

When we make contact with an extra-terrestrial civilization, what should we tell them is humanity's greatest achievement?

Asked by extra-terrestrial beings, "What is humanity's greatest achievement?" the human representatives have a lot to consider- earth's existence could be at stake. Narrowing the parameters, the human spokespeople should be without national or corporate bias, and the extra-terrestrial beings (referred to as aliens) appropriately representative of their civilisation. The core of this essay is to justify "humanity's greatest achievement" whilst bearing in mind the precarious context in which the question is posed. I have judged the greatness of an achievement through the level of effort it required, its significance at the time, and its future implications. This essay argues that humanity's greatest achievement is establishing contact with the aliens. Not only does the event merit the title "greatest" (particularly within a technological and political realm), but such flattery would preserve inter-galactic diplomacy.

An immense past effort has gone into meeting aliens; the science and technology necessary to simply reach space are incredibly complex and the pinnacle of collaborative human innovation. The rocket propulsion system alone requires myriads of components: nozzles, pumps, and propellants. To preserve human life, scientists have to further devise radiation protection, communication, and navigation. Planning for space exploration covers core rocket science to even the colour of the spacesuit logo. Such an extraordinary effort shows humanity at its greatest, attempting to chart the previously uncharted.

On the other hand, it could be argued that reaching aliens would be an extrapolation of the first moon-landing, itself the earliest successful application of rocket-landing technology. Therefore, on the foundation set, contacting aliens would not be a great exertion. However, one of the primary motivations for space travel in the first place was to find aliens. From planetary rovers to radio transmitters, the search for intelligent life forms has been at the forefront of aeronautical impetus. Contacting an extra-terrestrial civilisation would thus be the result of all past exertion into space research, the first moon-landing merely a pre-cursor.

Moreover, contacting extra-terrestrial life would be of substantial, immediate significance to humans: the event would signal the end of the space race. The space race was a "battle" between Russia (USSR) and the USA to demonstrate their dominance through space technology. It initiated frictions and hostilities that still mar global affairs. If Russia and the USA united to meet the aliens, it would mean worldwide collaboration- immediately benefitting international and interplanetary relations.

This interplanetary connection would be greater than any prior connections made by man. It can be argued that every unrequired human action intends to forge, destroy, or change connections and that the effectiveness of said action judges how meaningful it was. The idea can be applied to larger bodies, like governments, and is witnessed throughout history. For instance, France- Britain relations have fluctuated drastically. Their vast catalogue of historic rivalries, including the Hundred Years' War and the Napoleonic Wars, are assorted with friendlier associations, like the Entente Cordiale and the EU. The affiliation between earth and aliens would be a revolutionary change from these treaties and wars that have ambled through time. It would be the greatest, most meaningful connection ever, and therefore the greatest achievement.

The alien contact also fulfils my criteria "future implications". There could be an infinity of possible achievements resulting from the event. To illustrate, previous investigations into planets without aliens (that we know of) have enriched our lives with advancements such as solar panels (needed on the ISS) and cancer treatment (resulting from the high radiation levels in space). With the presence of extra-terrestrial life, the potential is awe-inspiring. Pooling the information, materials, cultures, and practices of humans and aliens would benefit both species, and increase their kinship. Evidently, contacting aliens would have vast implications for all aspects of life and be a turning point in human history.

Pragmatically, there are many reasons we should tell the aliens that humanity's greatest achievement is meeting them. Primarily, flattery is a diplomatic tactic to keep the peace. An intergalactic war, despite media glamorisation, could end human existence, or at least result in horrific casualties, economic burdens, and political frictions- likely fighting outside of our environment! Additionally, the benefits of friendly relations with the aliens would be sacrificed. Declaring the contact with them is humanity's greatest achievement could be the compliment that prevents a conflict and procures an alliance.

Conversely, since the aliens have not contacted us first, it is natural to assume one of two circumstances: either they are not advanced enough to reach earth, or they wish to remain isolated. Both of these would render the extra-terrestrial civilisation unable or unwilling to start a war. Therefore, by claiming that a weapon or feat of labour is humanity's greatest achievement, earth could assert its dominance in potential agreements without justifiable fear of war. To demonstrate, the Asian Trade Bloc satisfies China, whose power assertion threatened the other countries into submissiveness. Generally, the international political system appeases and pacifies the biggest threats, like the UN security council. If this is replicable within interplanetary relations, it would be beneficial for earth. Nevertheless, it is not worth the risk of war; friendship and integrity could (arguably) forge a more stable connection than threats.

In summation, the human representatives should say that meeting aliens is humanity's greatest achievement. Through this, earth can create the best possible outcome: forging diplomatic relations and preventing war. The event itself fulfils the greatness criteria, through past efforts, present significance, and future implications. The science is immensely complex, the connection revolutionary, the event monumental, and interplanetary prosperity feasible; all other achievements pale into insignificance.