

UFO Stylized Social Facts

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Even though many or even most UFO sightings are best explained as delusions, hoaxes, and ordinary stuff misunderstood, there appears to be a large remnant (>1000) that are much harder to explain, and which show consistent patterns. Such as ~30-1000 second episodes peaking near ~9pm (tied to local sidereal time), at random spatial locations, of quiet lights or objects in the sky with intelligent purposes and amazing speeds and accelerations. Sometimes confirmed by many people and recorded by many instruments.

If they aren't delusions, hoaxes, or misunderstandings, the main remaining explanations are a) some sort of secret society or agency that arose on and is tied to Earth, or b) some sort of aliens. I'm not saying its aliens, but in this post, it's aliens. That is, here I want to "go there", and think about how best to explain UFOs, if they are in fact aliens.

Many have worked on trying to explain UFOs in terms of their immediate physical effects. I kinda like "laser pointers for cats" style theories wherein aliens in orbit send beams to paint a local disturbance, while using telescopes to watch local reactions. But these details aren't that important for whether we believe that UFOs are aliens, as aliens would almost surely be a lot more advanced than us, and so plausibly capable of a wide range of such approaches.

No, it seems obvious to me that the main reason that most resist believing that UFOs are aliens (or secret societies for that matter) is the apparent implausibility of the social thesis. We find it hard to integrate this hypothesis with the rest of our social world views. That is, with our views on what agents can exist, how they are socially organized, and the sorts of behaviors that we expect of social agents within particular kinds of organizations. If aliens are around, why haven't they made more direct contact, or built more obvious stuff, or traded with us, or conquered or killed us?

If the main block to believing in UFOs as aliens is a lack of a plausible enough social theory of aliens, then it seems a shame that almost no one who studies UFOs is a social science theorist. As I'm such a person, why don't I step in and try to help? If

we can find a more plausible social theory, we could become more willing to believe that UFOs are aliens. And if we can't, we can at least confirm more expertly that the usual reluctance is justified; the social theories you'd have to invoke are so crazy unlikely that yeah, we gotta attribute UFOs to delusions, hoaxes, and misunderstandings, no matter what our eyes and instruments seem to say.

In social science, we often prepare for theorizing about a topic by first summarizing its "stylized facts". These are key data patterns in need of explanation, phrased in language that is closer to theory. In this post, I will attempt this "stylized fact" exercise for UFOs-as-aliens. In my next post I'll take my shot at explaining them. Here are three key stylized facts:

1. LIMITATION - The very idea that UFOs are aliens, rather than a secret society on Earth, implies either a completely independent origin from us, or that any common ancestor was long ago. (~100Myr+.) So unless aliens civilizations are very short-lived, then any modest randomness in the timing along either evolutionary path implies that one of us reached our current level of civilization millions of years before the other. And since we just got here, it must be they who reached our level millions of years ago.

(Note that having a civilization last for many millions of years is itself quite an achievement. Which raises obvious questions: what sort of genetic, cultural, organizational, etc. changes were required to achieve that, and at what cost came such longevity?)

If UFOs on Earth are aliens from elsewhere, then there are in fact aliens out there, who can and do travel between the stars. Because here they are, aliens who have actually traveled between the stars. So right off the bat we must reject theories that say that such travel is impossible or crazy impractical. Or that some motivational convergence ensures that advanced life almost never does actually travel.

Now put these two facts together: they've been around for millions of years, and they can and do travel between the stars. With millions of years and this same tech they used to get here, they could have gone everywhere. The big dramatic implication: they could have remade the universe, or at least a big chunk including our galaxy, but have not done so. Somehow they have self-limited their expansion.

(Note that in addition to limiting their expansion, aliens behind UFOS also seem to have limited their tech; UFO tech seems advanced, but not 100Myr+ level advanced.)

Now one possibility that I want to note, and set aside, is that the universe is in fact chock full of aliens who have in fact remade it, but that we are fooled to see otherwise by crazy advanced tech wielded by a vast tightly-coordinated alien conspiracy based on arbitrary inscrutable motives. Like theories of powerful intrusive gods and simulation managers with arbitrary inscrutable motives, it is not that such theories are impossible, but that they offer little room for structured analysis. I see little to gain from discussing them.

Stylized fact #1: UFO aliens are very old, and could have remade universe, but some self-limit stops them.

2. CORRELATION - This failure to remake the universe gets more puzzling the more common are aliens in space and time. If UFOs-as-aliens are as thick on all planets at all times as they are here and now, then there must be a crazy huge number of well-hidden alien facilities out there where UFO equipment is made, repaired, refueled, staffed, etc. All strongly limited to ensure that it never remakes its local universe.

Worse, there have been literally an astronomical number of opportunities for any one deviant alien to start to remake its local universe. If a deviation could last long enough, to acquire enough local resources and power, other aliens would have a hard time shutting it down without also acquiring similar levels of local resources, and thus also remaking their local universe. Even if some sort of local conformity pressure tends to stop most deviations, that pressure has to be crazy extreme reliable to work everywhere always in a vast densely populated universe.

The simplest way to resolve this puzzle is to posit that aliens are in fact pretty rare, and that they coordinate to preserve that rarity. After all, the fewer are the possible alien travel events, the higher of a deviant event chance that we can tolerate in our theory of their behavior.

(If aliens are very short-lived, then there have to be even huger numbers of them for one to be here now, requiring an even more crazily-low chance of any of them allowing any deviations.)

Besides perhaps interstellar travel being impractical, advanced life arising very extremely rarely is the simple story most of us most start out with to explain our empty universe. And even if one must postulate that aliens are only extremely rare, not very extremely rare, to explain humanity's early arrival in the universe, that still means aliens are so rare that we won't meet them for roughly a billion years.

But for aliens that rare we have a different problem: why are they right here right now, but almost nowhere else? Something has caused a huge correlation between them and us, so that even though aliens are rare enough for their facilities to stay hidden, and even though they have created local pressures to ensure that they only rarely travel or have opportunities to try to remake the universe, they've made an exception for traveling to be with us here now.

The rarer are such aliens, the more time they'd need to get here from where they started. So either they've been around for a very long time, and decided to come here based on what Earth looked like a very long time ago, or they happened to start very close to us, a remarkable spatial coincidence in need of explanation.

Stylized fact #2: UFO aliens are rare and self-limited, and yet are here now.

3. INDIRECTION – We can think of a number of plausible practical motives for rare self-limited aliens to make an exception to visit us. First, they may fear us as rivals, and so want to track us and stand ready to defend against us. Second, if their limitation policies are explicit and intentional, then they'd anticipate our possibly violating them, and so want to stand ready nearby to enforce their limitation policies on us.

In either of these two cases, aliens might want to show us their power, and even make explicit threats, to deter us from causing problems. And note the big the

question of why they don't just destroy us, instead of waiting around. A third possible motive that can explain this is that the origins of independent aliens like us are a rare valuable datapoint to them on far-more-capable aliens who they may fear eventually meeting. In this case they'd probably want to stay hidden longer, and then maybe destroy us later.

Note that all of these motive theories suggest a substantial ability of these aliens to organize and plan actions on the basis of such abstract, collective, and long-term considerations. A very decentralized alien society might not be capable of it, nor perhaps of maintaining whatever pressures prevent their own travel and remaking the universe.

The most striking fact about UFO encounter events is how little they seem to accomplish, not for any of these goals, nor for any other easily identifiable practical goals. Advanced aliens could surely monitor us sufficiently from a distance unseen, and to control us via commands or threats would require much more direct contact. These UFO events don't help them collect useful info or resources, nor do they much limit or expand our info, powers, or resources. Yes they show some of us that the universe can look weird, but surely they know that we know that fact regardless.

Now we humans are widely known to often act on indirect motives, not tied very closely to simple direct practical outcomes. Many animals "play." Human ancestors who did things for "symbolic" reasons are often seen as especially "advanced". People today often have "obsessions" that make them spend far more on some things than practical ends can explain. Lazy secure organizations are at times quite "wasteful", doing things that pretend to achieve practical ends, but in fact achieve them at best quite ineffectively. And I've recently coauthored a book on how common are hidden motives in humans today; many things we do just don't much accomplish the goals to which we give lip service, like learning at schools, and healing at hospitals.

So it isn't crazy to think that aliens might have indirect obsessive lazy motives for UFO encounters, motives hidden perhaps even from themselves. But this case, of overcoming the usual coordinated limits to fly to a distant star just to glow-buzz their treetops, seems spectacularly extravagant even by the standards of dreamtime humans today.

To do this, aliens need a sufficient level of “slack” resources available to spend on such symbolic activities. And even with hidden motives and lazy organizations, we humans usually at least make up vague stories about practical ends served by our actions, even when such stories don’t stand up to close scrutiny. So a decent theory of aliens should explain their level of slack, and suggest some ideas for what stories aliens are telling themselves about the ends they accomplish via UFO encounters. And why they haven’t just destroyed us.

Stylized fact #3: Alien-driven UFO encounters accomplish little, yet must somehow be justified to them.

And those are the key stylized facts that a social theory of aliens must explain. Again, it is the lack of seeing a sufficiently plausible explanation of such facts that is why most are reluctant to believe in UFOs-as-aliens. (Yes, many are not so reluctant, but mostly because they don’t understand enough to be puzzled.)

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