

Preface

In an age where geographical boundaries are weakening through electronic communications, but strengthening in places where groups of people feel a new found confidence to express their national and ethnic identity; in an age where surveillance has become technologically easier and its means more pervasive; and in an age where environmental concerns have forced us to begin to cooperate on an international level not seen before, the meaning of the word ‘liberty’ and the place of individual freedom, has become a topic once more of concern to all human beings.

However, alongside these Earth-bound concerns, there is emerging an entirely new playing field on which intellects and governments will decide the fate of human freedom—outer space.

As more national governments develop expansive space programmes and more private companies design and build spaceships with the capacity to launch satellites, robots and humans into space, the number of organisations in space is growing. With this expansion comes the inevitable consequence of an expanding number of interests to protect and so with that, the chance for a clash of ownership, rules and regulations which together define the environment for individual freedom.

There are not, at the time of writing, a large number of humans in space to argue about their liberty, but this will surely change. And this small band of extraterrestrial settlers, whenever they take root on the space frontier, will exert an influence on terrestrial liberty. Having oversight and control over the geopolitically important places above the Earth’s gravity well, their view of freedom will be as significant for the people that sit at the bottom of the gravity well into which they peer as it will be for them. It will not take many people in space to make a discussion of extraterrestrial liberty relevant.

This book is a collection of essays on extraterrestrial liberty. The bulk of them is the intellectual progeny of a meeting we held in London in June 2013 co-organised by the UK Centre for Astrobiology and British Interplanetary Society to consider what freedom is beyond the Earth.

We would like to thank the British Interplanetary Society for supporting this discussion, which has led to this collection. We would also like to thank Springer, in particular Ramon Khanna, Charlotte Fladt and Doug Vakoch at the SETI Institute for bringing this book into fruition.

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