

## Universalist Ethics in Extraterrestrial Encounter

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### **Background: Extraterrestrial Encounter**

While humanity has not yet encountered an extraterrestrial civilization, this possibility cannot be ruled out. Some evidence suggests that an encounter may be likely. If an encounter occurs, it would be of profound significance for humanity. There thus has been much debate on the outcome of an encounter. Opinions are sharply divided on whether extraterrestrials would be safe or dangerous to humans. However, this debate overlooks a crucial factor: the civilizations' ethics. *This paper demonstrates that if either civilization supports universalist ethics, then the outcome would be greatly affected.*

### **Universalist Ethics**

In *universalist ethics*, everyone is valued equally, whether male or female, young or old, or human or extraterrestrial. There are different types of universalist ethics, depending on the specifics of what is valued equally. In an extraterrestrial encounter, key factors include whether the civilizations use the same resources to produce whatever is valued, whether both civilizations value the same phenomena, whether they are equally efficient at producing these phenomena, and whether one civilization is capable of destroying the other. Different combinations of these factors lead to different encounter outcomes. Possible outcomes include the traditional fight-to-win, mutual neglect, symbiosis/cooperation, one civilization sacrificing itself, and both civilizations racing to become the first to commit suicide. The great diversity of outcomes demonstrates the importance of considering universalist ethics in analyzing possible encounters.

### **Implications for Human Civilization Strategy**

If humanity encounters an extraterrestrial civilization, then it must select a response strategy. Important information includes whether the extraterrestrials could destroy humanity in a conflict and what ethics the extraterrestrials support. If the extraterrestrials support some universalist ethics, then analysis such as that presented in this paper is warranted. This in turn suggests the strategic importance of detecting the extraterrestrials' ethics. Caution is warranted to avoid misinterpreting any misinformation presented by the extraterrestrials.

### **Implications for Contemporary Ethics**

Even if an extraterrestrial encounter does not occur, the mere possibility of one raises important ethical issues. First, the *anthropocentric* view that humans are morally superior to other species for certain reasons is challenged by the possibility that extraterrestrials might be superior to humans for the same reasons. For example, if we condone us eating other species because of our superiority, would we condone superior extraterrestrials eating us? Second is the famous *utility monster* thought experiment in which certain universalist ethics recommend that we feed ourselves to the monster to produce more value. The possibility of extraterrestrial encounter shows that this thought experiment is not merely hypothetical. These ethical issues demand careful consideration both because they affect our strategy should we encounter extraterrestrials and because how we resolve the issues affects our character as moral beings.