, we still have no contact and there are issues regarding other civilizations in the universe to be discussed. I have my doubts and would suggest that no one can be sure about anything.

1. We are opinionated beings; we assume if intelligent beings have evolved somewhere, they must have the same characteristics as us. This notion is false; we do not really know how intelligent life evolves in the first place. We have our theories about this topic (<http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34160/1.html>), but this speculation is also prejudiced. We confusingly mix our presumptions with reality. We do not even know for sure how life on Earth evolved. We can acknowledge theories such as Darwin's or Dawkins's or the Bible's for that matter, but they are merely theories, nothing more or less. They are not the acknowledgment of facts. We have no idea how intelligent life would appear if it evolved somewhere else. We have only one example – life on Earth and nothing else! Why should we presume that intelligent beings from another planet would have all of our features? I understand that we desire to see aliens in our likeness, perhaps slightly different, but with two or more legs, two or more eyes, five or six fingers and senses like ours – something like Steven Spielberg's “ET” or Greg Mottola's “Paul.” Why? Who knows? I think we must reconsider our assumptions. Intelligent beings that have evolved on other worlds could be very different than us, and we extremely different than them. I am not sure they will have radios, TV and telescopes. I am not sure about anything regarding life in outer space.
2. What we can now behold in the night's sky are planets and stars from past years – some from a very long time ago. Our present-day glimpses of most galaxies and stars

are from a time when the first mammals evolved on Earth or earlier. While we have not yet received signs of life, who can claim and maintain that the civilizations elsewhere could not have evolved in the last thousands and millions of years? The nearest star to our Solar System is Alpha Centauri. We now receive the light from there which is about 4.34 years old. From Gliese 581 we receive data which is about 20 years old. Usually the stars we see in our night sky in the Milky Way are 50 to 2,500 light years away from us. The diameter of the Milky Way is 100,000 light years. How can we be so sure that nothing has happened out there in those years? I am not sure. This time shift is another issue when it comes to making contact.

3. There is another problem and it is the most serious to consider of all. The distances between the stars are so great that it makes little sense to contact one another. One must appreciate that if we send a signal to Gliese 581 we must wait at least 40 years for a response. Do we need this type of contact? I am not sure. The aliens there, if they are at all like us, and presuming they have radio, perhaps also do not want to wait such a long time. The challenges of extreme distance and time are the most crucial obstacles to contacting aliens. I am not sure we can overcome these problems. Time shift again.
4. Back to suggestion number one. Science fiction writers often describe our future as if we will not have changed much overall. We would still be similar to present-day humans or part cyborg. This kind of fiction is only a fiction and has nothing in common with reality. We are NOW humans, but we are not sure how our world will change. We are not sure what we will look like after a million years. Our civilization is no more than 10,000 years old. We have done our work: we changed the nature and changed ourselves. Which changes will come? Who knows? When Gene Roddenberry shows us human beings in the future, it evokes smiles. Can someone actually imagine that in the year 3010 humans will be the same as now? I am not sure. Change is another problem.
5. Ray Kurzweil (<http://www.heise.de/tp/blogs/3/147440>) and many other futurists dream about the "Singularity." They want this turning point in human evolution to occur very soon, perhaps already in this century. The idea is that we would have the means to upload our minds to a machine and live forever as consciousness somewhere in a jungle of chips. I am sure we will accomplish this in the future. And, what kind of creatures would we be then? Now imagine, if somewhere in the Milky Way beings from a civilization have already evolved who can upload themselves, what interest would they have in contacting us? I am not sure they would have any.
6. One more funny thing. Steven Hawking was alarmed and declared this year that we must be careful with aliens; they might need our resources and attempt to exploit us. This man has a vivid imagination. Many other authors are also entranced with this idea (<http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34579/1.html> and <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/34/34385/1.html>). Evil aliens, so advanced that they can visit us, will come to Earth and take away our last piece of bread. Poor earthmen! Evil aliens! In the vast cosmos they cannot find any place to get their resources but the Earth. Funny. Does anyone really think that aliens will behave like conquistadors from 500 years ago? Really, human fantasy is extremely limited!
7. I want to underscore once more the time scale. Our civilization is very, very young: only 10,000 years have passed since we learned how to write, read, count, build and speak different languages. Ten thousand years are a mere drop in the cosmic bucket. As we are informed by astrophysicists, our universe is about 13.7 billion years young. Simple arithmetic tells us that the elapsed time for our civilization is 1/1,370,000th of the age of the universe. So I ask, what will come when our civilization is 10 million years old? If there is life in the universe, how old could it be? Imagine other sentient

beings that are 100 million years old. Will we look toward the resources of other civilizations when we are the same age? Who knows what our successors will think 100 million years from now? I doubt that anyone can answer that question.

8. The one and only constant in our lives is that everything is in flux. When I was born there were only simple televisions, and now I use advanced technologies to communicate and exchange ideas. This development was very rapid – it occurred in less than half a century. Our tools and devices continue to change and advance rapidly. When I look toward the future I recognize that the technology of today is not the end of the line. We will constantly change the nature and everything around us. These things will change us as well. Perhaps in a million years we will transform the Earth -- not simply the surface, but the entire planet. Who can insist that we will one day fly with our bold rockets and build colonies on other planets? I can only advise the audience to anticipate the ideas of Freeman Dyson (<http://www.sns.ias.edu/~dyson>) regarding our future.

All in all we are not certain about anything regarding aliens. And speculation regarding extra-terrestrials, including pronouncements by renowned scientists and entertainers, is simply that -- speculation. I wrote this essay simply to give readers a suggestion to give the matter some serious thought. The age of science fiction has passed; we must grow up and look at our universe soberly.

*Written on alien-free, smoggy November 2011*