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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN?: REFLECTIONS ON THE PORTRAYAL OF HUMAN
NATURE IN INTERSTELLAR MESSAGES

Abstract

The intentional messages we have sent to possible extraterrestrial recipients provide an important perspective on what we humans deem most important to convey about ourselves to other worlds, as well as what we believe we are capable of communicating. In missives borne on spacecraft such as the Pioneer probes and transmitted from radar facilities like that of the Arecibo radio observatory, the designers of these messages have attempted to convey something about—among other things—human motivations, our sense of beauty, and our level of self-awareness. This study will examine some of the intended and unintended messages contained in the images, greetings, and music from Earth encoded in the Voyager interstellar recording; the dialogues between noncorporeal “humans” in Freudenthal’s *Lingua Cosmica*; and a sampling of briefer but often no less informative portraits of ourselves sent to other worlds. Possibilities for expanding the breadth and depth of such portrayals in future messages through greater reliance on the arts, psychology, and anthropology will be considered.