

James McTaggart: “Is there life on Earth?”

Biog:

James has been a Member of HAS for the last 6 years, although, as he has not yet paid up his Subscription, he feels that perhaps he counts, this evening, as an Outside Speaker!!

He has been interested in Astronomy since, aged five, he listened to his father reading about the Planets from Arthur Mee’s Children’s Encyclopaedia.

James lives in a rural glen with dark skies and is a keen Observer of the Moon, both because it is easy to find and because it does not mean staying up too late or getting up too early.

He is an educational psychologist, by profession, specialising in early years and in child trauma.

Synopsis:

Exoplanet surveys are now regularly turning up planets of nearly Earth size and likely similar composition. We are now very close to finding an Earth-like planet in a habitable zone around its star, and the next generation of space telescopes will probably find many. These planets may be habitable, but is there life on them? Will we actually be able to tell? In fact, we have been practising this for years by trying to find life on Earth! Even when we know the answer this is not easy. The talk will look at how we might need to look for, and how we have tried to detect it. In particular, we have used observations from the solar system missions such as Galileo looking back at Earth. Have we succeeded in finding life on Earth? Is there any hope of doing so for exoplanets? We will look at some of the data and try to decide.