

60th International Astronautical Congress 2009

38th SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) – The
Next Steps (A4.)
SETI II : SETI and Society (2.)

Author: Prof. Douglas Vakoch
SETI Institute and California Institute of Integral Studies, Mountain View, California, United States,
vakoch@seti.org

COMMUNICATING MULTIPLE THEORIES OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY IN INTERSTELLAR
MESSAGES

Abstract

Proposals for the content of interstellar messages we might some day transmit to extraterrestrial civilizations typically assume that we should emphasize our most up-to-date scientific explanations, rather than precursors. This emphasis on the latest scientific theories rather than theories from prior centuries reflects an attempt to present our most comprehensive understandings rather than explanations now superseded. Particularly as we move toward an explication of theories of human psychology, however, which are highly influenced by historical factors and choices about the range of phenomena to be explained, such an emphasis on the most recent dominant model provides a truncated view of our self-understanding. This paper examines the assumptions of various schools of psychology that have been dominant at various times since the inception of the discipline, such as structuralism, functionalism, behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and cognitive psychology. We suggest ways to encode key concepts from these schools in interstellar messages, providing a richer portrait of humanity than an account from a single theoretical perspective. By encoding the chronology of the development of these theories, we can also convey to extraterrestrial intelligence something about the nature of the evolution of science on Earth.