

Contents

<i>Preface. The Cambridge sandwich</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	<i>xix</i>
1. Looking for Easter Island	1
Inherency: where is the ground plan in evolution?	5
The navigation of protein hyperspace	8
The game of life	10
Eerie perfection	13
Finding Easter Island	19
2. Can we break the great code?	22
The ground floor	23
DNA: the strangest of all molecules?	27
3. Universal goo: life as a cosmic principle?	32
A Martini the size of the Pacific	33
Goo from the sky	34
Back to deep space	38
A life-saving rain?	42
4. The origin of life: straining the soup or our credulity?	44
Finding its path	47
Problems with experiments	49
On the flat	53
Back to the test tube	58
A sceptic's charter	63
5. Uniquely lucky? The strangeness of Earth	69
The shattered orb	69
Battering the Earth	71
The Mars express	75

viii CONTENTS

Making the Solar System	77
Rare Moon	87
Just the right size	92
Jupiter and the comets	93
Just the right place	99
A cosmic fluke?	105
6. Converging on the extreme	106
Universal chlorophyll?	106
The wheels of life?	111
Fortean bladders	112
A silken convergence	115
Matrices and skeletons	117
Play it again!	120
Attacking convergence	126
Convergence: on the ground, above the ground, under the ground	134
7. Seeing convergence	147
A balancing act	148
Returning the gaze	151
Eyes of an alien?	158
Clarity and colour vision	166
Universal rhodopsin?	170
Smelling convergence	173
The echo of convergence	181
Shocking convergence	182
Hearing convergence	190
Thinking convergence?	194
8. Alien convergences?	197
Down in the farm	198
Military convergence	200
Convergent complexities	205
Hearts and minds	214
Honorary mammals	218
Giving birth to convergence	220
Warming to convergence, singing of convergence, chewing convergence	223

CONTENTS ix

9.	The non-prevalence of humanoids?	229
	Interstellar nervous systems?	230
	The conceptualizing pancake	231
	The bricks and mortar of life	234
	Genes and networks	237
	Jack, the railway baboon	242
	Giant brains	243
	Grasping convergence	261
	Converging on the humanoid	264
	Converging on the ultimate	271
10.	Evolution bound: the ubiquity of convergence	283
	Ubiquitous convergence	284
	Respiratory convergence	287
	Freezing convergence, photosynthetic convergence	290
	The molecules converge	295
	Convergence and evolution	298
	Converging trends	304
	A possible research programme	308
11.	Towards a theology of evolution	311
	An evolutionary embedment	312
	Darwin's priesthood	314
	Heresy! Heresy!!	318
	Genetic fundamentalism	323
	A path to recovery?	326
	Converging on convergence	328
12.	Last word	331
	<i>Notes</i>	333
	<i>Index</i>	446