

Opinion: Pluto is not a planet, despite SETI poll

By OLE MAN JENKINS
Staff Writer

Have you heard the news? (Probably because you are reading the newspaper) Pluto is a planet again, at least according to an opinion poll conducted by the SETI institute.

At long last, people who got their panties in a wad over the correction of Pluto's planetary status back in good ole '06 are appeased, but at what cost? In what universe does the uninformed opinion of the common man trump the data collected and analyzed by professionals?

I hate to inform you all that science is not a democracy. It is the systematic search for knowledge and truth. It is the only field untainted by the angry masses, and it's disconcerting that Millennials are grubbing it up with their nostalgia.

Nostalgia belongs at 10-year reunions and movie remakes, not in the field of Astronomy. Letting the uninformed public make decisions about what is "true" regarding the sciences not only sidetracks scientific

advancement but sets a dangerous precedent.

As Neil DeGrasse Tyson beautifully put it, "The good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it." The masses cannot decide the planetary status of Pluto based off their childhood whims just like Texans can't decide evolution isn't real. Knowledge is not up to a vote.

One could argue that the classification of planets was put up to a vote by a committee of scientists, you know, because it was. But the key difference between our Internet poll democracy and theirs is they know what they're talking about. The decisions they made and the information they have are extremely relevant to their fields of expertise. This is what they do.

I have trouble finding the Little Dipper in the night sky. I know zip-squat-diddly about astronomy and unless you're currently studying it, neither do you. Everything we know about Pluto has come from the people who make these decisions. I have faith in them, and I can say that because

they aren't politicians. We didn't vote for them, so they're probably qualified.

Yes, "back in your day" there were 9 planets. Well back in my day, we didn't know what the heck a planet was. We literally killed the people who trying to figure that stuff out.

So nothing is inherently good just because you remember it that way. The best use of memories, at least regarding science, is to learn from them, not to attempt replicating it.

If your anger stems from your fear of change, know this: The change of Pluto's planetary status was a result of fine-tuning, not a comment on Pluto's importance.

As more and more "planets" like Pluto were discovered, scientists noticed more similarities between Pluto and these soon-to-be-named dwarf planets than between Pluto and

our 8 planets. So they changed the specifications of a planet for the sake of precision and simplicity.

Scientists of all specialties take the complicated behaviors of bodies and matter in our

of Pluto from "planet" to "dwarf planet" reminds you of The Man putting you down, rest assured; Pluto is not an allegory for your fate or self-worth.

You don't have to stand up for Pluto because you identify with this dwarf planet's plight. I will let you in on a secret: you are significant. Maybe not on the universal scale, or even planetary scale, but your size does not retract from your worth. So stop projecting your existential fears on a planet and let scientists do their jobs.

Please do not mistake my criticism for hatred. I'm excited that people are getting interested in science. Apathy is a poison that so easily seizes a society. I just wish the media did not sensationalize such trivialities. The status of Pluto means much more to the people studying it than it does to you.

Do not wallow in what is lost: "Planet" is merely a title. Get excited for what there is to gain, for a better understanding of the world surrounding us infinitely in everywhere direction. This was long.



An artist's rendering of Pluto's moon Charon from Pluto's surface.

Photo courtesy of NASA

Pluto is still a planet

By RICHARD ONG
Editor-in-chief

In 2006, the International Astronomical Union decided to create a set of criterion for what constitutes a planet. They decreed a planet must orbit the sun, be large enough to form a spherical shape and clear "its neighborhood" of other orbiting bodies.

Pluto, the ninth planet, failed to meet these arbitrary criteria set by this self-appointed body of so-called "astronomers" and was thus demoted to being a dwarf planet.

Currently, the astronomical community says there are eight planets and five dwarf planets, Ceres, Pluto, Haumea, Make-make and Eros. Why would the astronomical community demote Pluto to dwarf planet, rather than raise the status of the other four dwarf planets to being actual planets?

So if a dwarf planet is not a planet, then isn't it just a dwarf? That is offensive, IAU, and I demand an apology.

Pluto was discovered in 1929 at the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Ariz. by Clyde Tombaugh, a 23-year-old Kansan looking for the mythical "Planet X" which has since been disproven.

This makes Pluto the only planet discovered by an American, which is a point of national pride. To demote Pluto from planet to dwarf planet consti-

tutes at best, un-American activity and at worst, treason.

The name Pluto was suggested by Venetia Burney, an 11-year-old schoolgirl in Oxford, who named it after the Roman god of the Underworld and it was official adopted in March, 1930. The same year, Walt Disney named Mickey Mouse's dog Pluto, after the new planet, and in 1941 Glenn T. Seaborg named element 93 Plutonium, following the trend of naming new elements after new planets.

Pluto has five moons, Charon, Nix, Hydra, Styx and Kerberos and is currently the largest Kuiper belt object.

The demotion of Pluto is deeply concerning. The idea of what a planet is always appeared to me as something concrete and absolute.

If Neil deGrasse Tyson can simply decide Pluto is not a planet anymore, then why should Mercury be considered a planet, or Earth, which fails to meet the size standards of planets such as Jupiter, Saturn and their ilk? Forgive me for thinking the definition of a planet is the one thing in life which is a constant.

I am not alone in this thinking. In 2007, the New Mexico House of Representatives passed a resolution decreeing Pluto is a planet within New Mexico, since Clyde Tom-

baugh was a long-time resident of New Mexico. I agree with much of the public in saying Pluto should remain a planet.

Currently, there are two categories within that of planets: the Rocky Planets, which are Earth, Venus, Mars and Mercury and the Gas Giants, which are Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Uranus. I propose a third subcategory of planets be created, the Planetaminus, a portmanteau of the latin *Planeta* meaning planet and *minus*, meaning smaller.

This category would include the five dwarf planets and officially categorize them as planets. After all, Earth does not completely clear its orbit, and Neil deGrasse Tyson himself referred to the area around the Rocky Planets' orbits as a "shooting gallery."

If Pluto does not meet the definition of a planet, then a strong argument could be made Earth and Mars do not either.

Furthermore, it will be diffi-

cult to teach astronomy to the public if they are so enraged by such an anodyne classification. By demoting Pluto, scientists risk creating a schism between the populace and scientists, similar to the issue of evolution or global warming, which are undoubtedly far more important.

But the core of my argument, the crux of the issue, is something far more philosophical and abstract. Pluto is a planet, not because we know it is but because we feel it is.

In long time Pluto advocate Stephen Colbert's first show, he coined the term truthiness, a

word characterizing a truth that a person making an argument know intuitively because of a "gut feeling" without regard for evidence, logic or facts. So while the current body of scientific evidence, which might change once NASA's New Horizon's probe reaches Pluto in 2015, says Pluto is not a planet, I feel like it is a planet and therefore it is one.

Pluto is a planet because we as a public have made it an integral part of both our culture and our conscious. I refuse to accept this decision by some body of "experts" as it is fallacious and morally dubious.

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