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Galaxies Twice As Bright As Previously Thought

May 18th, 2008 | by Linux W |

Astronomers led by Simon Driver of Scotland's University of St. Andrews have discovered that interstellar dust shades us from as much as 50% of the light emitted by stars and galaxies. The scientists compared the number of galaxies we could see "edge-on" against the number which were "facing us," reasoning that dust would obscure more of the former, since we already receive less light from them. SPACE.com notes, "In fact, the researchers counted about 70 percent fewer edge-on galaxies than face-on galaxies." A NYTimes report provides some additional details: "Interstellar dust absorbs the visible light emitted by stars and then re-radiates it as infrared, or heat, radiation. But when astronomers measured this heat glow from distant galaxies, the dust appeared to be putting out more energy than the stars. 'You can't get more energy out than you put in, so we knew something was very wrong,' said Dr. Driver. The results also mean that there is about 20 percent more mass in stars than previously thought."

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