

Comments on the likely uniqueness of human evolution from "Little Men and Flying Saucers" (1957) by anthropologist Loren Eiseley:

"Darwin saw clearly that the succession of life on this planet was not a formal pattern imposed from without, or moving exclusively in one direction. Whatever else life might be, it was adjustable and not fixed. It worked its way through difficult environments. It modified and then, if necessary, it modified again, along roads which would never be retraced. Every creature alive is the product of a unique history. The statistical probability of its precise reduplication on another planet is so small as to be meaningless. Life, even cellular life, may exist out yonder in the dark. But high or low in nature, it will not wear the shape of man. That shape is the evolutionary product of a strange, long wandering through the attics of the forest roof, and so great are the chances of failure, that nothing precisely and identically human is likely ever to come that way again.

"...In a universe whose size is beyond human imagining, where our world floats like a dust mote in the void of night, men have grown inconceivably lonely. We scan the time scale and the mechanisms of life itself for portents and signs of the invisible. As the only thinking mammals on the planet – perhaps the only thinking animals in the entire sidereal universe – the burden of consciousness has grown heavy upon us. We watch the stars but the signs are uncertain. We uncover the bones of the past and seek for our origins. There is a path there, but it appears to wander. The vagaries of the road may have a meaning however; it is thus we torture ourselves.

"Lights come and go in the night sky. Men, troubled at last by the things they build, may toss in their sleep and dream bad dreams, or lie awake while the meteors whisper greenly overhead. But nowhere in all space or on a thousand worlds will there be men to share our loneliness. There may be wisdom; there may be power; somewhere across space great instruments, handled by strange, manipulative organs, may stare vainly at our floating cloud wrack, their owners yearning as we yearn. Nevertheless, in the nature of life and in the principles of evolution we have had our answer. Of men elsewhere, and beyond, there will be none forever."