Policy options for the radio detectability of Earth

Abstract

The METI risk problem refers to the uncertain outcome of sending transmissions into space with the intention of messaging to extraterrestrial intelligence (METI). Here, I demonstrate that this uncertainty is undecidable by proving that the METI risk problem reduces to the halting problem. This implies that any proposed moratorium on METI activities cannot be based solely on the requirement for new information. I discuss three policy resolutions to deal with this risk ambiguity. Precautionary malevolence assumes that contact with ETI is likely to cause net harm to humanity, which remains consistent with the call for a METI moratorium, while assumed benevolence states that METI is likely to yield net benefits to humanity. I also propose a policy of preliminary neutrality, which suggests that humanity should engage in both SETI (searching for extraterrestrial intelligence) and METI until either one achieves its first success.

Keywords: SETI; METI; radio transmission; Halting problem, detectability
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