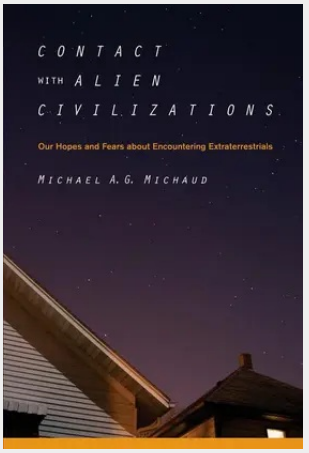
Michaud

Contact with Alien Civilizations

Our Hopes and Fears about Encountering Extraterrestrials

This book describes a wide variety of speculations by many authors about the consequences for humanity of coming into contact with extraterrestrial intelligence. The assumptions underlying those speculations are examined, and some conclusions are drawn. The book emphasizes the consequences of contact rather than the search, and takes account of popular views, not just those of scientists. As necessary background, the book also includes brief summaries of the history of thinking about extraterrestrial intelligence, searches for life and for signals, contrasting paradigms of how contact might take place, and the paradox that those paradigms allegedly create. Michael Michaud has been actively engaged in discussions of these issues within the International Academy of Astronautics. He served as Director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Advanced Technology and as Counselor for Science, Technology, and Environment at the American embassies in Paris and Tokyo.

The proper study of mankind is not merely Man, but Intelligence. 1 ¿Arthur C. Clarke, 1951 In the long-running television series ¿The X-Files,¿ the original Deep Throat said to FBI Special Agent Mulder that ¿there are those like yourself who believe in the existence of extraterrestrial life.¿ Ah, but that¿s not the question. If extraterrestrial life exists, most of it may be in simpler forms comparable to the one-celled organisms of Earth biology. Finding such life would be fascinating for scientists, but may be of only passing interest to the general public. What intrigues the average citizen is the possibility of contact with extraterrestrial intelligence. We want to communicate with other sentient beings, learning what they know and telling them about ourselves. We want to ? nd out how they are like us and how they are different. Microorganisms don¿t have a lot to say. There is another implication of contact that underlies this book: Intel- gent extraterrestrials might have an impact on our future. The information they send us¿if any¿might change our cultures. They could have c- scious intentions toward us, and possibly the technologies to reach us directly. Their intentions may be benign¿or not. Our interest in alien minds is not new. The idea that intelligent beings exist beyond the Earth has been part of the Western intellectual tradition for more than 2000 years. Sometimes this belief was widespread; at other times, it was out of fashion.



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