The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Begins on Earth

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The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) has traditionally focused on detecting electromagnetic signals from technological civilizations. But this effort rests on the initial premise that these planets harbor the complex intelligence that makes this technology possible. Therefore, it is logical that SETI be invested in such broad questions as: What is the nature and scope of intelligence? How does intelligence evolve? What is the relationship between intelligence and the environment? What is consciousness and how does it relate to intelligence?

SETI has an opportunity to investigate these critical questions by engaging the scientific study of intelligence on earth. As a concept, intelligence is complex and multi-dimensional. Yet most investigators recognize that the study of intelligence is accessible through topics such as brain evolution, structure and function, behavioral ecology, comparative cognition, and, ultimately, the study of mind. And there is a prodigious quantity of data which is the stock-and-trade of many relevant disciplines which can be brought to bear on SETI.

In my presentation I will address: 1) the logical and scientific misconceptions we hold about intelligence that limit our ability to think about SETI, 2) examples of scientific findings that are highly relevant to SETI, and 3) a way to organize and begin to utilize these data in the context of SETI.