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In recent decades we have come to realize that the microbial world is hugely diverse, and can be found in the most extreme environments. Fungi, single-celled protists, bacteria, archaea, and the vast array of viruses and sub-viral particles far outnumber plants and animals. Microbes, we now know, play a critical role in ecosystems, in the chemistry of atmosphere and oceans, and within our bodies. The field of microbiology, armed with new techniques from molecular biology, is now one of the most vibrant in the life sciences.

In this Very Short Introduction Nicholas P. Money explores not only the traditional methods of microscopy and laboratory culture but also the modern techniques of genetic detection and DNA sequencing, genomic analysis, and genetic manipulation. In turn he demonstrates how advances in microbiology have had a tremendous impact on the areas of medicine, agriculture, and biotechnology