

Speculative Realms

SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2010

The Zoo-Keeper Hypothesis

I am a big-time Star Trek fan. I'm especially fond of the original series and its pilots and I'm very happy that J.J. Abrams chose to give a Sixties feel to the new film series. I was also ecstatic that Abrams was careful to keep sound elements from the original run.

Star Trek, after all, had a distinct sound. It was like birdsong. You know a hawk when you hear it. You also know Star Trek when you hear it.

But I apologize to those with Star Trek allergies and to those who, I think quite correctly, loathe cultural contamination with respect to the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH), even though they may enjoy the ground I cover below.

Star Trek, in point of fact, made an answer to the [Fermi Paradox](#) [if ETs exist, where are they?]. Two of their best episodes foreshadow, more or less, J.A. Ball's "Zoo Hypothesis." [J.A. Ball. "The Zoo Hypothesis," *Icarus* 19:347 (1973)].

"The Cage" was the original Star Trek pilot. It was never broadcast because NBC thought it too "cerebral"—shows what they think of our intelligence. In The Cage, Christopher Pike takes the Enterprise to Talos IV to rescue survivors of a spaceship crash. The crash turns out to be fake and Captain Pike is taken hostage by the Talosians, big-brained aliens with strange voices.

The Talosians have exorbitant mental powers and can make humans believe their own illusions to be real. While being kept in cages, humans actually live out their lives in their own minds. Gene Roddenberry later used footage from The Cage to construct another excellent Star Trek episode called [The Menagerie](#).

Essentially, Talosians, doomed genetically, are collecting zoo specimens and use their zoo-keeper status as a means of saving their own race. [Cultural contamination theorists might recognize the whole narrative about the Grays here.] The zoo seems more like a laboratory but the head Talosian is referred to by Spock as "The Keeper."

The problem with the Zoo Hypothesis as put forth by Ball is that the Zoo has primarily irresponsible keepers. They don't even clean the poop in the cages. They just observe.

I think there is a reason for that.

In [Extraterrestrial Life: Where is Everybody?](#) [from M.D. Papagiannis (ed.), [The Search for Extraterrestrial Life: Recent Developments](#), pp. 483-486.], Ball came up with ten categories of possible answers to the Fermi Paradox. He identifies the following two categories as the "zoo hypothesis."

"6) OCs [other civilizations] exist; we are of some interest to them; a few of their scientists are discreetly studying us.

"7) OCs exist; we are interesting to them; they are studying us in some detail but inconspicuously." [Papagiannis p. 484]

Bell says the next two categories are outside the realm of scientific inquiry:

"8) OCs exist; they are studying us and occasionally even dabbling in our affairs. (UFOs may be representative of OCs.)

"9) OCs exist; we are an experiment in their laboratory ('Petri-Dish Hypothesis')." [Papagiannis p. 484]

It is interesting that the poop-clearing zoo keeper appears in these two categories whereas "he", "she" is excluded from the zoo hypothesis, the hypothetical Ball includes within the purview of scientific investigation. Evidently, the rat can't scientifically investigate his lab-tech.

Yes. I'm calling Ball a laboratory rat.

I'm sure he wouldn't like that. I'm sure he'd be insulted. I'm sure I'm supposed to know my place. As I'm sure the hundreds of credible people, from all walks of life, including the supposedly more sober populations of law enforcement, airline pilots, and foreign air forces, are supposed to know

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Left Eye On Books

Dwayne A. Day, writing at [The Space Review](#), notes that he does not have additional sources confirming this, but: many of the elements that Annie Jacobsen's source used in her Roswell story are there in [science fiction writer James] Blish's short story ...

their place.

To tell a scientist "he" is supposed to know his place is insulting.

Nonetheless, to contemplate a zoo, it seems to me you must necessarily contemplate a zoo keeper, complete with the ordinary chores and responsibilities of a keeper. The aloof, hands-off observer, the type Ball says it is fine scientifically to study, is not a zoo keeper but a zoo patron. You can't contemplate a zoo without contemplating the keeper.

In other words, it is only structurally scientific to study the zoo hypothesis if you wear the lab coat. If you are in the position of the rat, you can't study the zoo hypothesis. It isn't your place.

God [I know-off topic] forbid that scientist was ever in the position of the lab rat!

Look, "man" is king of the mountain. In spite of all the historical evidence that "man" is an ethical moron, that "man" has worshipped science to the point of "his" own destruction, that "man" has used scientific progress to poison the air "he" breathes and the water "he" drinks, "man", the god, "man", the measure, "man", the piece of work, is scientific king of the mountain in this universe.

The false is made true by sheer demonstration of scientific power.

The zoo-keeper hypothesis in categories 8 and 9 are offenses to the scientific ego and that is why Ball disqualifies them for study. Science has always had an ego problem. Why is it Science hasn't resolved the Fermi Paradox? Not because SETI should look for something other than radio signals. They should. But it is because to a narcissistic, self-involved, cloistered profession, evidence of the existence of superior intelligences that challenge one's essential love of oneself is too bitter a pill to swallow.

The ETH not only posits the existence of an "other," which scientific egomaniacs thoroughly deny in deed if not intellectually, but a *SUPERIOR* other—an *OTHER WITH A LAB COAT ON!*

Ball can't hack that.

Remember Oppenheimer—when the first atomic bomb test was completed? "I am become death!" Me Tarzan, you Hiroshima! All burned up! Remember Oppenheimer's stooge, Truman—laughing when he announced the bomb had been dropped, incinerating and poisoning and genetically tampering with hundreds of thousands of Japanese? Is that behavior worthy of scientific study?

Are these rats who deserve to be in a cage, studied by an alien other? To my mind, it makes sense to keep these lab rats under lock and key. If there is an ethical structure to the Universe, and higher intelligence implies higher ethical standards, I'd like to hope the zoo keeper hypothesis is valid. For the sake of the Universe, if not for the sake of "rare" Earth.

But then again Nazi Scientists were highly intelligent. Were they highly ethical? A study of ethics does not prove alien existence but a study of ethics does prove human ignorance. Human ignorance impacts scientific investigation. How often do skeptics survey the UFO community and chortle "consider the source"? Science has been at the forefront of some of the ugliest human behavior in our history. Deeply ignorant human behavior.

Consider the source.

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[Fermi Paradox](#)
[Rare Earth Hypothesis](#)
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Posted by Gary Haden at 6:20 AM 

Labels: [anthropocentrism](#), [anthropomorphism](#), [fermi paradox](#), [scientific egomania](#)

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