

“Why Would an E.T. Have to Have a Biology Like Ours?”

Love your ministry. Keep up the good work! Just a question on your article [UFOs and Alien Beings...](#)

You wrote:

In the first place, it is highly improbable that there is another planet in our cosmos capable of supporting physical life. Dr. Ross has calculated the probability of such a planet existing by natural processes alone as less than 1 in 10^{174} .

My question would be: Why would one assume that an E.T would have to have biological mechanism that functions as you and I? Is it possible they can have a body that is not limited or constrained to “our” conditions here on planet earth?

You asked a good and frequent question. Actually complex life would have to be of similar chemistry as us. It turns out that carbon is the only element capable of forming the diversity of bonds and molecules that would allow life. Carbon can form bonds to four other atoms, including hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen as well as others. These bonds can serve as the basis for numerable molecules which life depends on. Since other life would necessarily be carbon based, there would also be requirements for water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, phosphorous, sulfur, etc. Eventually life’s chemistry would be similar to our own and intelligent life would have to be similar to us.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

UFOs and Alien Beings – A Christian Worldview Response

Michael Gleghorn addresses issues related to reports of UFO and alien sightings. He considers the various possible causes before closing with a biblical, Christian perspective pointing out these reports are often presented like false gospels. At the end of the day, even an alien cannot take away from the importance of faith in Christ.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

A Tale of Two Hypotheses

It seems that almost everyone is interested in reports of UFOs and alien encounters. But how should these reports be understood? Where do these “unidentified flying objects” come from and what are they? Are intelligent beings visiting us from another planet or some other dimension? Or are UFO reports merely a collection of hoaxes, hallucinations, and misidentified phenomena? Can all UFO reports be adequately explained, or are there some that seem to defy all natural explanations? These are just a few of the questions we want to consider in this article.

First, however, it’s essential to note that most UFOs (unidentified flying objects) become IFOs (identified flying objects). John Spencer, a British UFO researcher, estimates that as many as 95 percent of received UFO reports “are turned into IFOs and explained satisfactorily.”^{[1](#)} For example, the report might be found to have been a clever prank or to have

some natural explanation. Planets, comets, military aircraft, and rockets (among many others) have all been mistaken for UFOs. But even if 99 percent of UFO reports could be satisfactorily explained, there would still be thousands of cases that stubbornly resist all natural explanations. These are called *residual* UFO reports.

If residual UFOs are not hoaxes, hallucinations, or some natural or man-made phenomena, then what are they? Most UFO researchers hold either to the extraterrestrial hypothesis or the interdimensional hypothesis. The extraterrestrial hypothesis holds that technologically advanced, interplanetary space travelers are indeed visiting our planet from somewhere else in the cosmos. Stanton Friedman, a representative of this view, states clearly, "The evidence is overwhelming that some UFOs are alien spacecraft."[\[2\]](#)

The interdimensional hypothesis agrees "that some UFOs are real phenomena that may exhibit physical . . . effects."[\[3\]](#) However, unlike the extraterrestrial hypothesis, this view does not believe that UFOs and alien beings come from somewhere else in our physical universe. So where *do* they come from? Some suggest that they come from some other universe of space and time. But others believe that they come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps a spiritual realm.[\[4\]](#)

How might we tell which, if either, of these two hypotheses is correct? Astronomer and Christian apologist Dr. Hugh Ross suggests that we employ the scientific approach known as the "process of elimination." He writes, "Mechanics use it to find out why the car won't start. Doctors use it to find out why the stomach hurts. Detectives use it to find out who stole the cash. This process can also be used to discover what could, or could not, possibly give rise to UFO phenomena."[\[5\]](#)

So what happens if we apply this process to the extraterrestrial hypothesis? Although quite popular here in America, there are some serious scientific objections to this

viewpoint.

The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

In the first place, it is highly improbable that there is another planet in our cosmos capable of supporting physical life. Dr. Ross has calculated the probability of such a planet existing by natural processes alone as less than 1 in 10^{174} . You actually have “a much higher probability of being killed in the next second by a failure in the second law of thermodynamics (about one chance in 10^{80}).”[\[6\]](#) Thus, apart from the supernatural creation of another suitable place for life, our planet is almost certainly unique in its capacity to support complex biological organisms. (See the Probe article [“Are We Alone in the Universe?”](#)) This alone makes the extraterrestrial hypothesis extremely improbable. But it gets even worse!

Suppose (against all statistical probability) that there *is* a planet with intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. What is the likelihood that such creatures are visiting our planet? And what sort of difficulties would they face in doing so?

Probably the greatest challenge to interstellar space travel is simply the immense size of the universe. One group of scientists, assuming that any alien spacecraft would likely maintain communication with either the home planet or with other members of their traveling party, “scanned all 202 of the roughly solar-type stars within 155 light-years of Earth. Not one intelligible signal was detected anywhere within the vicinity of these stars.”[\[7\]](#) This implies that, at a minimum, E.T. would have to travel 155 light-years just to reach earth. Unfortunately, numerous galactic hazards would prevent traveling here in a straight line. Avoiding these deadly hazards would increase the minimum travel distance to approximately 230 light-years.[\[8\]](#)

Dr. Ross estimates that “any reasonably-sized spacecraft transporting intelligent physical beings can travel at velocities no greater than about 1 percent” of light-speed.[{9}](#) Although this is nearly 7 million miles per hour, it would still take about twenty-three thousand years to travel the 230 light-years to earth! Of course, a lot can go wrong in twenty-three thousand years. The aliens might run out of food or fuel. Their spacecraft might be damaged beyond repair by space debris. They might be destroyed by a contagious epidemic. The mind reels at the overwhelming improbability of successfully completing such a multi-generational mission.

In light of these facts, it doesn't appear that the extraterrestrial hypothesis can reasonably survive the process of elimination. Does the interdimensional hypothesis fare any better? A growing number of serious UFO researchers believe it can. Let's take a look.

The Interdimensional Hypothesis

The interdimensional hypothesis holds that residual UFOs “enter the physical dimensions of the universe from ‘outside’ the four familiar dimensions of length, height, width, and time.”[{10}](#) Where do they come from? Some believe that they come from another physical universe of space and time. But this does not seem possible. General relativity forbids “the space-time dimensions of any other hypothetically existing universe” from overlapping with our own.[{11}](#) For this reason, many researchers believe that residual UFOs must come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps even a spiritual realm.

What evidence can be offered for such a bold hypothesis? Many point to the strange behavior of residual UFOs themselves. Hugh Ross contends that residual UFOs “must be nonphysical because they disobey firmly established physical laws.”[{12}](#) Among the many examples that he offers in support of this statement, consider the following:[{13}](#)

1. Residual UFOs generate no sonic booms when they break the sound barrier, nor do they show any evidence of meeting with air resistance.
2. They make impossibly sharp turns and sudden stops.
3. They send no detectable electromagnetic signals.

For example, “relative to the number of potential observers, ten times as many sightings occur at 3:00 A.M. (a time when few people are out) as at either 6:00 A.M. or 8:00 P.M. (times when many people are outside in the dark).”[\[14\]](#) If residual UFOs were simply random events, then we would expect more sightings when there are more potential observers. The fact that these events are nonrandom may suggest some sort of intelligence behind them. This is further supported by the fact that some people are more likely to see a residual UFO than others. Numerous researchers have observed a correlation between an individual’s involvement with the occult and their likelihood of having a residual UFO encounter. This may also suggest some kind of intelligence behind these phenomena.

Finally, residual UFOs not only appear to be nonphysical and intelligent, they sometimes seem malevolent as well. Many of those claiming to have had a residual UFO encounter have suffered emotional, psychological, and/or physical injury. A few people have even died after such encounters. In light of these strange characteristics, many researchers have reached similar conclusions about the possible source of these phenomena.

The Occult Connection

Many serious UFO investigators have noticed a striking similarity between some of the aliens described in UFO reports and the demonic spirits described in the Bible. Although it may not be possible to know whether some aliens are actually demons (and I certainly do not claim to know this myself), the well-documented connection between UFO phenomena and the occult cannot be denied.

In 1969 Lynn Catoe served as the senior bibliographer of a publication on UFOs researched by the Library of Congress for the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research. After a two-year investigation, in which she surveyed thousands of documents, she drew explicit attention to the link between UFOs and the occult. She wrote, "A large part of the available UFO literature . . . deals with subjects like mental telepathy, automatic writing and invisible entities . . . poltergeist manifestations and 'possession.' Many . . . UFO reports . . . recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic phenomena." [\[15\]](#) Veteran UFO researcher John Keel agrees. After surveying the literature on demonology he wrote, "The manifestations and occurrences described in this imposing literature are similar if not entirely identical to the UFO phenomenon itself." [\[16\]](#) The bizarre claim of alien abduction may lend some credibility to these remarks.

Many (though not all) of those who report an abduction experience describe the aliens as deceptive and hostile. Whitley Strieber, whose occult involvement preceded the writing of both *Communion* and *Transformation*, at times explicitly referred to his alien visitors as "demons." For example, in *Transformation* he described his emotional reaction to the aliens with these words: "I felt an absolutely indescribable sense of menace. It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn't move, couldn't cry out, couldn't get away . . . Whatever was there seemed so monstrously ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister. Of course they were demons. They had to be. And they were here and I couldn't get away." [\[17\]](#)

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that abduction is often physically and emotionally painful, Mr. Strieber tends to believe that its purpose is ultimately benevolent. When integrated correctly, the abduction experience can provide a catalyst for spiritual growth and development. Still, he candidly admits that he is really not sure precisely *who* or

what these beings actually are, and he continues to warn that many of them are indeed hostile and malevolent.[\[18\]](#) In light of this, one can't help wondering about the experiences related in Mr. Strieber's books. If his encounters with aliens were not merely hallucinatory, or due to some mental disorder, isn't it at least possible that his sinister visitors really were demons? As noted above, many UFO investigators would indeed consider this (or something very much like it) a genuine possibility.

Another Gospel?

In his letter to the Galatians the Apostle Paul delivered a stirring indictment against every gospel but that of Christ. "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (1:8-9). Evidently, the purity of the gospel was deeply important to Paul.

In today's pluralistic society a variety of gospels are being preached. And among the great throng of voices clamoring for our attention are many UFO cults. Since the 1950s a number of these cults have arisen, often around a charismatic leader who claims to be in regular contact with otherworldly beings. Interestingly, unlike the abduction phenomenon, most contactees do not claim to have ever seen the aliens with whom they communicate. Rather, they claim that the aliens communicate with them psychically or telepathically. The contactee is simply a channel, or medium, through whom the aliens communicate their messages to humankind. This method of contact is rather intriguing for those who favor the interdimensional hypothesis. As John Saliba observes, "Many contactees . . . write about UFOs and space beings as if these were psychic phenomena, belonging to a different time/space dimension that lies beyond the scope . . . of modern

science.”{19}

So what sort of messages do the aliens allegedly communicate to contactees? Often they want to help guide us to the next stage of our spiritual evolution or give us advice that will help us avoid some global catastrophe. Strangely, however, many of them also want to deny or distort traditional doctrines of biblical Christianity. Oftentimes these denials and distortions concern the doctrine of Christ. For example, the Aetherius Society “views Jesus Christ as an advanced alien being . . . who communicates through a channel and travels to Earth in a flying saucer to protect Earth from evil forces.”{20} As a general rule, “UFO religions . . . reject orthodox Christology (Jesus’ identity as both God and man) and thus reject Jesus Christ as the . . . Creator and . . . Savior of humankind.”{21}

A deficient Christology, combined with an acceptance of biblically forbidden occult practices like mediumistic channeling (see Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12; etc.), make many UFO cults spiritually dangerous. By preaching a false gospel, they have (perhaps unwittingly) placed themselves under a divine curse. By embracing occult practices, they have opened the door to potential demonic attack and deception. Nevertheless, there is hope for those involved with these cults. There is even hope for those tormented by hostile beings claiming to be aliens. The Bible tells us that through His work on the cross, Jesus disarmed the demonic rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15). What’s more, for those who flee to Him for refuge, He makes available the “full armor of God,” that they might “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Regardless of *who* or *what* these alien beings might be, no one need live in fear of them. If Jesus has triumphed over the realm of evil demonic spirits, then certainly no alien can stand against Him. Let those who live in fear turn to Jesus, for He offers rest to all who are weary and heavy-laden (Matt. 11:28).

Notes

1. John Spencer, ed., *The UFO Encyclopedia* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), s.v. "identified flying objects (IFOs)," cited in Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 25.
2. Jerome Clark, *The UFO Encyclopedia*, 2d ed., vol. 1 (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998), s.v. "Friedman, Stanton Terry," cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 31.
3. Ross, et al., 32.
4. Ibid., 109.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Ibid., 39.
7. Ibid., 57.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 109.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 69.
13. Ibid., 69-70.
14. Ibid., 116.
15. Lynn Catoe, *UFOs and Related Subjects: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. iv (prepared under Air Force Office of Scientific Research Project Order 67-0002 and 68-0003), cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's and Other Supernatural Phenomena* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 17.
16. John A. Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (New York: Putnam's, 1970), p. 215; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 18.
17. Whitley Strieber, *Transformation: The Breakthrough* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 181; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 23.
18. For example, his recent online journal entry, "How We Can Protect Ourselves," (Aug. 28, 2003) at

www.unknowncountry.com/journal/. 19. John A. Saliba, "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in *The Gods Have Landed*, ed. James R. Lewis (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 25; cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 145.

20. Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 150.

21. Ibid., 164.

© 2003 Probe Ministries

Contact: A Eulogy to Carl Sagan

The Paradox of the Movie *Contact*

At the very beginning of the movie *Contact*, you should have noticed in the lower right corner of the screen a little dedication which read, "For Carl." This, of course, is Carl Sagan (1934-1996), the Cornell astronomer and science advocate to the public, whose 1985 novel was the basis for the movie.⁽¹⁾ Sagan passed away in December 1996, before the movie was released, after he struggled for several years with a rare blood disorder.

The movie serves as a fitting eulogy for the most visible member of the scientific community within popular culture. The phrase "billions and billions", attributed to Sagan, has become a part of the public's lexicon of scientific phrases, even though Sagan never actually used the phrase in print or in any of his public broadcasts or appearances. Sagan used it self-effacingly as the title for his final and posthumously

published book.

Many of us know of Carl Sagan, but we know very little about him. As a planetary astronomer, Sagan made significant contributions to the fields of chemical evolution, Martian topography, and Venusian meteorology. He also served as an official adviser to NASA on the *Mariner*, *Voyager*, and *Viking* unmanned space missions. Carl Sagan led the charge both to the public and in the Congressional halls of government funding for space research and particularly SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence.

Sagan was awarded the Peabody Award and an Emmy for his stunningly influential public television series, *Cosmos*. The accompanying book by the same title is the best-selling science book ever published in the English language.(2) He earned the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Dragons of Eden* on the evolution of human intelligence, and numerous other awards and honorary degrees. He is the most read scientific author in the world, and upon awarding him their highest honor, the National Science Foundation heralded his gifts to mankind as "infinite."

The main character of *Contact*, Ellie Arroway, played by Jodie Foster, portrays Sagan's life in miniature. While not sharing Sagan's awards and rapport with the public, Ellie Arroway is a brilliant, driven, self-reliant young astronomer obsessed with SETI. Dr. Arroway endures scorn and ridicule from the public and science for her dedication to discovering signs of extraterrestrial life, just as Sagan has. Arroway, like Sagan, confronted with the demons of superstition, fundamentalism, and scientific jealousy, fought back with reason, sarcastic wit, and sheer perseverance.

Arroway parrots Sagan's views on the need for a rational, non-religious view of reality to solve our problems, his hope for an extraterrestrial savior to save us from our technological adolescence, and the wonder and beauty of the cosmos pointing

to our species as a curious, brave, precious accident of the universe. What is paradoxical about *Contact* is not the conflict between faith and reason, but who is forced to rely on faith and experience instead of evidence. Following Ellie's trip through the galaxy and her conversation with an alien, she returns with no documentation. What was an 18-hour experience for Ellie appeared to be an uneventful few seconds to everyone else. She must ask a Congressional panel to accept her account of events on *faith* with no evidence. If you were paying close enough attention as the film wound down, however, you could discover that this paradox is only apparent. Ellie's data instruments recorded a full 18 hours—not a few seconds—of static. There was evidence of her experience, but it was withheld from Ellie by apprehensive government officials. The scientific validation once again highlights Sagan's conviction that science is mankind's only reliable tool in the discovery of truth, and that faith only covers up our fears and stifles our search for answers.

Contact is a must-see film for those who wish to comprehend and knowingly confront our culture's hostility towards faith that relies on revelation.

The Paradox of Sagan's Views of Religion

One of the most perplexing aspects of the movie *Contact* is the seemingly confusing portrayal of religion. The confusion, I believe, is only superficial. If you reflect on how the different traditional religion is discarded as irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst.

Sagan's disdain for traditional religion is clear from the beginning. Events from Ellie's childhood flashback through the early part of the movie and lay the groundwork for her rational rejection of traditional Christianity. In the novel, Ellie's father is portrayed as a skeptic of revealed religion; he views the Bible as "half barbarian history and half fairy tales."⁽³⁾ In the movie, Ellie admits to Palmer Joss that her

father was asked to keep her home from Sunday School because she asked too many questions that could not be answered, such as "Where did Cain get his wife?" Although this and other objections offered in the novel are easily answered, they are left unchallenged as apparently sturdy nails in the Bible's coffin.

When Ellie's father dies in the movie, the clergyman offers harsh and uncaring words about some things being hard to understand, that we aren't meant to know, and that we just have to accept it as God's will. This deliberately presents the God of the Bible as unknowable, cruelly inscrutable, and demanding of our acceptance. Ellie's response to the minister's attempt to be consoling is to berate herself on where she should have left extra medicine where it could have been reached in an emergency. Self-reliance and analytical thinking easily out-compete the minister's feeble lecture. In a conversation with Palmer Joss, Ellie confidently asserts that we created God so we wouldn't feel so small and alone. He's just an emotional crutch.

Two other characters in the film outline Sagan's view of the modern evangelical right. The long-haired preaching zealot is portrayed as a dangerous man, out of control and out of touch with reality. He later borrows a trick from Muslim fundamentalists by sacrificing himself in an attempt to derail the multinational project to build the travel machine. Richard Rank, the presidential advisor, represents that portion of the religious right that hungers and thirsts not for righteousness, but for political power. At a cabinet meeting, Rank offers sanctimonious drivel about science intruding into areas of faith and the message being morally ambiguous. If his remarks made you cringe with anger, they were supposed to.

And then there is Palmer Joss, the enigmatic, amoral, has-been priest. Palmer Joss's New Age religion sees truth as relative and the real issue as oppression. Joss has no quibble with the conclusions of science, just its attempts to overstep its

boundaries and rule our lives. His knowledge of God is limited to an experience on which he does not elaborate and that intellect cannot touch. Perhaps the attraction between Joss and Arroway is the challenge they represent to each other. Joss's religion is at least scientifically informed and therefore intriguing to Ellie, and she is scorned by the same scientific establishment that Joss distrusts. A match made in Hollywood.

Sagan left no room for any faith that does not embrace the conclusions of a scientific materialism. This needs to be kept in mind when Joss challenges her about her belief in God during the hearings. When the other multinational members speak up in defense of Joss's question, it is clear they are only referring to some politically correct supreme being, not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Sagan's Extraterrestrial Hope

Even in a scientifically sophisticated film such as Carl Sagan's *Contact*, we run into our culture's preoccupation with life beyond our planet. Though Carl Sagan spent some of his time combating the UFO crazies, he nevertheless held out a hope that there are civilizations out there waiting to discover us, or us them. Where does this conviction come from? For a scientific materialist and humanist like Carl Sagan, this confidence comes from two sources. First is the notion that if life evolved here, it is presumptuous of us to think that we are alone. Certainly life has evolved elsewhere! Second is Sagan's and others' fear that our species sits on the brink of self-destruction and we will need some outside help to overcome our predicament.

In a conversation with Palmer Joss, Ellie Arroway gives a calculation of sorts to explain her confidence in life having evolved elsewhere. She is looking up into the plethora of stars in the nighttime sky and says, "If just one in a million of those stars has planets, and if only one in a million of

those has life, and if just one in a million of those has intelligent life, then there are millions of civilizations out there." It is a little surprising that a film of such high caliber would get this one wrong. If you take each of those probabilities and multiply them together, that's one in a million million million, or a billion billion, or in scientific notation, 10 to the 18th power. Current estimates suggest that the stars number approximately 10 to the 22nd power. That would technically leave only 10,000 civilizations in the universe, not millions. That would mean that we are alone even in our own galaxy.

In another essay ([Are We Alone in the Universe?](#)) I summarized the calculations of Christian astronomer Hugh Ross. Ross estimated the probabilities of all the necessary conditions for life occurring by natural processes. Ross concluded that if all we have to depend on are physical and chemical processes, then we are alone in the universe. Life could have evolved nowhere else. Even the biochemical complexities of living cells are revealing that life requires intelligence ([See my review of Darwin's Black Box.](#)). Sagan's confidence that life is super-abundant in the universe is grossly out of proportion.

The second reason for Sagan's hope of other civilizations was expressed well by Ellie Arroway. An international panel, assigned the task of choosing the one individual who would enter the machine and perhaps visit this alien civilization, queried each candidate what one question they would ask. Ellie said she would want to know how they survived their technological adolescence without destroying themselves. Sagan has been a tireless supporter of nuclear disarmament. He truly feared that we would destroy ourselves before we reached our full potential. In the opening scene of his *Cosmos* television series, he remarked that our species was "young and curious and brave; it showed much promise." (4) Couple this fear with the conviction that there is no God, and the only source of

hope for a salvation from ourselves is another civilization more advanced than us, giving us some pointers for survival.

This confidence that an alien culture that could contact us would be more advanced than us is not unreasonable. If they have the technology to purposefully contact us, and this is something we cannot do, then their technology must be beyond ours. What is never explained, however, even though it is raised in the movie, is why we would expect this alien culture to be benevolent. It is just as likely, if not more so, that an alien civilization would be more of the variety depicted in the movie *Independence Day*. This hope reflects more on Carl Sagan's optimistic cosmic humanism that any scientific reality.

Who Will Save Us, God or Aliens?

The movie *Contact* tells us of a more realistic scenario for a first encounter with an alien civilization, than, say, *Men in Black*. A radio signal is received from space that is broadcast at a frequency that is equal to the value of hydrogen times pi and gets our attention by counting the prime numbers from 1 to 101 in sequence. The message is authenticated as coming from the star Vega, 26 light years away. The message is eventually decoded and found to contain the plans for constructing a machine for one person to apparently travel out into the galaxy. Ellie Arroway, a young astronomer who discovers the message, eventually boards the machine and travels out into space for a close encounter of a supposedly more realistic kind.

A very tantalizing line is repeated three times in the course of the film. When Ellie Arroway, as a child, asks her father if there are any life forms out in the universe, he says that if there isn't, it would be an awful waste of space. Palmer Joss repeats the line to an adult Ellie as they engage in a conversation under a starry sky in Puerto Rico. It is a poignant scene as Ellie clearly is stunned as she recalls her

father saying the same thing. Ellie, herself, repeats the phrase at the end of the film as she is addressing a group of school children and is asked if there is life out there in space.

Sagan has drawn a bead on the argument for the existence of God from design, or the teleological argument. Waste implies misdirected design. If the universe was created for us and we are alone, why does it have to be so big? Surely we could have survived quite well in a much smaller and economical universe. But if you think about it, Scripture proclaims that the heavens declare the glory of God, not man (Ps. 19:1). Indeed, if the universe was created only for man's benefit, then it is a waste of space. We don't deserve it. But if the main purpose of the universe is to glorify the splendid, eternal, all-powerful God, it could never be big enough.

Another interesting theme is the form that the alien takes. After Ellie travels through the galaxy, she arrives at a large docking space station. She is somehow transported to a beach, resembling a picture of Pensacola, Florida she drew as a child. Eventually, a figure approaches. It is her father. The alien appears to her in the form of her father. He tells her that they thought this would make it easier for her.

It's fascinating that Sagan often complains that if God exists, why doesn't he make himself plain? Why not a cross in the sky or a mathematical formula in the Bible? Why is everything so obscure? One answer from Philip Yancey's book, *Disappointment with God*, is that God did reveal himself plainly to Israel during the Exodus and they still rebelled, and Jesus performed incredible miracles and still most rejected him. The Father does not want to coerce our love. So isn't it interesting that in Sagan's own story, when a superior intelligence wants to make contact with us, they put us in familiar surroundings, take on our form, and speak our language?! If they appeared to us in their true form, we would be repulsed. Isn't that precisely what the Father did for us

in sending Jesus to live among us? It appears that Carl Sagan has unwittingly answered his own objection.

The Worldview of Carl Sagan

Carl Sagan began his highly acclaimed public television series *Cosmos* with a grand overview of the universe and our place within it. With a crashing surf in the background, Sagan declares,

"The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be."(5)

Sagan eloquently expresses his conviction that matter and energy are all that exist. He goes on to describe his awe and wonder of the universe. He describes a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, as the greatest of mysteries is approached. With excitement, Sagan tells us our tiny planetary home the Earth is lost somewhere between immensity and eternity, thus poignantly emphasizing our simultaneous value and insignificance.

In the movie *Contact*, Dr. Ellie Arroway expresses this awe and wonder at several points in the film. The most dramatic episode occurs during her galactic space flight when she is confronted with the wonders to be seen near the center of the galaxy. She is at a loss for words in the face of such beauty and humbly suggests that a poet may have been a better choice to send on the trip.

While this is all very moving, the great emotion seems strangely misplaced and inappropriate. If the cosmos is indeed all there is or ever was or ever will be, why get excited? If we are lost between immensity and eternity, shouldn't our reaction be one of existential terror, not awe? Sagan borrows his excitement from a Christian worldview where the heavens declare the glory of God, which *should* produce a tingle in the spine and a catch in the voice.

In the next to final scene in *Contact*, Ellie attempts to defend herself by finally admitting that she has no evidence of her trip through the galaxy. But she has been given something wonderful, a vision of the universe that tells us how tiny, insignificant, rare and precious we are. In *Cosmos*, Sagan reflects that while we are a species that is young and curious and brave, our place in the universe is to be compared to “a mote of dust that floats in the morning sky.”(6)

How can we be tiny and insignificant and rare and precious at the same time? Clearly Sagan cannot live consistently within his own worldview. His view of the universe dictates that all is meaningless chance and we are nothing special, yet he irrationally rejects the despair that logically follows in favor of being curious, brave, rare, and precious.

As Sagan neared death, many around the world were praying for him. Though clearly an enemy of the faith, the closing sentences of the novel *Contact* indicated a belief, a hope, in an intelligence that antedates the universe. Might he see the whole truth before he passes into eternity? In his final book *Billions and Billions*, his wife Ann Druyan writes, “Contrary to the fantasies of fundamentalists, there was no deathbed conversion.... Even at this moment when anyone would be forgiven for turning away from the reality of our situation, Carl was unflinching.”(7) In reflecting on the many cards and letters she received upon his death from people telling of the impact Sagan had on their lives, she writes, “These thoughts comfort me and lift me out of my heartache. They allow me to feel, without resorting to the supernatural, that Carl lives.”(8) Sadly, Carl does live, but not as she believes. Remember that enemies of the faith are lost and in need of a Savior. But even though they may be prayed for and witnessed to by colleagues up to the end, many, including Carl Sagan, will still, defiantly, die in their sins. It is a bitter, needless grief.

Notes

1. Carl Sagan, *Contact* (NY: Pocket Books [Simon and Schuster], 1986).
2. Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), p. 459.
3. Sagan, *Contact*, p. 20.
4. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* Video, "Episode 1: The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean" (Turner Home Entertainment, 1989).
5. Ibid.
6. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 4.
7. Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions* (New York: Random House, 1997), p. 225.
8. Ibid., p. 228.

© 1998 Probe Ministries

See Also:

- [Probe Answers Our E-mail: "You Are Full of Hatred and Bigotry"](#)