Intelligent Life in the Universe
Advances in Astrobiology and Biogeophysics

This series aims to report new developments in research and teaching in the interdisciplinary fields of astrobiology and biogeophysics. This encompasses all aspects of research into the origins of life – from the creation of matter to the emergence of complex life forms – and the study of both structure and evolution of planetary ecosystems under a given set of astro- and geophysical parameters. The methods considered can be of theoretical, computational, experimental and observational nature. Preference will be given to proposals where the manuscript puts particular emphasis on the overall readability in view of the broad spectrum of scientific backgrounds involved in astrobiology and biogeophysics.

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Series Editors:

Dr. André Brack
Centre de Biophysique Moléculaire
CNRS, Rue Charles Sadron
45071 Orléans, Cedex 2, France
Brack@cnrs-orleans.fr

Dr. Gerda Horneck
DLR, FF-ME
Radiation Biology
Linder Höhe
51147 Köln, Germany
Gerda.Horneck@dlr.de

Professor Michel Mayor
Observatoire de Genève
1290 Sauverny, Switzerland
Michel.Mayor@obs.unige.ch

Dr. David Wynn-Williams †
British Antarctic Survey
High Cross, Madingley Road
Cambridge, CB3 0ET, United Kingdom
Peter Ulmschneider

Intelligent Life in the Universe

From Common Origins to the Future of Humanity

With 130 Figures
Including 31 Color Figures

Springer
Preface

One of the most exciting questions for mankind is whether we are alone in the universe. That intelligent nonhuman beings exist was commonly believed in prehistoric times as well as in antiquity. Creatures such as giants, centaurs, angels, and fairies were essential and universally accepted parts of Greek, Jewish, and Germanic mythologies. Although no fossil traces of such beings have ever been found, most of us firmly believe that nonhuman intelligent beings do indeed exist. This conviction is derived from the staggering size of the universe with roughly $10^{22}$ stars, which makes it inconceivable that we could be the only intelligent society in the universe. Indeed, modern science has shown that since the Copernican revolution all attempts to define our position as an exceptional one in the universe have failed dismally.

But if other intelligent civilizations do exist, how can we find them? Why is there no terrestrial or astronomical trace of them, despite great technological advances in recent centuries and especially in modern times? Why have we never found artifacts discarded by visiting aliens, which would convincingly prove the existence of nonhuman intelligent beings? Is the number of planets on which life is able to evolve too small, or is the formation of life – and particularly intelligent life – an extremely rare event? Could these intelligent societies face insurmountable difficulties in traveling over large galactic distances, or do they no longer exist?

Recent advances in search techniques for planets, in the theory of planet formation, and particularly in biochemistry, molecular, and cell biology are about to give answers to these questions: how life appeared and how many planets can be expected in the universe on which life, and eventually intelligent life, developed. New in this book is the argument that, by thinking carefully about the future development of mankind, one can gain insight into the nature of extraterrestrial civilizations.

The book consists of three parts: planets, life, and intelligence. In Part I, Chaps. 1–3 discuss stars, galaxies, and the origin of chemical elements, our recent planet formation theories, the search methods for extrasolar planets and what has been found so far. Chapter 4, “Planets suitable for life”, describes what constitutes an Earth-like planet and how many of them can be expected in the universe. In Part II, Chaps. 5 and 6 outline life and its
origin on Earth, how it evolved, and how intelligent life developed. Chap. 7 discusses the search for extraterrestrial life and intelligent societies. In Part III, Chap. 8, “The future of mankind”, gives possible insights into what can be expected about the nature of extraterrestrials. Finally, Chap. 9, on extraterrestrial intelligent life, constructs a likely picture of these beings and attempts to answer the question of why they don’t interact with us.

Heidelberg, June 2002

Peter Ulmschneider
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