On Completing the Copernican Revolution

What is the nature of life and is there life on other planets? It took us 450 years from the realization that Earth is a planet to discovering Earths orbiting other stars. We are just beginning to understand the diversity of planets like our own and their origins. Now astronomy and biology could combine to tell us something new about our place in the universe.

DR. HARRY LYMAN HOOKER DISTINGUISHED VISITING PROFESSOR

Dr. Dimitar Sasselov

PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND DIRECTOR OF THE HARVARD ORIGINS OF LIFE INITIATIVE.

Dimitar Sasselov, Planetary Astrophysicist, and Director of the Harvard Origins of Life Initiative, has made recent discoveries of exo-planets (“Super-Earths”). He looks at new evidence to explore the question of how chemical systems become living systems. Using novel techniques, he has discovered a few such planets, and his hope is to use these techniques to find planets like Earth. Sasselov is a scientist on NASA’s Kepler space telescope team looking for New Earths. He is the founder and director of the new Harvard Origins of Life Initiative, a multidisciplinary center bridging scientists in the physical and in the life sciences, intent to study the transition from chemistry to life and its place in the context of the Universe. Sasselov has more than 200 technical papers in scientific journals, has edited 4 books, written popular articles, and written a forthcoming book.

The Origins Institute at McMaster University creates and fosters transdisciplinary research on origins themes across a broad range of fundamental science. It also sponsors a public outreach and lectures program, as well as an undergraduate curriculum, the Origins Research Specialization.

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