

The COVID pandemic can seem like a very big deal. Apart from anything else it closed down the world, it caused the biggest recession for 300 years and it has had a bigger impact on our lives than anything that has happened in Britain since the war and you have to be over 80 just to remember the war. And yet in cosmic sense how big a deal is it? The earth is small and the universe is big.

Look at this picture; it was taken by Voyager 1 in 1990 just as it was leaving the solar system. By this point it had been moving very fast for 13 years. And there you can just make out what Carl Sagan, the American physicist called a 'Pale blue dot'. That's us; from the edge of the solar system the course of a disease on that dot is hardly a big deal. And the Solar system itself is a mere dot in our galaxy. Consider this; if a spaceship left earth 2000 years ago and travelled at the speed of light – which is a million miles every 5 seconds it STILL wouldn't have left our galaxy and there are millions of galaxies in the Universe.

And yet when Carl Sagan saw that dot, this is what he said: 'The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.'

And for nearly a century the inhabitants of that dot have been listening out to find out if we are alone. Is there any other intelligent life out there? And so far...nothing, zilch, a big fat zero. No radio or microwave signal, no artificial light.

All of which leads to a strange and eerie possibility. That small and insignificant though we are, it is possible that we, we human beings are the only place in the universe that the universe knows it exists. Jupiter is unaware that it has a storm circling the planet, Saturn does not know it is surrounded by ethereal rings. Nor for that matter does your cat. That knowledge exists in us alone.

However it happened, here on this wet rock not only did life develop but intelligent life, conscious and educated. And we are it.

Exercise: For a moment concentrate on your own mind. Spend a moment thinking of all the things your mind does:

- Regulating your response to heat and cold
- Helping you sleep.....and wake up
- Remembering moments of love, moments of joy, moments of anger, moments of fear
- Planning
- Sending out antibodies to fight disease, even new ones.

The list is endless. And you mind, along with my mind, and all our minds is perhaps the most complex thing in the universe