



THINK
THEISM

Welcome!

Ratio Christi, meaning “reason for Christ” in Latin, serves to defend the Christian faith in honest dialogue with both our skeptical & believing friends.

Weekly Meetings: Thursday @ 8:30 pm

RC-TAMU.org



RATIO CHRISTI

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Ratio Christi
Texas A&M



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Thomistic Institute

The Thomistic Institute exists to promote Catholic truth in our contemporary world by strengthening the intellectual formation of Christians at Texas A&M University, in the Church, and in the wider public square. The thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Universal Doctor of the Church, is our touchstone.

Reading Group Details in the Slack

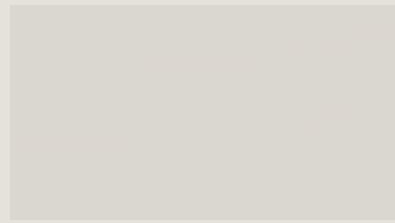
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**THINK
THEISM**

The image features the text "THINK THEISM" in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font. The text is centered and appears to be glowing. Behind the text is a horizontal band of alternating orange and red stripes. The background is a dark purple space filled with small white stars. On either side of the central text, there are stylized mountain ranges rendered in a cyan wireframe style. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and digital.

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RATIO
CHRISTI





Why the Ontological Argument Should be Considered a War Crime

Anselm's true intentions?



Christianity is Incompatible with Extraterrestrial Intelligence

If Martians, why Jesus?



tian
trata



patible



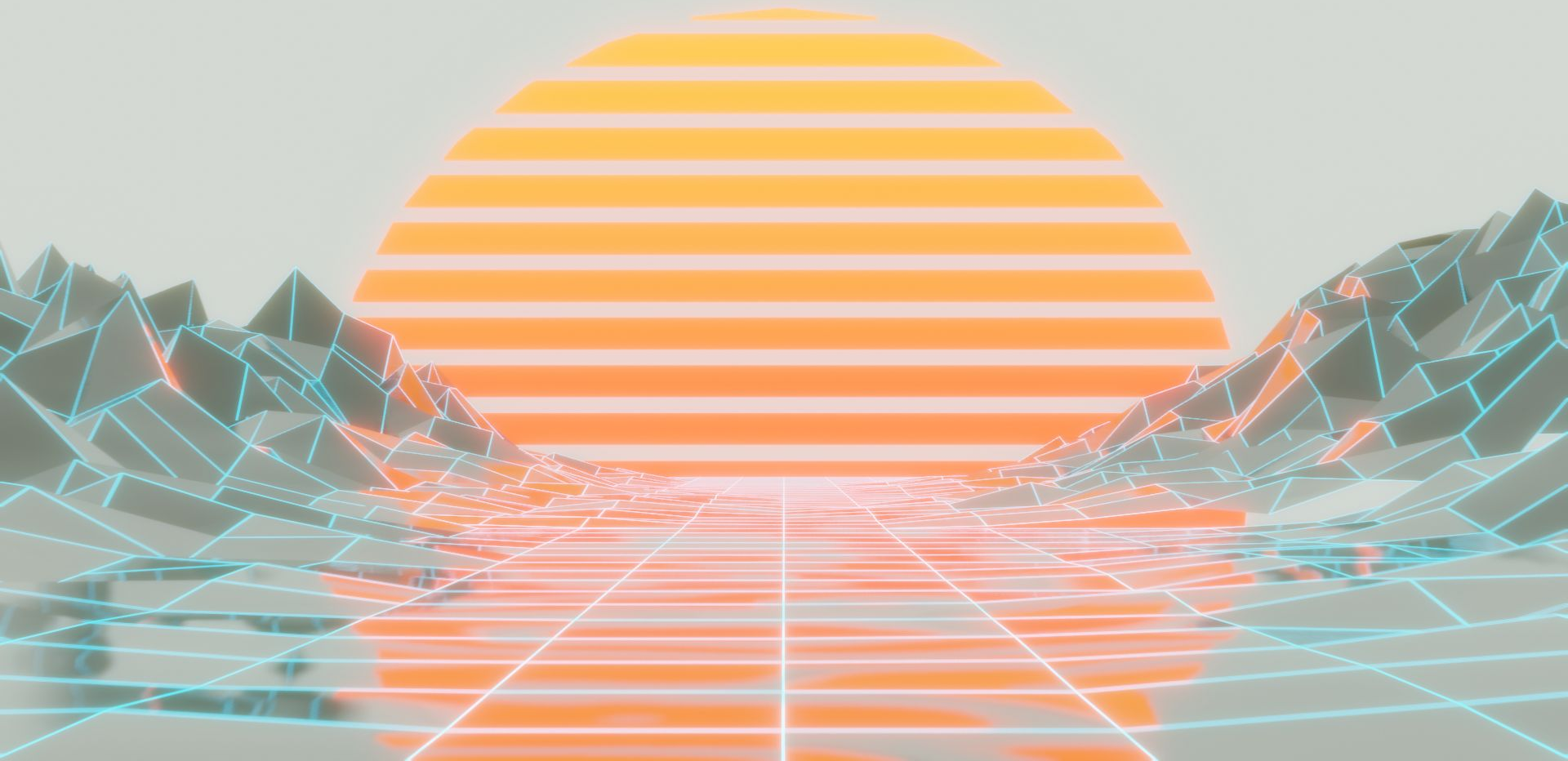


**Raise your hand if you think there is
a >10% chance that ANY
extraterrestrial life exists**



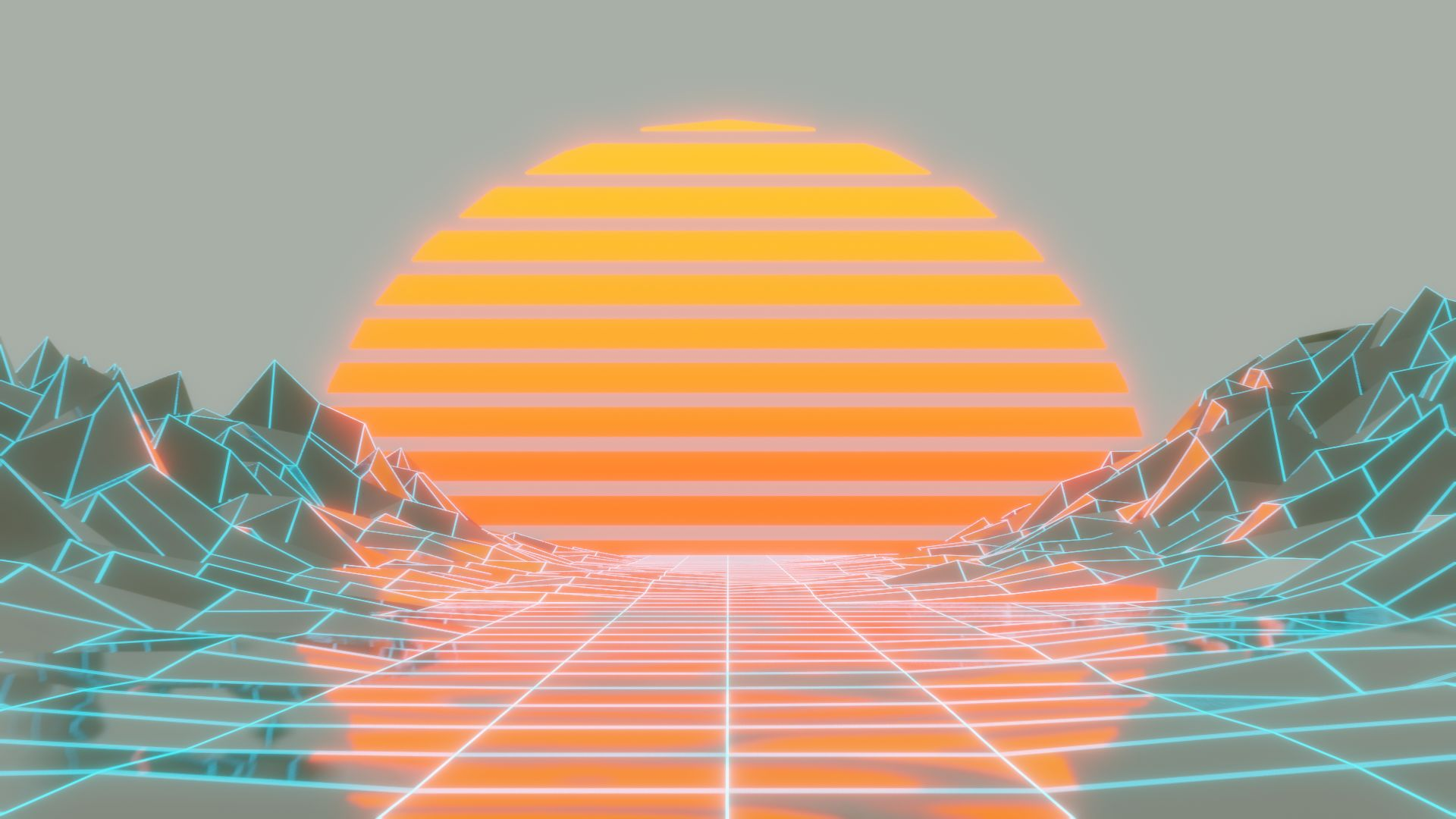
**Raise your hand if you think there is
a >10% chance that Intelligent
extraterrestrial life exists**

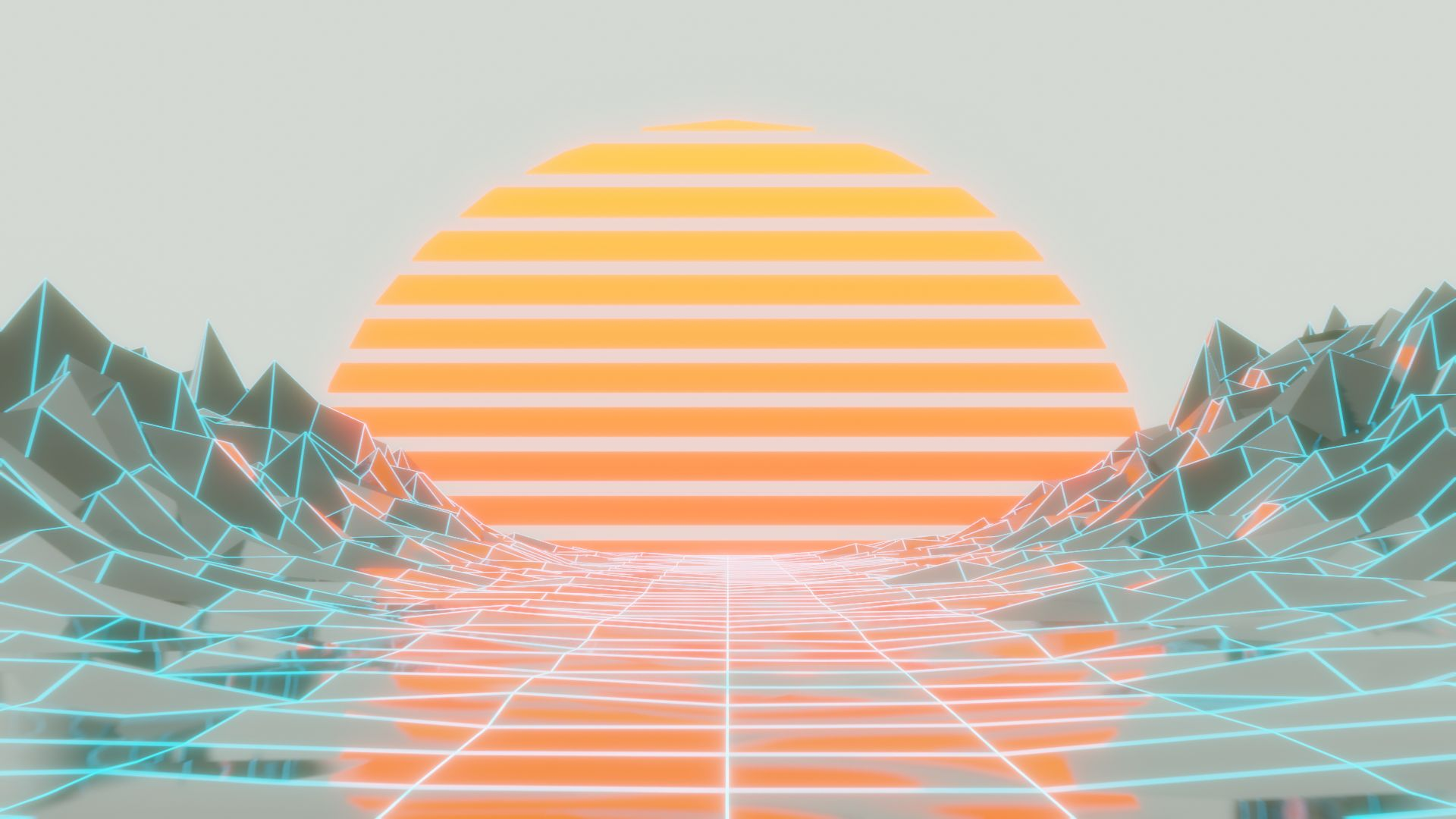
Put your hands down. Or else...





Raise your hand if extraterrestrial intelligence conflicts with Christianity or makes you uncomfortable





Takeaways

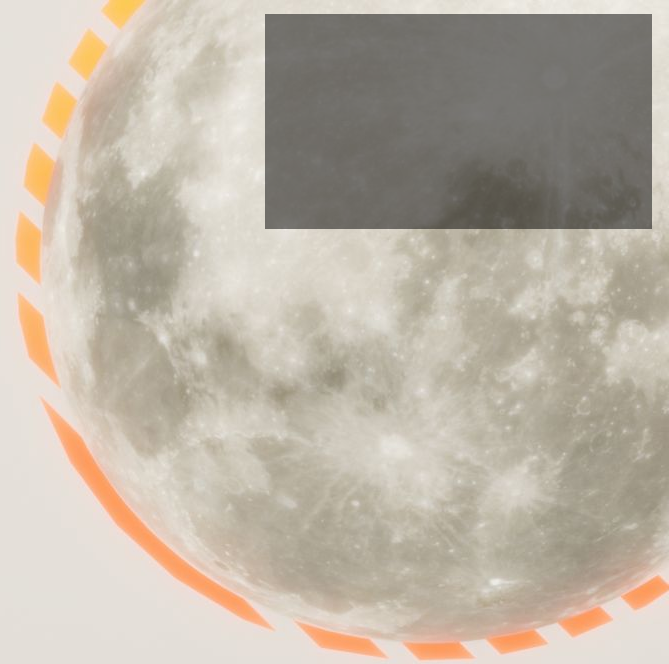
1. No conflict with the core of Christianity.
2. No inherent apologetics problem with aliens, but it can enhance a problem that already exists.
3. You should reconcile your perspective on the Christian Narrative with a wide range of possibilities.
4. There are no strong positive reasons for believe ETI exists in our galaxy.



Is this topic relevant/timely?

Maybe, sci-fi movies come out regularly, some with thought-provoking themes aimed at getting us to consider our humanity and why we value it. This topic can be a lens to understand ourselves better.

This topic can be a lens to understand Christianity better. It allows you to ask how a given doctrine corresponds to a potentially more general principle.



Possible Thoughts

- “Jill Tarter, former director of SETI thinks that if ETI made their existence known to us, we would abandon our religious beliefs and adopt whatever they believe, since they would likely be the intellectually and technologically superior species.”
- “Physicist Paul Davies thinks the existence of ETI would have a profound impact on religion, shattering the traditional perspective of God’s special relationship with man.”
- The incarnation cannot occur multiple times without being reduced to a traveling circus act.



Main Source:



Tyler McNabb
(above) and C.A.
McIntosh (right)



Houston Do We Have a Problem? *Extraterrestrial Life and Christian Belief*



Houston, Do We Have A Problem? Extraterrestrial Intelligent Life and Christian Belief

C. A. McIntosh and T. D. McNabb

Would the existence of extraterrestrial intelligent life (ETI) conflict in any way with Christian belief? We identify six areas of potential conflict. If there be no conflict in any of these areas—and we argue ultimately there is not—we are confident in declaring that there is no conflict, period. This conclusion underwrites the integrity of theological explorations into the existence of ETI, which has become a topic of increasing interest among theologians in recent years.

Introduction

Our galaxy is extremely vast. It takes approximately 100,000 years for light to cross from one side to the other. Yet there are billions of other galaxies besides our own. That's right—*billions*. And so far, some 4,000 exoplanets (planets that orbit a star outside of our own galaxy) have been discovered in them, and there are likely far more. As Jennifer Wiseman points out, since on average every star has a planet, we should expect billions of more planets to exist—again, *billions*.¹ As the number of potentially habitable exoplanets discovered increases, so too does the likelihood that one or more plays host to extraterrestrial intelligent life (ETI). Aside from such likelihood estimates based on the size and scale of the universe,² there are a number of arguments, old and new, for the conclusion that their actuality *increases* the likelihood of there being ETI.³ We mention such arguments *en passant*, but will not assess them here. Rather, we will assume for the sake of argument that ETI exist.

Would the existence of ETI conflict in any way with Christian belief? Before we attempt an answer to this question, we must first say a bit about what we mean by “Christian belief,” and, for that matter, “conflict.” By the former we mean the broad intersection of beliefs that, traditionally, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant believers alike would be happy to raise their glass to: that there is one God who is three persons, perfect in knowledge, power, and goodness, responsible for the creation and sustenance of the universe, and whose character is specially revealed in the Bible, in particular, the New Testament, the central message of which is that while we are estranged from God by sin, God, in His grace and mercy, extended

¹ See Wiseman (2018), chapter seven.

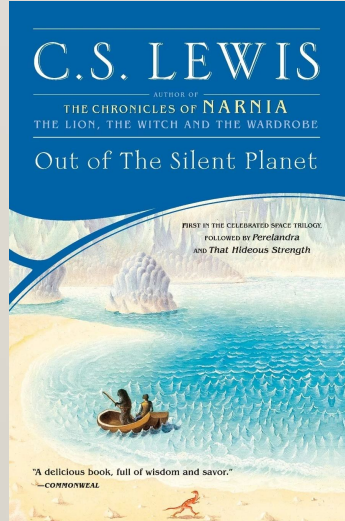
² I (CAM) don't find the “sheer numbers” argument very compelling for several reasons. First, the numbers themselves can be questioned. Physics and astronomy professor Larry Molnar tells me that the definition of “habitable planet” is often broadened in ways that inflate their number. More sober estimates imply Earth is rare, but probably not unique. Second, as John Barrow and Frank Tipler note, astrophysicists and astronomers are much more optimistic about the existence of ETI than are evolutionary biologists. After surveying the various physiological prerequisites for the evolution of intelligent species like ourselves, they report “[f]or the above reasons, and many others which we omit for reasons of space, there has developed a general consensus among evolutionists that the evolution of intelligent life, comparable in information-processing ability to that of *Homo sapiens*, is so improbable that it is unlikely to have occurred on any other planet in the entire visible universe.” See Barrow and Tipler (1986), p. 133. Barrow and Tipler themselves go on to argue in similar fashion against the existence of ETI based on the improbability of the requisite evolutionary steps taking place elsewhere before an extinction event occurs (*idem*, pp. 561-570), in addition to other considerations based on the thought that if ETI did exist, they probably would have made their existence known by now (*idem*, pp. 570ff). Thus, in the end, I think the best reasons for thinking there are ETI are, ironically, theological.

³ Most of these arguments are based on certain alleged theological implications of them. For a historical sampling of such arguments, see Weintrub (2014), ch. 2. For a contemporary defense, see the relevant essays in Kraay (2015), especially Robin Collins’.

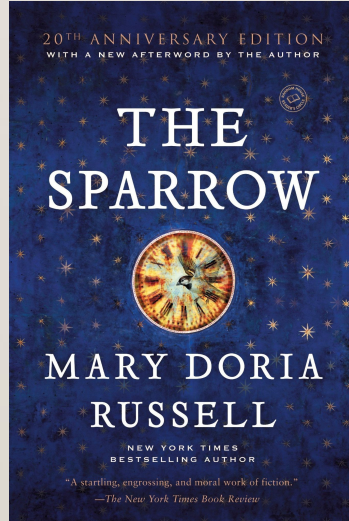
Auxiliary Sources

It may be helpful to look to fiction for a variety of thought provoking scenarios:

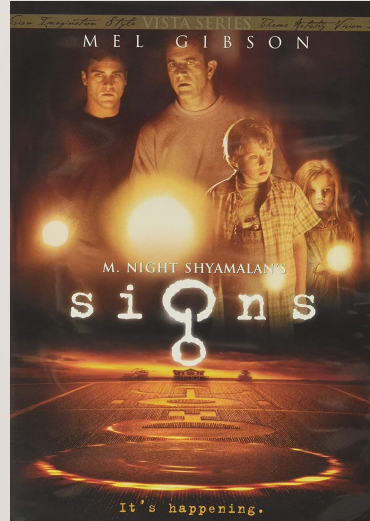
C.S. Lewis
Out of the Silent Planet



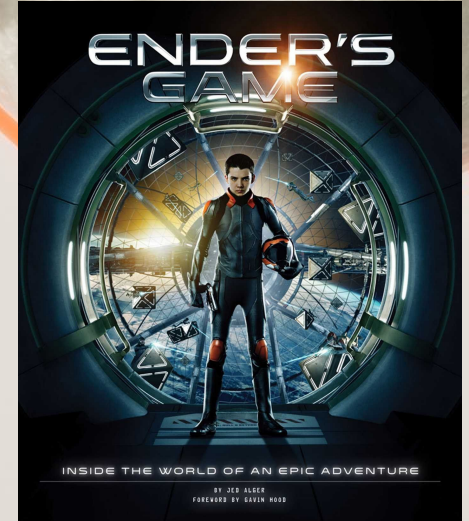
Mary Doria Russell
The Sparrow



M. Night Shyamalan
Signs



Orson Scott Card
Ender's Game



IS ETI Incompatible with Christianity?

What is the conflict?

1. Conflict with Theism
2. Conflict with Scripture
3. Conflict with Doctrine
4. Conflict with Tradition
5. ETI and the Problem of Evil
6. Narrative Conflict



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Conflict with Theism

Here is one potential way of formulating the conflict with Theism:

P1: God would not create ETI

P2: ETI exists

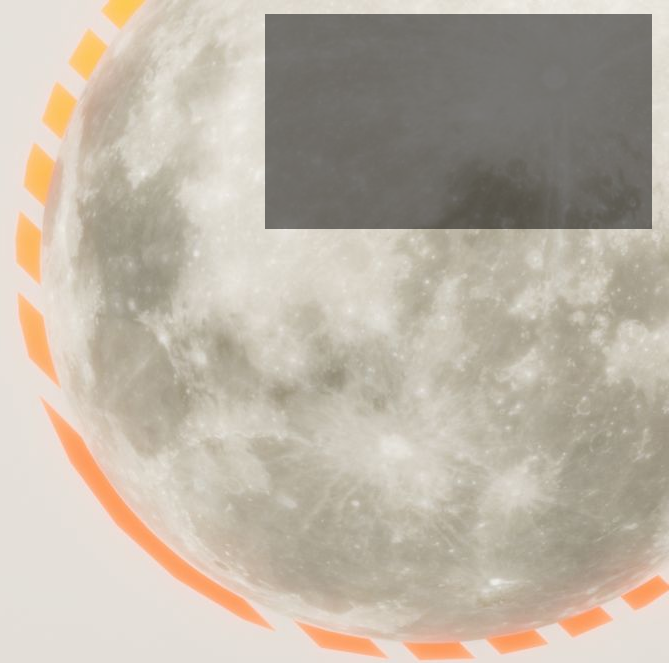
C: God does not exist

Can anyone think of anything else?



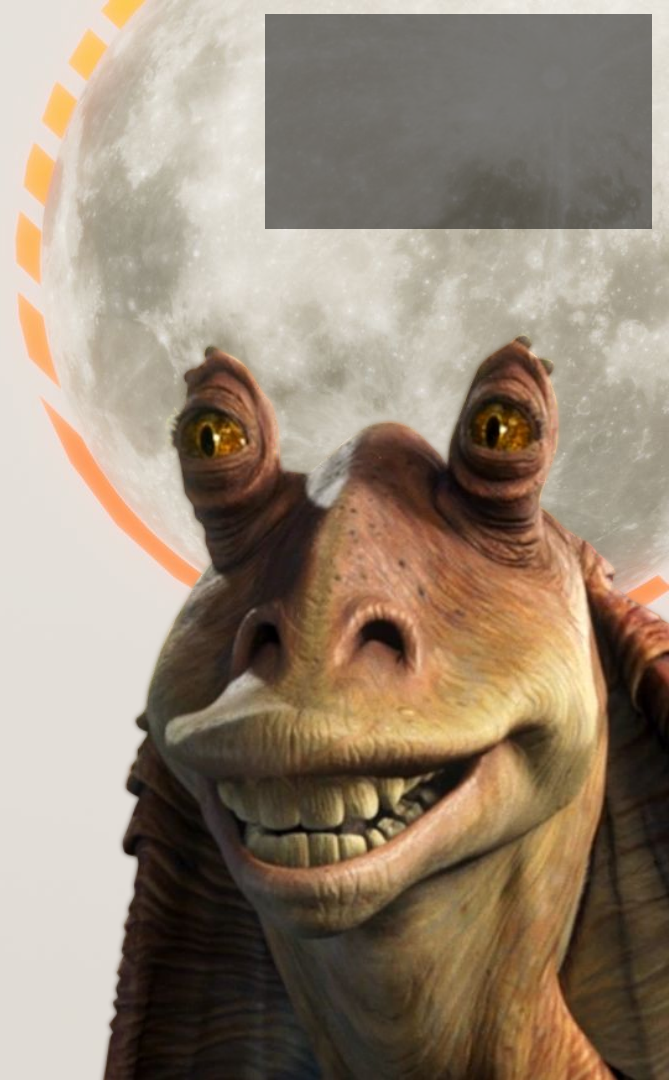
Conflict with Scripture

If Christianity's sacred scriptures taught that there is no ETI, and there is in fact ETI, there'd be conflict between Christian belief and the existence of ETI to the extent that one's view of scriptural inspiration doesn't allow for such a discrepancy.¹⁰ But, it hardly needs to be said that scripture teaches no such thing, so entertaining this counterfactual is of little interest to us. With due caution reserved, and ignorance confessed, over the meaning of those mysterious passages referring to otherworldly beasts and creatures, we regard any interpretation of scripture that purports to be a direct pronouncement on the existence of ETI as hokey, frankly. We cringe at the thought of what desperate Biblical eisegesis would follow confirmation of ETI. The reality is that the Christian scriptures are chiefly about God's relationship to man. At the risk of taking a popular analogy too far, it would be odd, to say the least, for a man to mention that there have been others in a love letter to his wife. That is a conversation for a different time and forum. Scripture's silence on the matter should therefore be expected. If there is no direct conflict in letter between the Christian scriptures and the existence of ETI, might there be indirect conflict with the spirit of the Christian scriptures as embodied in Christian doctrines?

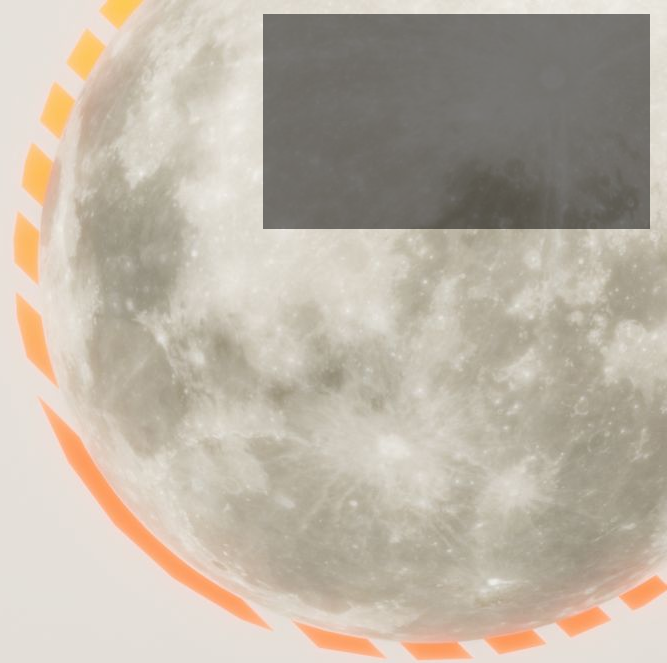


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Conflict with Scripture



TLDR:

- 1) **THERE ARE NO ALIENS IN THE BIBLE**
- 2) **THE BIBLE DOES NOT CLAIM ALIENS DON'T EXIST**
- 3) **THERE IS NO OBVIOUS REASON WHY THE BIBLE WOULD ADDRESS WHETHER OR NOT ALIEN LIFE EXISTS.**

Thomas Paine

The ancestor of all internet atheists:

To believe that God created a plurality of worlds, at least as numerous as what we call stars, renders the Christian system of faith at once little and ridiculous and scatters it in the mind like feathers in the air. The two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind, and he who thinks that he believes both, has thought but little of either. ... From whence, then, could arise the solitary and strange conceit that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world, because, they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple? And, on the other hand, are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an Eve, an apple, a serpent, and a redeemer? In this case, the person who is irreverently called the Son of God, and sometimes God himself, would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world, in an endless succession of deaths, with scarcely a momentary interval of life.



Conflict with Doctrine

(1) If Christianity is true and there is ETI, then either only humanity falls, or all intelligent life falls. Contrary to *Out of the Silent Planet*

(2) But it's absurd to think that either only humanity falls, or that all intelligent life falls. The *Principle of Mediocrity*

(3) Therefore, it's false that Christianity is true and there is ETI.



Assumptions

A1) All intelligent life would be fallen and need to be saved

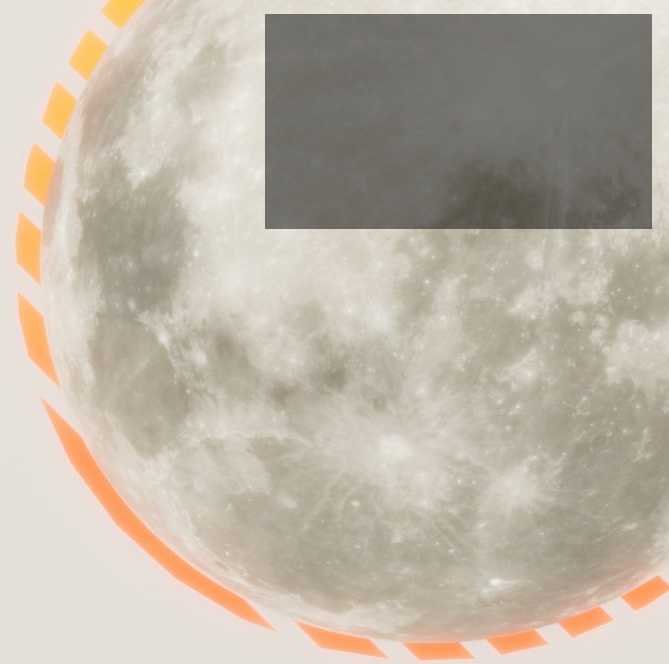
A2) All fallen intelligent life is saved only via incarnation

A3) There cannot be multiple incarnations



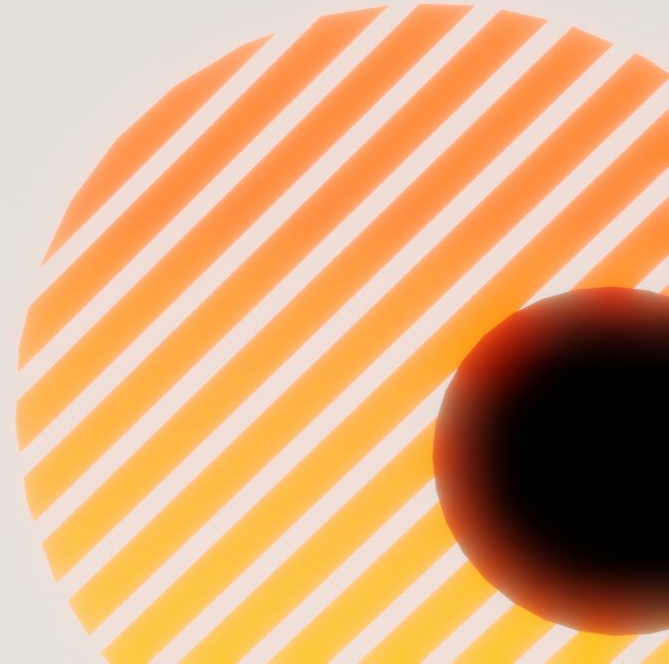
Challenges to the Gospel

1. Incarnation: are there any philosophical challenges to the incarnation? Would God abandon a populated creation just to come to earth?
2. ***Atonement: if atonement is unjust then it becomes worse if it plays out the same way. If it plays out a different way then wouldn't that be better?***
3. Resurrection: philosophical objections to the resurrection are multiplied. Do multiple resurrections make it a cheap trick?



Conflict with Tradition

There are no creeds or church fathers expressing tension with the existence of ETI and Christianity.



ETI and the Problem of Evil

This is of course a very complicated issue so if there is enough interest we can broach this topic in depth at another juncture. Here are some thoughts:

- There may be no evil and suffering elsewhere in the universe
- The excess evil may be balanced by a lot more good
- The Problem of Evil could get better or worse depending on what's out there

Any other thoughts?



The Problem of the Unevangelized

Julie did a very thorough presentation of this problem. However, whatever portion of this problem remains is potentially multiplied with time and distance.

If we are God's only chosen species in the cosmos, does that make The Great Commission just a cruel joke?



The Problem of Hell

Zach did a great job of presenting a range of biblical interpretations of hell coupled with some philosophical concerns regarding justice.

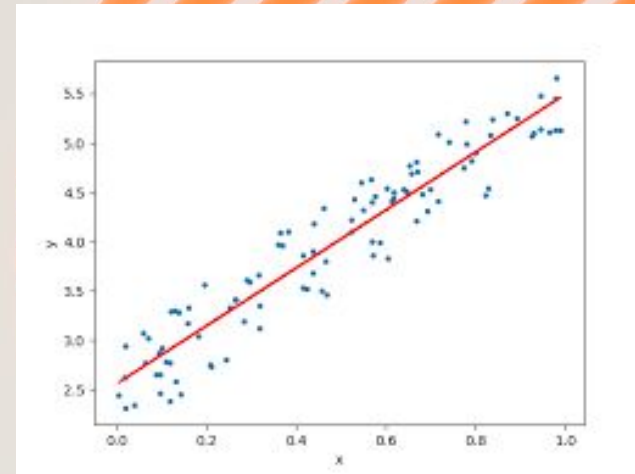
If the cosmos is more populated than we thought, is Hell more populated as well?



What is the Christian Narrative

I asked at the beginning of this presentation whether anyone felt tension or discomfort with the idea of ETI.

Christianity is true and yet we can also refer to it as a story with a thesis and many themes. When we individually ponder and live out our role in this story, we contribute to the narrative and in order for us to believe and appreciate it, it must be cohesive.



Narrative Conflict

*It is conceivable to us that ETI disrupts the Christian story, so to speak. It would be quite jarring, for example, if UFOs started appearing in the sky at the denouement of the cinematic masterpiece *The Shawshank Redemption*, although there is nothing in the film up to that point suggesting aliens don't exist.*



Narrative Conflict

The extent to which ETI disrupts the Christian story—and, accordingly, the depth of tension between the two—will depend on whether and how ETI interacts with us humans. We take the following five scenarios to represent increasing levels of tension:

- S1.** ETI is so remote or undetectable that any interaction is (nomologically) impossible.
- S2.** ETI is so remote as to be physically inaccessible, but communication is possible.
- S3.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is peaceable.
- S4.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is hostile but not an existential threat.
- S5.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is hostile and an existential threat.

Narrative Conflict

The extent to which ETI disrupts the Christian story—and, accordingly, the depth of tension between the two—will depend on whether and how humans. We take the following five levels of tension:

- S1.** ETI is so remote or undetected that physical interaction is (nomologically) impossible.
- S2.** ETI is so remote as to be physically undetectable, but communication is possible.
- S3.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is not hostile.
- S4.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is hostile but not an existential threat.
- S5.** Physical interaction with ETI is possible; ETI is hostile and an existential threat.



Scenario V

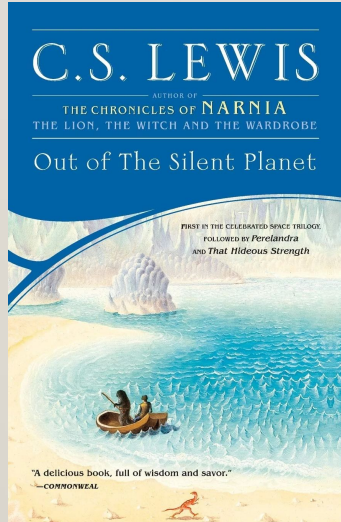
Clearly the most unsettling is the fifth option so what do we make of this?

- Anthropocentric Theodicy
- Redemption of the Cosmos Theodicy
- Suffering Theodicy

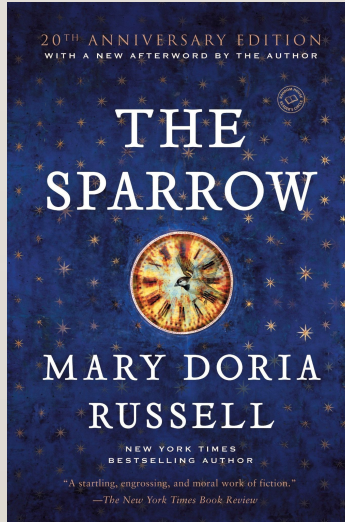
In order to constitute a legitimate objection, all Theodicies reconciling Scenario V with Christian belief and linear combinations of the form $(uL+vL)$ must be false or improbable.

Wait a minute, repeat slides? How lazy!

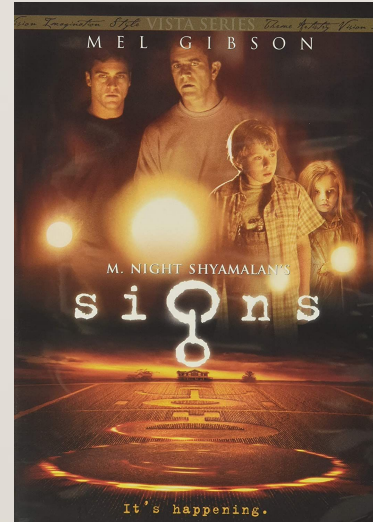
C.S. Lewis
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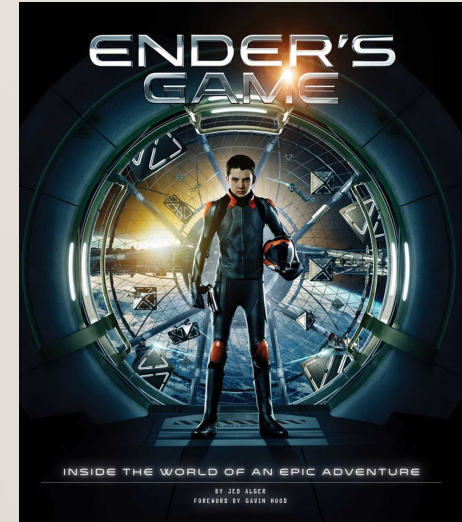
Mary Doria Russell
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Reconciling the Christian Narrative

Are you prepared to enter into other people's lives with your understanding of Christianity and expand your perspective to include them?

You may encounter incredible suffering in your own life and the lives of those you care about and reach out to. *You ought to be prepared to reconcile this with the goodness of God and the truth of the gospel.*



Reverse Engineering

We have addressed the possible sources of discomfort and some resolutions. Let's work backwards:

- If you still think Scenario V is disconcerting, consider how unlikely it is.
- If you still think the incarnation cannot happen multiple times, consider there may be other ways for God to reach ETI.
- If you think God cannot save ETI, consider that they may not have fallen.
- If you think they have to have fallen, consider they may not even exist.

A circular logo with a gradient from orange to black. Inside the circle, on the left, is a white silhouette of a person thinking. To the right of the silhouette, the words "THINK" and "THEISM" are stacked vertically in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**THINK
THEISM**

The Drake Equation

The equation describing the likelihood of ETI is known as the Drake equation.

It is enormously indeterminative and unhelpful given the huge amount of uncertainty regarding the last four or five terms of the equation.

The Drake equation is:

$$N = R_* \cdot f_p \cdot n_e \cdot f_l \cdot f_i \cdot f_c \cdot L$$

where:

N = the number of [civilizations](#) in our galaxy with which communication might be possible (i.e. which are on our current past [light cone](#));

and

R_* = the average rate of [star formation](#) in our [Galaxy](#)

f_p = the fraction of those stars that have [planets](#)

n_e = the average number of planets that can potentially support [life](#) per star that has planets

f_l = the fraction of planets that could support life that actually develop life at some point

f_i = the fraction of planets with life that actually go on to develop [intelligent](#) life (civilizations)

f_c = the fraction of civilizations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space

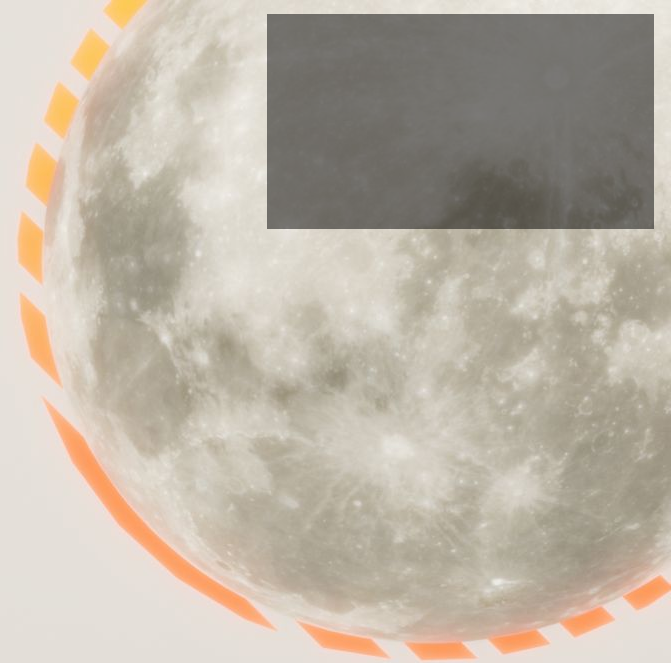
L = the length of time for which such civilizations release detectable signals into space^{[5][6]}



A Naturalistic Bias

There is a certain bias when proposing values to fit into the Drake equation.

1. Observe life on earth
2. Deduce that life must be a feature of the natural world
3. Learn about the conditions required for life
4. Ignore those conditions and blindly state the virtual certainty of the existence of ETI



Fermi Paradox

Doesn't fit anywhere else, but is an interesting idea:

- ETI should be relatively common in our galaxy but we haven't observed any. This demands an explanation such as a filter.
- One possibility is that the filters are behind us.
- The filters could also be ahead of us:
 - Self-caused
 - Hostile intelligence waiting for us
 - Space plague!



Takeaways

1. No conflict with the core of Christianity. You should know your doctrine.
 - a. Don't be anthropocentric
2. No inherent apologetics problem with aliens, but it can enhance a problem that already exists.
3. You should reconcile your perspective on the Christian Narrative with a wide range of possibilities.
4. There are no strong positive reasons for believe ETI exists in our galaxy.



