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Du Pont suggests hydroxyl clouds as space signals

Free astronomers of today qua-

tion the possibility that intelligent
life may be found elsewhere in the
universe. The major problems now
in finding a technique by which in-
telligent beings could broadcast
their presence to other intelligences
across the light years of space.

Professor Allen H. Barrett, De-
partment of Physics, has sug-

gested a way in which this sig-

naling might be done and specu-
lates that such signals might, at
this moment, be reaching the
earth.

Barrett’s suggestion, which
came at a recent international
atmospheric meeting at Caracas,
Venezuela, was that signals
might be broadcast using the
Milky Way’s hydroxyl clouds.

The hydroxyl clouds, which are
tiny, fast-moving clouds of hydrogen
and oxygen, have been noted to
radiate waves of an unusual fre-
quency, 1,666 megahertz, from
certain parts of the sky.

Most gas clouds emit frequen-
cies of radiation that appear to be
in certain set ratios to each
signal can be more than ten times
other, but in hydroxyl clouds one
as intense as the others.

The strange signals appear to
come from small clouds only, and
instead of being blurry, they are
very narrow and pure, containing
only one frequency. Puzzled au-
toronomers have named this radia-
tion source “mysterious.”

Barrett theorizes that the mys-
terious source might actually be
a giant wave (an acronym for
microwave amplification by stim-
lated emission of radiation), us-
ing the highly charged gas itself as
the maser. The cloud, Barrett
suggests, would be pumped with
ultraviolet, infrared or radio en-
ergy.

A radio wave of the right fre-
quency, passing through such a
cloud, would set off the excited
gas molecules, and would produce
a cascade of energy. The added
energy would amplify the signal,
producing the unusual intense
emissions.

“If one grants that such things
can possibly exist,” writes Barrett in
“Science,” “interpreting the initial
evidence . . . would be our detec-
tion of a vast instantaneous com-

Barrett suggests hydroxyl clouds as space signals

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