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OTHER BEINGS ON OTHER PLANETS?*

Today man is looking out at the star-filled heavens with new curiosity, asking if tomorrow's space explorers may find other beings on other worlds. Based on science's rapidly expanding knowledge, the answer is "Yes." Eminent astronomers are sure conditions suitable for life exist elsewhere.

Our galaxy, called the Milky Way galaxy, contains roughly 400 billion stars and Dr. Gerard Kuiper, director of the Yerkes Observatory, believes that about 10 billion of the stars do have sets of planets orbiting around them. These are invisible to terrestrial telescopes because planets are cold masses emitting no light of their own. Assuming that our planetary solar system is typical, Dr. Kuiper estimates that there are about 100 billion planets in our own galaxy alone. In the entire universe there may be over 100 billion galaxies like ours and Andromeda.

If other solar systems are like ours, about 10% or 10 billion planets in our galaxy are orbiting in a temperate "life zone," at just the right distance from their sun where liquid water, air and vital chemicals could exist. Where these ingredients do exist, so may living cells. "Life is probably the inevitable consequence of chemical evolution wherever physics, chemistry and climatology are right," Harlow Shapley of the Harvard University Observatory maintains.

To support their conclusions, astronomers turn to the mathematical theory of probability which holds it inconceivable that out of 10 billion "inhabitable" planets in the galaxy our earth is the only one where conditions are right for the evolution of life. In fact, though man's 5½ billion-year-old earth is actually middle-aged by celestial standards, there may well be a multitude of other planets on which life has been evolving millions of years longer than on earth. If spaceships which approach the speed of light could be built and if man ever reaches distant planets, he may, on arriving, find himself to be just a primitive Johnny-come-lately compared to the local inhabitants.

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