

The Impact of Discovering Life Beyond Earth

The search for life in the universe, once the domain of science fiction, is now a robust research program with a well-defined roadmap, from studying the extremes of life on Earth to exploring the possible niches for life in the Solar System and discovering thousands of planets far beyond it. In addition to constituting a major scientific endeavor, astrobiology is one of the most popular topics in astronomy, and is of growing interest to a broad community of thinkers from across the academic spectrum.

In this volume, distinguished philosophers, theologians, anthropologists, historians, and scientists discuss the big questions about how the discovery of extraterrestrial life, whether intelligent or microbial, would impact society. Their remarkable and often surprising findings challenge our foundational concepts of what the discovery of alien life may hold for humankind. Written in easily accessible language, this thought-provoking collection engages a wide audience of readers from all backgrounds.

Steven J. Dick held the 2014 Baruch S. Blumberg NASA/Library of Congress Chair in Astrobiology at the John W. Kluge Center of the Library of Congress. In 2013 he testified before Congress on the subject of astrobiology. He served as the Charles A. Lindbergh Chair in Aerospace History at the National Air and Space Museum from 2011–2012, and as the NASA Chief Historian and Director of the NASA History Office from 2003–2009. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the NASA Exceptional Service Medal and the Navy Meritorious Civilian Service Medal, and is author or editor of 20 books, including *The Biological Universe*. He was awarded the 2006 LeRoy E. Doggett Prize for Historical Astronomy of the American Astronomical Society. In 2009, the International Astronomical Union designated minor planet 6544 stevendick in his honor.

“Living in our Milky Way galaxy with its billions of habitable planets, we humans are aching to know something, anything, about our intelligent neighbors among the stars. *The Impact of Discovering Life Beyond Earth* offers thoughtful and beautiful notions for the coming breakthrough contact.”

Geoff Marcy, *University of California, Berkeley*

“Are we alone in the cosmos? If yes, we can never be sure. If no, we might well have an answer within the decade. The 22 authors of these fascinating and informative essays say no, we are not alone, despite the fact that so far not a shred of evidence has been found for the existence of life elsewhere in the universe. But just in case they are right, we need to start thinking about the possibility that we are not alone, and here is a good place to start.”

Owen Gingerich, *Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics*
Author of *God's Planet*

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Former NASA Chief Historian



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*To Baruch S. Blumberg
and
John Billingham
In The Spirit of Exploration*

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