

ANALOGY AS A TOOL TO COMMUNICATE ABSTRACT CONCEPTS IN SETI

Paolo Musso

University of Genova

V. Montevideo 2A/5-6, 16129 Genova, Italy

Phone: +39-010-3623559; Fax: +39-010-312042

Email: musso@nous.unige.it

1) Purpose - The aim of my paper is to detect a suitable way to make our moral and religious concepts understandable to extraterrestrials in a hypothetical SETI communication.

Methodology - I have studied the former proposals of possible interstellar languages in SETI history, matched them with the ideas of Middle Age philosophers about the analogical structure of our conceptual framework, and then tried to work out a first sketch of a possible message based on the principles I have derived from my previous analysis.

Results and Conclusions - A first evaluation of my test message suggests that an analogy-based, integrated language, using both mathematics and pictures, could really be a good way to communicate our moral and religious concepts in SETI. Further studies will be required to determine whether this method could be extended to higher-level abstract concepts in the other fields of our culture.

2) In my paper I am going to expose the reasons why I think analogy could be a good way to communicate our moral and religious concepts to extraterrestrials. Moreover, I'll try to show that this is possible only in the context of an integrated language, using both abstract symbols and pictures that I have already suggested in some previous papers. A possible practical example of this will be sketched, too, and the results of its evaluation will be shown. Finally, I'll also argue that only the inner logic of such a language is really relevant in a SETI communication, while the symbolical apparatus is not. So, maybe the best we can do is just to use an already existing and well-tested one, that is, our common alphabet.

3) There are at least four reasons why the material is new and original:

a) First of all, the reflection about the problem of SETI language has always taken in consideration the point of view of modern (especially analytical) philosophy, sometimes the ancient philosophers one, but very little the ideas of Middle Age thinkers.

b) In the history of SETI many mathematical and/or logical based languages have been proposed, and many iconical based ones, too, but an explicit and organic reflection about the possibility of a combination of both approaches in a unique methodology is still missing, even though it has sometimes been used in some practical attempts (especially in Vakoch's ones).

c) Most of the previous languages used analogy to various extents and degrees, but none of their authors has ever focused on this point in order to explain its whole potential.

d) Many of these authors have often tried (or suggested to try) to create a completely new symbolical apparatus for interstellar communications, whereas according to my view it turns out to be useless.

4) Finally, as requested, I certify that this paper was not presented at any previous meeting and that my attendance in Toulouse is assured.