

Quote Without Comment¹

“But as inhabitants of the earth, we are living at the very beginning of time. We have come into being in the fresh glory of the dawn, and a day of almost unthinkable length stretches before us with unimaginable opportunities for accomplishment. Our descendants of far-off ages, looking down this long vista of time from the other end, will see our present age as the misty morning of the world’s history; our contemporaries of today will appear as dim heroic figures who fought their way through jungles of ignorance, error and superstition to discover truth, to learn how to harness the forces of nature, and to make a world worthy for mankind to live in. We are still too much engulfed in the greyness of the morning mists to be able to imagine, however vaguely, how this world of ours will appear to those who will come after us and see it in the full light of day.”

—Sir James Jeans, *The Universe Around Us*, MacMillan, New York, 1929, p. 331.

“In the postindustrial society, knowledge is the most valued resource. . . . [K]nowledge, in a general sense that encompasses science and culture, is likely to be most highly prized by an advanced civilization. . . . [C]omplete contact with a superior civilization (in which their store of knowledge is made available to us) would abort [our] further development . . . [B]y intervening in our natural progress now, members of an extraterrestrial society could easily extinguish the only resource on this planet that could be of any value to them. . . . To establish that avoidance of open contact is not the most likely alien behavior, one would need to identify a resource that does not fall into this category.”

—T. B. H. Kuiper and M. Morris, “Searching for Extraterrestrial Civilizations,” *Science* **196**:616 (1977).

“[T]he human race [will be] usurped by its own artificial progeny . . . in whom we can take pride when they refer to themselves as our descendants . . . while we, their aged parents, silently fade away.”

¹Well, almost.

—Hans Moravec, *Mind Children*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 1.

“The real future is always much more astonishing than any prophet dares to predict. . . . For it may be that the old astrologers had the truth exactly reversed, when they believed that the stars controlled the destinies of men. The time may come when men control the destinies of stars.”

—Arthur C. Clarke, *The View from Serendip*, Ballantine, New York, 1978, pp. 72, 82, and 206.

“Many biologists and chemists have concluded from inadequate evidence that the development of intelligent life should be a frequent occurrence in our galaxy. Having examined their evidence and heard their arguments, I consider it just as likely that no intelligent species other than our own has ever existed.”

—Freeman J. Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, Harper & Row, New York, 1979, p. 216. See also *Mercury* **1(6)**:9 (1972).

“It would be a clear case of megalomania, an extreme delusion of greatness, to assume that we on Earth were the only intelligent beings in the universe. *Nothing is unique*, and most probably we are about average . . .”

—Sebastian von Hoerner, “Astronomical Aspects of Interstellar Communication,” *Astronautica Acta* **18**:421 (1973).

“Yet whenever I see a frog’s eye low in the water warily ogling the shoreward landscape, I always think inconsequentially of those twiddling mechanical eyes that mankind manipulates nightly from a thousand observatories. Someday . . . we are going to see something not to our liking, some looming shape outside there across the great pond of space. Whenever I catch a frog’s eye . . . I stand quite still and try hard not to move or lift a hand since it would only frighten him. And standing thus it finally comes to me that this is the most enormous extension of vision of which life is capable: the projection of itself into other lives.” [But then, like the oracle who does not understand his own words, Eiseley adds,] “This is the lonely, magnificent power of humanity.” [To be charitable, we might assume that he meant to

say, “on Earth.”]

—Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*, Vintage Books, New York, 1959, pp. 45–46.

“Life on earth is as old as it could be—a striking fact that, in itself, points to chemical inevitability in origination (given proper conditions . . .). Paleontological discoveries . . . have shattered the previous consensus . . . that life is exceedingly improbable Hints and indications are not proofs, but I don’t know what message to read in this timing but the proposition that life, arising as soon as it could, was chemically destined to be, and not the chancy result of accumulated improbabilities.”

—Stephen Jay Gould, “Enigmas of the Small Shellies,” *Natural History* **10/90**:6 (October 1990).

“I predict that, if a form of life is ever discovered in another part of the universe, however outlandish and weirdly alien that form of life may be in detail, it will be found to resemble life on Earth in one key respect: it will have evolved by some kind of Darwinian natural selection.”

—Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Norton, New York, 1986, p. 288.

“[I]f the decades and the centuries pass with no indication that there is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, the long-term effects on human philosophy will be profound, and may be disastrous. Better to have neighbors we don’t like than to be utterly alone. For that cosmic loneliness could point to a very depressing conclusion: that intelligence marks an evolutionary dead-end.”

—Arthur C. Clarke, *ibid.*, p. 238.

“Either mankind is the most advanced intelligence in the galaxy; or not. Either alternative is mind-boggling.”

—Lee A. DuBridge, quoted in *IEEE Spectrum* **13**:46 (March 1976), and personal communication.

“We believe, first and foremost, what makes us feel that we are fine fellows. . . . Self-importance, individual or generic, is the source of most of our religious beliefs. . . . The importance of Man, which is the one indispensable dogma of the theologians, receives no support from a scientific view . . . ”

—Bertrand Russell, *Unpopular Essays*, Clarion, New York, 1950, pp. 82–85.

“It is more difficult to deal with the self-esteem of man as man, because we cannot argue out the matter with some nonhuman mind. The only way I know of dealing with this general human conceit is to remind ourselves that man is a brief episode in the life of a small planet in a little corner of the universe, and that, for aught we know, other parts of the cosmos may contain beings as superior to ourselves as we are to jelly-fish.”

—Bertrand Russell, *ibid.*, p. 106.

“Science is often accused of having brought terrible dangers upon man by giving him too much power over nature. This accusation would be justified only if scientists were guilty of having neglected man himself as a subject for research. *The danger to modern man arises not so much from his power of mastering natural phenomena as from his powerlessness to control sensibly what is happening today in his own society.* I maintain that this powerlessness is entirely the consequence of the *lack of human insight* into the causation of human behavior. . . . [T]he fact that the functions of our digestive system are well known and that, owing to this knowledge, medicine, particularly intestinal surgery, saves many thousands of human lives annually, is entirely due to the fortunate circumstance that the functions of these organs do not evoke particular awe or reverence. If, on the other hand, we are powerless against the pathological disintegration of our social structure, and if, armed with atomic weapons, we cannot control our aggressive behavior any more sensibly than any [other] animal species, this deplorable situation is largely due to our *arrogant refusal to regard our own behavior as subject to the laws of nature and as accessible to causal analysis.*”

—Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression*, Bantam, New York, 1971, p. 215 (emphasis added).

“I know that God exists [but this proposition] cannot be substantiated by the methods of scientific investigation; therefore there must be something wrong with [these] methods . . . at least [as] applied to the supernatural (or paranormal).”

—James Lett, “The Persistent Popularity of The Paranormal,” *Skeptical Inquirer* **16-4**:381 (Summer 1992).

“The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic, because in arithmetic there is knowledge, but in theology there is only opinion.”

—Bertrand Russell, *ibid.*, p. 104.

“ . . . the universe . . . alien, unconscious . . . its indifference scarcely distinguishable from benevolence.”

—John Updike, *Natural History* **2/00** 102 (February 2000).

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