

From Big Bang to biospheres

Martin Rees

Institute of Astronomy, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0HA, United Kingdom

Astronomers have made astonishing progress in probing our cosmic environment, thanks to advanced technology. We can trace cosmic history back to some mysterious ‘beginning’ nearly 14 billion years ago, and understand in outline the emergence of atoms, galaxies, stars and planets – and how, on at least one planet, life developed a complex biosphere of which we are part. But these advances bring new questions into focus. How special is our Solar System? How widespread is life in our cosmos? Should we be surprised that the physical laws permitted the emergence of complexity, and what were the key stages in this emergence? And is physical reality even more extensive than the domain that our telescopes can probe? This illustrated lecture will address (but not answer!) such questions.