

ESA

# Are We Alone?

The Stanley Kubrick  
Extraterrestrial-  
Intelligence  
Interviews

*Twenty-one leading scientists speculate  
on life in the universe and the impact  
its discovery would have upon us*

Edited with an Introduction, Notes, etc.  
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# Norman Lamm

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CARAS: Rabbi, is there anything in the philosophy of the Jews that militates against there being extraterrestrial life?

LAMM: In Jewish thinking throughout the ages there has been a general tendency to regard man as the sole concern of God in this world. Accompanying this there has developed an idea that man is the purpose of the entire universe. This has been a rather general tendency, although it never has been enshrined into dogma. However, one of the very greatest of all Jewish thinkers of all days, perhaps the greatest Jewish philosopher of all times, Maimonides – about eight hundred years ago – strongly opposed this view and he maintained that man may be the superior creature on Earth but it would be foolish to consider that he is, therefore, the purpose of the universe or, in fact, that he is necessarily the most advanced creature in the world. And according to his whole approach, Judaism today can welcome with remarkable openness the idea that intelligent races exist elsewhere, species even more intelligent than man.

CARAS: If there are intelligent races and they have had millions of years longer than we have to develop, what would happen if they are not men? What would happen to the theological position, or must they be known as man?

LAMM: I think the problem as to what form these extraterrestrial intelligent sentient races take is really irrelevant. They may look like elephants, they may look like seals, or look like the little men from Mars that science fiction has always portrayed in the comics. The point is that it is not morphology or form that counts. What does count is their intellectual and spiritual development. If they are more intelligent than man, then I suppose they will be less hostile than man and that therefore we can enter into some dialogue with them - assuming, of course, that we ever can contact them.

CARAS: Do you think we will contact them?

LAMM: I am not a scientist and I think even the scientists don't have any definite answer. They can have an educated guess and measure

probabilities, but no one will know for certain until we hear that first voice.

CARAS: Do you, as an individual, believe that there is extraterrestrial life?

LAMM: As an individual I think there probably is intelligent extraterrestrial life, but that is not something that would displace my central concerns. My concerns are and should primarily be the perennial issues of human existence. I think there is a great deal of truth in the humorous question, 'Do you think there is intelligent life on Earth?' We have our very serious problems – here on this planet – the kind of problems that may cause us to disintegrate before we ever get a chance to find out if there is life elsewhere. So, while I certainly would not discourage or in any way denigrate the search for life elsewhere I think that it's a fascinating intellectual problem and that human curiosity certainly must be satisfied, but that the overriding problem is how to live in this world and live decently and well.

CARAS: Scientists have pointed out a number of times that if there is intelligent life in the universe and I think most people today tend to believe there is, outside the Earth, that it would be intelligent life in many cases millions of years older than ourselves because, simply, we're a fairly young planet around a not terribly old star. They speak of what we could learn from such creatures. Technologically our own civilisation is ten thousand years old and yet they may have a civilisation that's four million, ten thousand years old. What might we learn from such a race? Speculating from the point of view of theology and philosophy, surely there are mysteries in our theology? Mysteries in our philosophies? What if we had four million years of experience more with it? What might they teach us about God?

LAMM: I believe that if we should ever come into contact with an extraterrestrial highly intelligent race much older than our civilisation that the primary lessons we would learn from them would not be technological. If it's merely advanced technology then it's nothing but another human race, even though it may be shaped differently, but not qualitatively different. If there is a civilisation which has lasted that long, then by the very fact of its survival it has indicated that it has learned certain secrets of social justice and harmony and the ability for individuals to get along without killing themselves off on a large scale. I believe that will be the main thing we can learn from them. I don't think that theological insights are cumulative, that mere age or number of years of experience gives one more or greater theological insight. It may give him more technological knowledge, because technology is cumulative, but theological insights come more in jumps and leaps



and depend upon individuals without necessarily being additive. Perhaps they may have more knowledge than we have theologically. I am committed very deeply and very personally as a believing Jew to the idea of revelation. This does not preclude a revelation to intelligent beings elsewhere because the Jewish belief is the Biblical teaching that man was created in the image of God. This means that man shares something with the Creator. This sharing may be interpreted as intelligence, as ethical inclination, as creative ability, and there is nothing in our tradition that insists that man is exclusively the being who shares these faculties with his Creator.

CARAS: Some scholars somewhere pointed out the strange correlation that since time immemorial the concept of Heaven has always placed this heavenly abode up, not down. Not in the core of a tree, not inside of a rock, but up. He has attempted to correlate this with the belief that Earth may have been visited in the past by extraterrestrials, a very long time ago who drew to themselves and to their position of ascent physical...

#### SCENE TWO / TAKE ONE

CARAS: We were talking about Heaven being up.

LAMM: Yes.

CARAS: Is there any correlation that can be implied between this and the thought of extraterrestrial life?

LAMM: The fact that most religions have located God as residing, as it were, in Heaven – I don't think has any real relevance to the possibility that at one time extraterrestrial creatures visited the Earth by parachuting out of Heaven. I know that in the Bible the term *shamayim* or Heaven as used for the dwelling place of God is meant purely metaphorically. The Bible begins with the verse that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. If God 'lives' in the heavens, where was He before He created them? For instance, the Bible says that the Lord spoke to you out of the Heavens and yet, at another place, it says that the Lord came down on Mount Sinai. Obviously, He couldn't speak from the Heavens if He came down. Of course, all this is meant as metaphor. When the Bible speaks of God residing in Heaven and when men generally speak of God being in Heaven, it is meant as metaphor, because when one looks upward one is overwhelmed by the vastness of space. Even Immanuel Kant maintains that when he beholds the heavens he is overwhelmed by the natural order of the universe, even as when he beholds man, he is over-



whelmed by the moral order of the universe. There is no direct correlation between, as it were, the upness of the sky and extraterrestrial life. I will say, however, this: that in the Bible itself in the sixth chapter of Genesis there is a rather mysterious reference to the 'sons of God' who marry the 'daughters of Men,' and then a reference to something called Nephilim which means, as it has been translated, 'The Giants,' and whereas a good part of Jewish exegesis defines that as simply a race of strong men. There are certain Jewish sources, particularly Philo in ancient Egypt and Josephus, the Jewish general and historian in the Roman era, who saw in this a reference to a mysterious kind of race, which, I suppose, in contemporary terms would be described as an extraterrestrial race.<sup>1</sup> So that there are some kind of mysterious references to that sort of phenomenon, but of course it never has become any kind of official point of view.

CARAS: Mankind seems on the verge of developing a super-intelligent machine. This great-grandson of the computer will be with us in a few years. It's going to perform many of the functions, the mental functions, that men now perform. What problems lie in theology and what do you personally feel the future of this sort of thing is? When does a machine cease to be a machine? What if it feels pain? What if it is conscious?

LAMM: The problem of whether or not machines will become so great and so effective as computers that they will begin to replace man has no direct relation to theology, although it does have an indirect bearing. By that I mean that a computer, no matter how efficient, is fundamentally an extension of the human brain and this no more makes the human brain useless than the fact that the scissors are an extension of his fingers makes his fingers unimportant. It simply is a way that the human brain has managed to create machines to improve its own activity. It is inconceivable to my mind that a machine can be created which will be itself sentient, self-aware, and self-conscious. Of

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6: 4; 'There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them, the same became mighty men who were of old, men of renown.' (King James Version.)

The word *giants* here is the translation of the Hebrew *Nephilim* (from the Hebrew *napal*, meaning to fall, hence the fallen ones). The sons of God have been interpreted as angels, possibly fallen, but how could angels marry when they were reputedly sexless? Much has been made of this passage by the followers of von Däniken.

course, those who believe it have a problem. I do not think it is within the realm of real discussion, certainly not for the foreseeable future. However, should such sentient created machines also develop a moral sense, I would incline to treat them as a form of humanity.

CARAS: What about the machines themselves though? Not speaking now of man being obsolete. I know you passed this over and we can skip it if you want, but they're now talking, well, Freeman Dyson for instance is, that machines will not be electronic, they will be biological machines that will have this superior capacity.

LAMM: I'll pass on it, even though, as I implied, the development of a moral sense is critical.

CARAS: OK, it's a problem.

LAMM: A naughty one, too.

CARAS: In the future many scientists, perhaps even most scientists, believe they will synthesise life in the laboratory. What happens here?

LAMM: The question of whether life will be synthesised is a real one, but not an overwhelming one. I believe that from everything I read that life will be synthesised in the near future in the laboratory. The problem, of course, is that Genesis teaches that God is the author of life. He is the Creator of man and of all living things. However, if we understand our religious beliefs correctly we will, I believe, discover that there is no real problem. Man was created in the image of and he was commanded to imitate God. The imitation of God is understood as being primarily ethical, moral. Man must be ethical because God, too, is ethical. In the same manner we ought to imitate God in being creative. Judaism maintains that man is the co-Creator of the universe, that God created the world unfinished, as it were, and gave it over to man with his intelligence, his instincts, and his technological inclinations, to complete the world and to improve it. To make it liveable and habitable. Therefore, if man can, as it were, imitate God technologically with lifeless stuff, there is no reason why he cannot be given the same grant of sovereignty to create life itself. This too is the imitation of God, provided, of course, that man remembers that it is his task to imitate but not to impersonate God. The problem arises when man becomes an impostor and plays God rather than imitating Him. Then he imagines that the world is his and he can destroy it even as he can build it. So, when man will eventually learn to create life, that will be a marvellous development provided man uses this knowledge beneficially. But the problem arises when man succumbs to his tendency to misuse his powers. When man begins to have power over life and death by creating life then the problems we face now in morals and in ethics, especially in the field of medicine, will become increased



a hundredfold. The problems will then arise as to who is to say that the doctor, or the scientist, or anyone who has a PhD and is in control of certain processes, has a right to determine the future of anyone's, or anything's, life?

CARAS: Man is monkeying around with his environment. He is monkeying around with himself as well. He is changing himself. The Bible teaches, I believe, that God created man in His own image. Is there a theological problem here by which we will alter our own genetics? We will alter our own biology? We will purposefully create mutations in the years ahead?

LAMM: I cannot see any real problem in so far as the conflicts between man's creation in the image of God and genetic engineering, provided that genetic engineering is done under proper moral and ethical control. When we say that man was created in the image of God, we do not by any means intend any physical similarity between man and God. We do not maintain that God is some kind of invisible superman. We do assert that the image of God refers to His creative, intellectual, and ethical powers and, even more so, His freedom: freedom of will, freedom to do right or wrong, to do evil or good. Therefore, if man will exercise this freedom in determining the future course of his development in genetic engineering with moral orientation then that will be proper. In using his talents for creative and constructive ends, he will be fulfilling the image of God in the metaphysical sense and in the ethical sense.

### SCENE THREE \ TAKE ONE

LAMM: If we learn that from our contact with some kind of extraterrestrial intelligent race, far from us in the cosmos, that they have a concept of God different from ours, it is not going to count for much theologically. The reason for it is this: by the very definition of our understanding of God – as being far above nature, far beyond the universe and its Creator – he is essentially, in essence, unknowable. Well, if He is unknowable, that means that any other creative intelligence cannot fully fathom His essence. It matters little therefore whether this created intelligence is man on Earth, or other races elsewhere in the Cosmos. Their understanding of God may or may not be as advanced or more advanced than ours, just as there are people and communities on this planet of ours who have differing conceptions of God. Some may be more primitive, some more sophisticated, and we still do not know who is 'right' and who is 'wrong.' Therefore any com-

munication we have with other intelligences elsewhere may be illuminating, may be enlightening. It certainly will be something to consider. But I do not think that any created being has a monopoly on the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is not something which is gained through technological advancements or even through intellect alone, but through spiritual insight. Unless they are well beyond us spiritually, which takes us to a different realm of discussion, I do not think we have any real grounds for either fear or undue optimism.

CARAS: The Bible, the stories and the legends, are full of references to men speaking to God, not just in their prayers, but speaking to God and God appearing to them. Not many people today claim to speak with God. They speak to God in their prayers but not with Him. Is it possible that in some other place, that some other intelligence's God is in more direct contact as, indeed, He is said to have been in the Bible with us?

LAMM: It is quite possible, that whereas on Earth the period of prophecy has ended and direct revelations of God to man have not occurred for many, many centuries, nevertheless on some other planet God not only has revealed Himself more directly but is currently in a state of direct dialogue with sentient and intelligent creatures. There is no reason, according to the Jewish perspective, why this should not be so.

CARAS: You talked before of – no matter what the morphology was – of an extraterrestrial intelligence. If it was a created being it was man, in the definition of man as he appears in Jewish theology.

LAMM: The importance of man will, or course, have to be re-investigated and I think reformulated, if we indeed discover that there are intelligent races elsewhere. When the religious traditions of our times speak of the uniqueness of man, it does not mean necessarily that man is the only kind of intelligent race in the universe. Speaking from the point of view of Judaism, if we should discover races of sentient and intelligent intellectual beings elsewhere, this will not destroy the concept of man's uniqueness but will expand it and we shall begin to see that man on Earth is a member of a very large cosmic community of bio-spiritual beings. So that these beings, no matter what they look like, whether they look like man or like little green animals or like snakes or elephants, nonetheless, if they are intelligent, if they are possessed of a spiritual dimension then they and we and all others throughout the universe who share this likeness to the Creator of the universe, and are part of a unique community, the cosmic fraternity of God-imitating creatures. If you believe in God as our great monotheistic religious traditions teach us, then He is a very big God – big enough to be concerned with all kinds of intelligent race, no matter



where they exist throughout the universe. The fact that Earth may be only one small planet evolving around one small star, in a fairly insignificant galaxy does not reduce man's importance. Even if we are not in the centre of the world, I do not think that God is a social snob who will not be seen in the cosmic slums and alleyways. He is a 'great' God and a good one and even we on this little Earth are entitled to and receive His attention.

CARAS: The search for extraterrestrial life could consume generations, even hundreds of generations. Receiving a radio signal that may have been sent even a million years ago and sending it back out and receiving an answer, this is a long-term thing. This is not a short-term thing. How important is it to pursue this? If one of these radio observation programmes should receive a signal that is obviously artificially produced from an extraterrestrial source, how important is it to pursue it?

LAMM: It will be very important to pursue any kind of possible contacts with extraterrestrial life. Our natural curiosity as intelligent beings ought never to be stifled and this ought to be expressed by a continuing search for extraterrestrial life, no matter how long it is going to take and no matter how many generations will have to wait for an answer. However, there is always a problem of economy and I don't only mean economy of money.

CARAS: How important is it to continue the search or to maintain the search or to pursue the matter once there are clues?

LAMM: The pursuit of any kind of information indicating some extraterrestrial race attempting to contact us is an important one, even if only to satisfy human curiosity, which is such an important factor in civilisation and progress, and even to satisfy us as children of God who want to know more about His vast creation and His manifold works. However, as I said, it is ultimately a question of economy, not only of money but of time and attention and, above all, talent and competence. It is not a matter of black or white, of either we do pursue it or not at all. The question is – at the expense of what else? My own feeling is that our problems on this Earth are so immense, so terribly important, that it would be wrong-headed to ignore them because of preoccupation with the efforts to contact outer life. This project will be so consuming of money and time and talent, that we shall be forced to neglect the minor league questions of mundane terrestrial life. We may then find that we are so involved in an attempt to contact some extraterrestrial race that by the time we are going to get an answer, there will be no human beings left on this planet to contact. Thus our first principle should be survival on our own planet. As an individual, I certainly am immensely interested to find out if there is life else-

where and, certainly if there is, what kind of life it is, but not at any price.

CARAS: There has been an awful lot of hysteria over flying saucers, of course. There have been some hysterics who have been known as contactees – the ship came down from Venus. Invariably, almost conceivably, these Venusians, these Martians, these Saturnians, Plutonians, whatever they are, have long white beards, have white robes, aquiline noses. They are Moses-like, they are Christ-like and they are Abraham-like. What does this tell us?

LAMM: I think that the so-called visions of the contactees are illusory phenomena. I don't put any stock in them. I am not as fascinated by the fact that they invariably, as you tell me, appear to be Moses-like figures with long white beards, white robes and aquiline noses, because on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, both my grandfathers of blessed memory, when they wore their kittels, or white robe, looked just like that. I was very fond of them and I doubt if they were Venusian. I think they were more Galician – you know, part of Poland and part of the Ukraine.

CARAS: Anything you have missed you want to say on these subjects? Anything you want to pick up on? I think that we have covered our questions fairly well.

LAMM: Judaism is the kind of religion which affirms this world, the entire universe. We are other-worldly only to the extent that we believe that there is a kind of non-physical existence in the presence of God, but we do not therefore deny this world. That is why the Jewish tradition has always had such an affirmative and positive attitude towards science and technology when they are used creatively and constructively. It is in keeping with this tradition that I, as a Jew, am immensely concerned about the possibilities of life elsewhere. If this is discovered, this will in all likelihood make man feel more humble, but it will not humiliate him. On the contrary, those of us who have a religious commitment will feel that our horizons, religiously, have been expanded by discovering that God is greater than even our most profound theologians and thinkers have ever imagined Him to be. 'For the Lord is great above all His works' is a verse from our Bible that holds true now and that I suspect we will learn is even more true as our knowledge of the cosmos advances and progresses.