

A Conversation with Aliens

Bruce L. Gary, 2023.08.27

It was the first clear night in many days and I was looking forward to observing Tabby's Star. Sure, that star was misunderstood by probably everyone who viewed my web page about it, so I really couldn't justify my devotion to observing it. I had to admit that I liked the "clicks" to my web page; it made me feel relevant. I was embarrassed to be burdened with the "imperative for relevance" – but hey, I'm human, with most of the human foibles.

The half hour after sunset was magical for me. I referred to it as the "magic hour." There was beauty, yes, but for me it held the promise of observing with my telescope. That 16-inch reflector in a beautiful dome in my backyard. Most of my observing with it has been for serious projects, like WD1145 – a white dwarf star known for having a system of planetesimals that produce dust clouds that block the star's light when they pass in front of the star. But tonight would be just for fun, observing Tabby's Star to satisfy the appetites of those gullible enough to believe in aliens.

It was 5 minutes after sunset, partway through the "magic hour," when I noticed something strange in the sky. It was a bright star that didn't belong in my southern sky. It must have been a satellite still illuminated by the sun. It was moving up, toward my overhead sky. It was also getting brighter, but faster than it should.

No, it couldn't be a satellite. It must be an airplane! It stopped getting brighter, and became dim, so I had trouble discerning its shape as it approached. And it was getting closer. But why didn't I hear it – assuming it was an airplane. I recall making a quick calculation, that the dimming 5 minutes after sunset meant that it must have been at an altitude of about 1.5 km. I knew this because on evenings when there were scattered cumulus clouds that's the time after sunset when the clouds see a sunset, and they fade in brightness.

By now the plane, or whatever it was, must be only $\frac{1}{2}$ km away. Still no sound. The thought flashed in front of me "Could this be a flying saucer?" something I've secretly wanted to encounter my whole life!

Yes, as it approached my property it had the appearance of those fanciful drawings of a flying saucer! I must have been holding my breath while it began hovering over my yard, next to my dome observatory. It gracefully landed next to my dome.

"Flying saucers" exist – I said to myself! This must mean that extraterrestrial aliens also exist. Or could this simply be a secret military vehicle, possibly robotic, with only machines in control? But if it's a secret military vehicle, why would it land in my backyard? Or even if it's aliens, why would it land in my yard.

Greetings

I was frozen to my chair on the patio, watching this UFO in my backyard, expecting something to happen. I registered that a faint whirring sound stopped. A door opened, slowly. And out stepped a midget! Yes, a midget. But not an ordinary midget, an alien-looking midget. It was actually ugly, and I felt ashamed of myself for having that feeling. Could this be a human, I still wondered?

It stopped in front of the open door and looked at me. I lamely raised my hand as a greeting, and it did the same with one of its short arms. I stood up, and waited to see how the thing would react. It stepped forward, so I stepped forward. This seemed safe, one increment of trust at a time.

I slowly began to walk toward the alien, as I now assumed it was. As I walked, very slowly, the alien stayed still, apparently not alarmed by my approach. This must mean that it had powers to protect itself; powers that I could imagined could be fatal for me.

When I was “talking distance” away, I stopped and waited. I heard what sounded like a “click” from the alien, which was followed by a faint sound from something the alien was holding. “Hello” the device said. I said “Hello” back, and the machine uttered another “click” – which I assumed as a translation of my “hello” to the alien’s language. It occurred to me that this is the way the alien and I could have a conversation.

The alien was “in control” of this situation, so I waited for the alien to initiate a conversation. It said “You are Bruce, right?” His device did a good job of including prosody in its language, for it asked a question with pitch rising at the end of the sentence. I felt proud to have noticed this minor thing. “Yes, I’m Bruce. I’m glad to meet you.” It replied “My name is Won, and I’m glad to meet you.”

“Bruce, we come to have a conversation with you. However, it will be prudent if we fly away together for this conversation because we don’t want neighbors to notice our presence.” I replied, “I understand. Do you want me to enter your craft?” “Yes, and please trust us to return you safely.” “I trust you.” What else could I say? For some reason I actually did trust the alien.

Inside the UFO

The alien made a gesture for me to enter the flying saucer, or UFO as I’ll refer to it. The door was small so I ducked my head as I entered on my hands and knees. There was an airlock, so I waited for the alien to also enter the airlock. I felt relief that we understood this matter without communicating. After the outer door was closed, the airlock’s inner door opened, and I crawled in, on hands and knees again. The alien closed the inner airlock door, and I looked around.

There were other aliens, and they were all looking at me. I counted 6, including Won. Just then I felt an acceleration upward; we were leaving my yard. Won explained “We have to

go somewhere to escape the attention of your military. We have radar evasion, but sometimes there's enough reflection to get us in trouble." The acceleration increased, and when I felt like it was too much, it reduced to an acceptable level. I think they were monitoring my reaction and stayed within a g-limit that I was able to endure.

Won then began an explanation. "We choose people for conversations based on how likely they are to explain humans. We are puzzled by several human traits and behaviors." I lamely offered "Then you didn't choose me because of my backyard observatory?" "No, we chose you because of what you have written on the internet. We have browsed the Earth internet extensively, and we became interested in a book that you made available for free download, with the title *Eusociality and Psychopathy*."

As pleased as I was with the prospect of a conversation about a book that only a half dozen people have read, I was concerned about why we had been accelerating for maybe a minute. We must have traveled a long distance by now, so I asked "Where are we going?" "We're going to our home base in your solar system. It's on the far side of your moon. We'll be there in a few minutes."

Moon Base

Sure enough, they showed me a UFO window where I could see the moon, and indeed it was gradually growing bigger. We passed around to the back side and gracefully landed in a basin that I had recently read about called Compton-Belkovich. A Chinese satellite measured an anomalously high temperatures at his location, and the scientists attempted to explain this anomaly by postulating the presence of radiogenic heating from a granitic magma system. They never considered the possibility that an underground settlement was producing extra heat. Our landing was really a passing through a tunnel that led to what was an alien settlement. Our entry into the settlement was by way of an interlock chamber that accommodated the entire UFO. When the UFO had settled into a final landing position I noticed the moon's low gravity. The atmosphere was only slightly different from Earth's and was much like that in the UFO: extra light but oxygen rich.

The alien crowd was talking, but I couldn't make sense of any of it since the translation device was controlled by Won. The six aliens and I walked to a room with an audience of maybe two dozen. I noticed what must have been a TV camera, so in fact the audience could have been larger. Won asked me to sit down in a chair that was meant for humans. A microphone and speaker was in front of the chair, and a glass of water was nearby. Won also pointed in a direction and said "bathroom." I sat down, and Won asked if I was comfortable.

A few minutes passed, and Won apparently called the meeting to order. The speaker began with someone's welcome and a question "Thank you for coming to help us understand humans. Based on your writing we think you can provide us with new insights for helping us understand the many things that puzzle us. Are you ready for questions?" I answered "Yes, but I also have questions. They are about you. If I answer your questions

will you answer mine?" "That's a fair request, and the answer is 'yes.' The more informative your answers are about humans, the more we will tell you about ourselves." Good; we had an agreement that promised to be mutually engaging.

An Introduction to Humanity

"Our first question is about why human thoughts and behaviors are so puzzling. Can you introduce us to a way for viewing humans that will be helpful?"

"OK. This is a big subject, and I will give you my opinion. I'm sure you've heard from others with completely different opinions, so what I will say is just a suggestion for your consideration."

The human species is still gene-bound. It is my hope that humans will survive long enough, and eventually become wise enough, to achieve control of our genes. This would be something that I assume you achieved long ago. If you have a history of yourselves, then you probably learned about a time in your distant past when you did things that served your genes, and which in retrospect made your ancestors look like fools. That's the predicament almost all humans find themselves in today, and fewer than 1 in a million of us humans understand this.

Probably the best way to understand human thinking and behavior is to make a distinction between our genetic nature and our surrounding culture. Nature and culture are related to each other in a way that can be described as "co-evolving." Human nature changes slowly because it requires genetic change over many generations. Culture can change fast because it only requires that people living together express agreement with a belief or behavior, and social pressures assure that most people will adhere to the agreed-upon culture element (called a "culturgen").

The next thing to understand is the evolutionary history of humans. Many of us believe that we are the descendants of a species of "killer apes." Our lineage split from a species of chimpanzees, perhaps 6 million years ago, so we humans began a fast-paced evolutionary change starting with a chimpanzee nature. Specifically, we lived in groups that numbered between 50 and 200 individuals, and sometimes these groups competed with each other for territory. About 250,000 years ago the climate became variable; tribal success emphasized overcoming an unforgiving climate (i.e., a sparse and changeable flora and fauna). The interval between 250,000 years ago and 10,700 years ago is referred to as the Pleistocene epoch.

During the Pleistocene, tribes that consisted of individuals with a variety of talents could form teams that achieved their goals better, and these tribes survived. Such tribes rewarded individual differences. Also, tribes that encouraged cooperation had better chances of surviving. These tribes can be described as egalitarian; they differed from their chimpanzee ancestors by having a social structure in which no single male dominated the others.

Tribes survived or perished depending on how well the tribe confronted nature and neighboring tribes. The individual could not survive alone, he needed a tribe to survive. This meant that tribesmen were born with a nature that predisposed them to behave in ways that served the tribe. Individual talents were rewarded if the tribe needed that talent. Heroes were never those who were able to live alone without the tribe; heroes were those who were ready to sacrifice themselves to save the tribe. In other words, individuals were devoted to tribal survival, not their individual survival.

This is called “eusociality” by academics. So far on Earth we have identified 17 species that are 100 % eusocialized – like ants, termites and bees. During the past million or so years our species became partially eusocialized. It is fair to say that we are partially enslaved to our genetic creators, the “tribal genome.”

About 10,700 years ago everything changed! We can state that during the previous 240,000 years (the Pleistocene) human nature evolved in a way that was determined by the genes. Yes, cultures, differed somewhat during this epoch, but the timescale for tribes with different cultures to dominate evolution was so slow that the genes were able to keep up with these changes and solidify the way people were born to think and behave. Starting 10,700 years ago and going up to the present, an epoch that we refer to as the Holocene, everyone is born with a “human nature” that is adapted to the Pleistocene. Cultural change during the Holocene has been tumultuous! The genes have not had time to evolve, yet they still influence which culturgenes will be accepted and incorporated into a region’s prevailing culture. Accepted culturgenes will not necessarily be those that are most useful during the Holocene, since human nature has no prevision of the future. Therefore, a lot of Holocene cultures include mal-adaptive culturgenes, and people are clueless about this situation.

There’s one Holocene change that’s most “at fault” for allowing maladaptive culturgenes to exist. It’s the shift from tribes with populations between 100 and 200 during the late Pleistocene to super-tribes, with populations of hundreds of thousands and even millions. In a typical Pleistocene tribe, with a population of 150 (the so-called Dunbar Number), there will be about 50 men. It’s feasible for any of these men to know all other men well enough to know each man’s trustworthiness. It also permits each man to know the individual talents of the others. This has two important implications: 1) teams of men can form that fulfill individual talent needs, and 2) extremely selfish men (psychopaths) will be well-known and they will be kept in their place and will not be accepted into teams that require trust. In fact, these small tribes often banished or even killed the psychopaths among them, if they were present.

Holocene super-tribes could not have either of these benefits: 1) forming a team from strangers is unlikely to have the best qualified man in each position, and 2) psychopaths will be unknown for the imposters they are, since whenever they are discovered they simply relocate within the super-tribe. It is widely believed among those who study this

that the incidence of psychopathy has been increasing on historical timescales to its present rate of 0.8 % for men (among women it's 0.1 %).

At this time we are left with everyone born having a nature that is adapted for serving small tribes in a Pleistocene setting, and who are expected to embrace a culture that evolved during the Holocene without forces that guaranteed benefits to individuals. This, I propose, is a starting point for how to view present-day human beliefs and behaviors.

A voice from one of the aliens said "In other words, human thinking and behavior is today not meant for promoting either group survival or individual welfare because beliefs and behaviors are not adapted to present conditions. Human nature is adapted to serving tribes living in Pleistocene conditions, and current cultures have evolved in ways that don't serve either groups or individuals in the Holocene. Is that right?"

"Yes."

Future of Humanity

"So, what does that portend for humanity's future?"

I presented another long answer:

Human governance is precarious. People instinctively think in terms of the home tribe versus people from a rival neighbor tribe. It's equivalent to a person saying "My tribe is good, all other tribes are bad." There's a saying that captures this Pleistocene way of thinking: "My country, right or wrong." This is such a common finding for anthropologists who study primitive tribes that they've given it a name: "duality of morality." This way of thinking is so widespread among all cultures that it is also referred to by the term "amity/enmity." This registers the fact that people are cooperative with fellow-tribesmen and are prone to being cruel to anyone who resembles belonging to a different tribe. This can be ruinous to governance, because people's political affiliation takes on a tribal belonging. For example, if my political tribe tries to hold to account the criminal doings of a leader of a rival political party tribe, the followers of the criminal led tribe will come to the aide of their criminal leader. This makes governance impossible and such a polarized society is on a doomsday trajectory.

Whereas the previous example illustrates how a society can weaken and collapse from internal strife, there is always a threat to every human society posed by a neighboring society that wants to initiate war. Every Pleistocene tribe has a history of war and peace cycles. Those humans alive today are descendants of tribes that were successful in initiating war and defending themselves when attacked. A successful tribe has two societal organizations for dealing these two situations. During war a tribe must be hierarchical, whereas during peace a tribe should be egalitarian. A hierarchy is well suited for decisive command and control needed for war. An egalitarian society allows individuals to explore what they're good at, and this is needed for wartime team formation. Every tribe has a fraction of the population whose job is to force everyone else to mobilize for war by

renouncing individualism in favor of collectivism. Hierarchy requires that everyone submit to the collectivist calling. Now, what is under consideration by some historians is that a tribe, or society, should never be at peace for very long. The longer peace prevails the more individualism grows and the weaker will be the response to a calling for mobilization that's needed to form a collective hierarchy for warfare. This may be the explanation for the presence of warfare throughout recorded human history. In other words, warfare may be a genetic inheritance from the Pleistocene, and no Holocene forces seem able to control this need.

Finally, being mindful that I should keep my examples of human foolishness to a few examples, I will treat the matter of psychopaths hijacking societal governance. The most famous examples of this are the stealing of governance during the 20th Century by the psychopaths Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin. During the 21st Century we have Putin, Duterte, Erdogan and others. An attempt has been underway in America by Trump. In every case the hijacking converted a democracy (more or less) to a dictatorship. Some of these cases led to a kleptocracy, resembling a gangster takeover of a neighborhood (with Putin as the most stark example). The question has to be asked: How dumb are people for voting for such a hijacking? Germany was probably the most educated and cultured country before they voted for Hitler in 1933. Approximately half of voting Americans are cult followers of Trump. These threats to sanity are based on a Pleistocene mentality! The psychopath is an opportunist; he has an uncanny ability for perceiving weaknesses in potential victims. If he senses that there is widespread discontent with present conditions, such as frustrations created by wealth inequalities, he will pretend to be the frustrated common man's savior. If Trump is elected America's president by these naïve Roobs, within a matter of a few years America will collapse. And America is not the only country facing such a hijacking. Most democracies are showing signs of weakness and are vulnerable to being hijacked by psychopaths. Why isn't this being discussed publicly? Because it is impolite to call someone a psychopath unless they're a mass murderer – which is just one flavor of psychopathy. And why does this politeness exist? It came into existence during the Holocene when tribes were coalescing into super-tribes and tribal differences for the newcomers had to be overlooked.

You asked me to predict what the Pleistocene mal-adaptations portend for the future of humanity. After most democracies are crushed, and these societies are ruled by psychopaths, governance will be even further helpless in addressing the challenge of global warming and climate change. Mass migrations will occur, and migrants won't be welcomed by anyone except the overly-nice Nordic countries. Mass starvation is inevitable. The global human population may reach 12 billion, but afterward it will fall fast. A global collapse of civilized humanity will probably start this century, and could bring humanity's population down to Pleistocene levels during the next century. Humanity could enter a second Pleistocene within 100 years.

That's my prediction, but it's just one person's prediction. I hope I'm wrong. But I acknowledge that there are 9 million Earthly species that hope I'm right.

If I may, I would like to ask what you aliens are hoping for?

I was surprised that I asked this question. After all, my life was in their hands and I didn't want to insult them in a way that could jeopardize my return home.

There was a long silence. My worries grew. Finally a voice spoke.

"We don't take a position on something that is inevitable. We only wish to know what is most likely to happen, and we appreciate your candor. You asked for us to tell something about ourselves. So here's what we have decided to tell you."

We originated on the surface of Venus a billion years ago. When careless use of petroleum caused a runaway greenhouse warming and the oceans began to evaporate, we adapted to living in the atmosphere. We have floating communities on Venus at an altitude of 55 km. This is where air pressure and temperature are good for life. In fact, at that altitude the air pressure and temperature are like on Earth, at sea level. Our floating civilization obtains resources from the Venus surface using special robots. This is a very costly way to exist. We are having discussions about how to survive. That's all I can tell you about ourselves."

"Now, we are ready to transport you back to your home in Arizona. Are you ready to return?"

"I have just one more question. Why are you willing to return me to Earth? Am I not a liability to your future plans?"

"No. No one would believe you. This trip, and having a conversation with aliens, is so preposterous that if you hazard to tell anyone you will be branded crazy."

"OK, I understand. I think you're right. So I'm free to tell anyone who will listen about this trip, and it simply won't matter because my story will be considered an illusionary dream. I'm ready to return."

The aliens returned me at about midnight. The next day I wrote what happened as accurately as my memory allowed. That's what you just read. But the aliens were right: no one believes this happened; everyone thinks this is just a whimsical story I made up!