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KRAFFT EHRICKE AT 100 YEARS: THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

Krafft Ehricke at 100 Years:
The Moral Imperative of Space Exploration
Marsha Freeman

Space visionary Krafft Ehricke, who would have been in his 100th year, is known for his concept of the “Extraterrestrial Imperative.” He believed that space exploration is not simply a succession of individual missions, but a necessary, long-term journey to discover new scientific principles, and create new civilizations for mankind. Space exploration, he proposed, is “imperative” because within the limited resources of the “closed” Earth, mankind would reach the point of competition for dwindling resources, which would lead to geopolitical conflicts, and, eventually, wars. But space exploration creates an “open world,” where first the Moon, and then the entire Solar System, become an integral part of the economic sphere of human activity.

But Krafft Ehricke’s concern was not simply to promote the practical steps necessary to accomplish these goals. He was fully confident that mankind would develop the technology to do that. His unique contribution was to provide the philosophical framework through which the goals would have to be met.

Shortly before the opening of the Space Age with the launch of Sputnik, Krafft Ehricke published an article, “Anthropology of Astronautics.” It includes his “three fundamental laws” that lay the philosophical basis which should guide this new activity of man:

First Law: Nobody and nothing under the natural laws his universe impose any limitations on man except man himself.

Second Law: Not only the Earth, but the entire Solar System, and as much of the universe as he can reach under the laws of nature, are man’s rightful field of activity.

Third Law: By expanding through the universe, man fulfills his destiny as an element of life, endowed with the power of reason and the wisdom of the moral law within himself.

Most important, Krafft Ehricke explained, man not only has the “power of reason,” to find solutions to the challenges he will face, but also has a “moral law” to guide him. He believed that each human individual has the ability to make creative contributions to the benefit of the future of society, and that it is his moral imperative to do so.

He fought passionately for this philosophical view because the destruction and waste of human life had become widespread. He believed that space exploration would require the most noble qualities of man, and that the future would nourish that noble quality in return.