

## The Prime Directive

“General Order 1: ‘No starship may interfere with the normal development of any alien life or society.’”

- Star Trek -

In the Star Trek universe, there are 47 sub-orders in the Prime Directive including exceptions such as the Omega Directive. In real life, the creation of the Prime Directive is generally credited to Gene L. Coon, although it could be attributed to Theodore Sturgeon, who presented the Prime Directive in an unused script for the original series.

The Prime Directive also appeared about two decades earlier in Robert A. Heinlein's 1948 novel “Space Cadet,” which describes a military organization very similar to Star Trek's Starfleet. In an interview with Gene Roddenberry in a 1991 edition of “The Humanist” magazine, he implied that the origin of the prime Directive had its roots in his belief that Christian Missionaries had interfered with the normal development of other cultures.

Whatever the origin, the fact that the Prime Directive has appeared multiple times over the last sixty years is rather interesting. As a general rule, science fiction often deals with very real issues that the rest of civilization doesn't grapple with until many years later. Science fiction takes the evidence of the past, extrapolates it into the future and points to the crux of a problem. Another example of this would be the “Three Laws of Robotics” developed by Isaac Asimov. In this case, Asimov projected the industrial revolution into a future with sentient machines (robots with positronic brains) and deals with how humanity would protect itself and reassures itself that robots would not be a threat.

In general we tend to see ourselves as being on the originating end of rules such as the Prime Directive or the Three Laws of Robotics, but what if we were on the receiving end? Would we recognize it?

For many years there has been speculation that the earth is being visited by one or more alien species from the stars. In fact there are those who insist this is exactly what is taking place and there are even secret agreements between various aliens and earth governments. At the same time we have people who suspect this might be true but who remain frustrated in attempts to “get at the truth.” We are left wondering why the greatest revelation in the history of the world would be withheld from us? Why keep such a secret? If interstellar travel was already possible why are we fiddling around with chemical rockets and spending all our time orbiting earth instead actually of going somewhere? Why would we be considering a six month mission to Mars if we already might know that it is possible to get there in minutes? Could there be an alien version of the Prime Directive in effect?

Although it is not stated as such, in the Star Trek series “Enterprise” we see ways in which an alien version of the Prime Directive might affect us. This series is set in the period following “First Contact” with us by the Vulcans. Interestingly, even though the Vulcans know how to build extremely fast ships, they let earth struggle to develop its own Warp technology one step at a time rather than just handing over the answer. This reminds us of the old axiom, “Give a man a

fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” You learn more from the struggle than you do from the answer.

So, if the Prime Directive is really just our version of a universal truth, how might it affect us if interstellar aliens are indeed visiting us?

First, until we develop to some significant level of technology on our own, we could expect to see nothing more than tantalizing hints that interstellar travel might be possible. We are not going to see an alien space ship land on the White House lawn with the aliens emerging and saying, “We’re from Alpha Organia. Take us to your leader.” Instead, we might see odd vehicles flying through our skies doing things we don’t know how to do. We might find pieces of vehicles that are damaged and crash. There might even be vehicles that are crashed on purpose to give us clues without “giving away the store.” These would give us the incentive to do more research in a particular area to find our own answers and solutions. We would develop our own way to solve problems (learning to fish). Let’s say that a crash site reveals some transparent material that is extremely strong (a la “transparent aluminum” from Star Trek). This could lead us to research in how to make such a material that eventually leads to “transparent steel.”

Ann Arbor (MI) - Transparent aluminum has been the dream of many ever since it was first mentioned in a popular Sci-Fi movie a couple decades back. But researchers at the University of Michigan may have done that one better. It could almost be called "transparent steel". - Rick C. Hodgins, Friday, October 05, 2007 (<http://www.tgdaily.com/content/view/34213/113/>)

The same process could apply to semiconductor electronics, fiber optics, and maybe someday to Faster Than Light (FTL, or Warp) travel. The way this sort of thing would happen was explored to an extent in “Terminator II” where a piece of a smashed Terminator leads to a research project that eventually culminates in the development of Skynet (the system that tries to exterminate mankind).

Only 100 years ago we were flying airplanes that were little more than oversized kites with motors. Little more than 60 years later we were setting foot on the moon. Any way you slice it, this is an amazing amount of technological advancement in such a short time considering the history of the previous two thousand years. Then something happened. The last time man set foot on the moon was 35 years ago. What’s wrong with this picture? It was sixty years from oversized motorized kites to the moon followed by 35 years of just driving around the block (orbiting the earth). Could this make sense from the perspective of an alien Prime Directive?

It might indeed make sense if you consider that there are multiple aspects to “helping along” a civilization while doing everything possible to avoid destroying a culture. The advancement of a civilization and a culture is a delicate balance between technological, psychological, emotional and spiritual elements. If any element overwhelms the others there is a danger of collapse. So, if an alien civilization was trying to help earth with “hints” while also trying to avoid violating a Prime Directive, they may have been faced with a bit of a problem. By the middle of the 20th century, earth’s technological advancements were definitely outpacing everything else. The

effect was bringing the earth to the brink of worldwide destruction (global thermonuclear war). If aliens had been dropping technological hints for us, the easiest way to restore the balance was to slow or stop the flow of hints to allow other areas of civilization to catch up. Basically it amounts to giving us a little time to grow up and better understand the responsibilities and ramifications of the technological advancements. If this is the case, so far it seems to be working but we are still very near the edge. The two superpowers (the United States and Soviet Union) that had the capacity to destroy all life on earth matured enough to avoid it. However, the weapons are still out there. There are other parts of earth's family that may not have "grown up" quite enough yet. There are still those out there who believe triggering a nuclear exchange is an answer even though it is not.

So is there a Prime Directive that we are being subjected to? There does seem to be circumstantial evidence that points in that direction. If so, at what point do we meet some kind of criteria for "First Contact" or for that revelation that so many are wishing to see or hear? When will a starship from Vulcan land with emissaries that exit, raise their hand with center fingers spread and say, "Live long and prosper" without the hint of a smile? Perhaps I could tell you but am prevented from doing so due to the Prime Directive.