

# The Biggest Questions in Life – Part 1: Is There Intelligent Life in the Universe?

According to Plato, the philosopher Socrates wrote: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” With that in mind, here is a list of what I feel are the biggest questions in our lives.

Is there intelligent life elsewhere in the universe? Alright, let’s put aside the obvious joke: that we need to find intelligent life right here on Earth first. We know that there are billions of galaxies in the universe, each containing billions of stars. Many, if not most, of those stars should have planets revolving around them. Given enough time, the right distance from the star, and the right conditions, there could be millions of advanced civilizations in our universe. For many scientists, the question is not whether such aliens exist, but rather, how we will contact them.

The vast distance between stars is virtually an insurmountable impediment to interstellar travel. Currently, no known technology will allow journeys between solar systems. Perhaps alien races may devise such technology and visit us one day. However, if that happens, we face the dilemma of meeting beings with vastly superior technological capability, and no means of defending ourselves against them. Will they come as friends and assist us? Or will they come to conquer? If they are anything like us, then considering mankind’s history, the day we learn the answer to the original question will be the beginning of our end.

Yet, there is a greater irony. Most of the universe does not consist of anything that we would define as normal. The galaxies, the stars, and the planets that we can see comprise only about five percent of the universe. The rest is made up of dark energy and dark matter, mysterious substances about which scientists know virtually nothing. In a sense, what we believe to be normal in the universe is actually a small minority. Considering that the rest of the universe is so dissimilar, any life created in dark energy or dark matter would almost certainly be beyond comprehension. If there is intelligent life in the universe, we probably would be unable to recognize it. Even worse, this means that planets inhabited by races of man-hungry, gorgeous, humanoid women – like we witness on TV and the movies – exist only in Hollywood’s male fantasies. But I guess we already knew that.

One of the most enigmatic questions ever asked is: Who am I? Who we are is never simple to explain or understand. Am I my occupation – a

nurse, a laborer, an educator, or a farmer? Am I my physical body – short, tall, strong, female, frail, beautiful, or ugly? Am I the conglomeration of my trials, sufferings, and triumphs? Am I the sum of my dreams and aspirations? Am I merely my relational status with family and friends? Am I what I think I am, or what people think I am? Do my thoughts make me who I am? Or, perhaps it is my emotions. Or is it my actions?

Many feel that there is no correct answer to this age-old question. Perhaps who we are is never tangible, unambiguous, or definable. Perhaps it evolves as we adapt and persevere through our ever-changing lives. Perhaps we are not one singular thing, but a complex state of potential, accomplishments, thoughts, and actions.

With this question, I believe that we can over-analyze our lives, and in a sense live a somewhat questioning paralyzed existence. As the renowned philosopher Popeye says, “I am what I am.” Consequently, instead of asking yourself, “Who am I?” you would be better off asking, “Who do I want to be?” Then do everything in your power to be that person. Oh, and eat your spinach.

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