

Julian Chela-Flores: The Science of Astrobiology: A Personal View on Learning to Read the Book of Life (Cellular Origin, Life in Extreme Habitats and Astrobiology)

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Although several books dedicated to astrobiology have been issued recently, the book by Julian Chela-Flores entitled “The Science of Astrobiology. A Personal View on learning how to read the Book of Life” merits special attention. In addition to the classical astrobiology items, i.e., chemical and prebiotic evolution, origin and early life, search for life in the Solar System and in the Universe—which are well documented—the author relates the scientific data with other branches of knowledge and humanities such as philosophy and theology. Chapter 13, “Cultural frontiers of astrobiology” and Chapter 14, “When astrobiology meets philosophy,” are particularly interesting and illuminating.

Who better than Julian Chela-Flores to give his personal feelings on the new world of astrobiology from the inside? As Staff Associate of the Abdus Salam International center for Theoretical Physics (ICTP), he organized a series of conferences at the ICTP in Trieste on chemical evolution and the origin of life from 1992 to 1994 with Cyril Ponnampuruma, from 1995 to 1998 with François Raulin, and from 2001 to 2003 with François Raulin and Tobias Owen. The proceedings of the conferences were published in eight books. Pictures of pioneers in our field taken during these meetings are reproduced in the present book as historical and emotional testimony.

I strongly recommend this book, written by a real humanist, to any open-minded reader eager to consider “classical” astrobiology in its philosophical context. The book offers a very rare occasion to access the full dimension of astrobiology: origin, evolution, distribution and destiny of life in the Universe.

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