



Contemplating the Alien. The impact of SETI on human self-image

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Ambivalence of SETI

- Fascination with SETI has problematic consequences: popularization of the topic
- Scientific standards vs. popular culture
- Misunderstanding of SETI as fantasy research

Reasons for acceptance problems of SETI

- Failure to see the difference between science and science fiction
- Dangers of anthropomorphism
- Answer of science: entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem



Countermeasures

- Transparency and verifiability of SETI and all kinds of research connected with it
- Educating the public; help people to realize the difference between science and popular culture
- Educating politicians: point out the dangers that could arise from neglecting the topic

Cultural perspectives

- Considerable impact on different religious and social traditions
- Philosophical questions
- Existential fears
- Insight into the relativity of human existence

Artificial Intelligence and Alien Intelligence

- Natural vs. artificial intelligence
- What is „intelligence“?
- Monopolization of Artificial Intelligence
- Theoretical perspectives
 - Origin of rights: Nature/god or society/law giver?
 - Universal values/“metalaw“



Different attitudes

- Human position in the universe
- Cosmopolitism
- Nature
- Non-human species: (Other) animals

Practical implications

- Need for more international cooperation
- Regulation and governance
- Who is in charge when a „first contact“ takes place?

Conclusion

- Paradox: Overwhelming probability of alien life vs. lacking acceptance of SETI as a serious scientific topic
- SETI allows new perspectives on our self-image: relativity of human existence on earth
 - Cosmopolitism
 - Different understanding of nature
 - Different attitude towards (other) animals
- These changes in our self-image do not depend on whether real contact with alien intelligence can be made in our lifetime

- Thank you very much!