

Preface

Finding a definition for ‘liberty’ or ‘freedom’ has never been successful. It is not surprising as these words encompass a vast variety of things. We might speak of freedom from state interference or the freedom to achieve our personal capacities with the help of the state. We might speak of freedom to choose our own government. We can talk of freedom of expression, of thought, of religious belief or freedom of movement. Many of these notions of freedom are interlinked, and some are even inseparable. Many of them can also be examined as separate social or political challenges, confounding the difficulties in finding a coherent self-consistent set of ideas that can be summarised as liberty.

Nevertheless, it is also wise not to allow this complexity to lead one into cultural relativism: that all versions of liberty are just cultural permutations and combinations of these different ingredients, and therefore no human settlement or nation defines a better version of freedom. Freedom of expression, for instance, is not a particular type of liberty legitimately liked by some and not by others. The ability of a human individual to freely articulate their views, in the written or spoken word, on their society or those who govern over them without constant threat of imprisonment or execution is an objectively good type of freedom to expect and demand for all humans. It is right that human individuals should not be denied the opportunity to hear the views of other human beings because those other people have been murdered by a government that happens to find their views disagreeable. If human communities are not to degenerate into collections of contented slaves under the orders of despots, then encouraging independence of mind, and with it freedom of expression, is one objectively desirable form of liberty to pursue at all times and in all places. Freedom of expression is as good on the other side of the Milky Way as it is on Earth.

Maximising liberty in its various manifestations lies at the core of some of the large-scale ideological struggles and even military conflicts of human history. Although it is possible to identify some aspects of liberty that most people can agree are desirable, the conflicting views of what constitutes too much collective oversight and control and what constitutes enough space for individual ideas of the good life can probably never be completely resolved. So long as there are humans with

differing views of what constitutes a fully formed notion of liberty then disagreement will exist. And indeed, if all humans did agree on what represents a complete package of human liberty, then ironically it would probably spell the end of free thought and discourse.

The most constructive way to deal with these differences is to build open and free societies where people can debate their ideas of freedom and to construct the political and economic systems that allow for these ideas to be turned into governance and for this governance to change as ideas and opinions alter.

In no place are these challenges more apparent than in outer space. Confronted by lethal conditions, social isolation and the technical complications of supplying the basic needs of air, food and water, extraterrestrial settlements are the locus of a newfound discussion on the nature of liberty. They force us to continue a discourse that began in the emerging democracies of ancient Greece and has continued into the societies of present-day Earth. What sort of freedoms can, or should, people expect on the surface of the Moon when great collective efforts are needed to provide even oxygen to breathe? How can we ensure that people are not driven to desperate depths of depression by the utterly monotonous grey landscape that may sap the sense of self-worth and sense of freedom of mind? Are these questions answered differently on Mars or on an isolated spaceship traveling to a distant planet or even star? These questions merely point at the enormity of the branch of political philosophy that examines extraterrestrial liberty.

On 12 and 13 June 2014 we continued a conversation begun by the UK Centre of Astrobiology and the British Interplanetary Society in 2013. It focussed on the means by which governance structures in space are to be built in a way that maximises the chances for different forms of liberty to flourish. It built on the 2013 discussion which examined the more general idea of what liberty is beyond Earth and what conditions might be necessary for liberty to survive in the extreme conditions of space.¹ Governance in space has been examined before, but there has remained a deficit of discussion about the specific links between governance and human freedom. The chapters presented in this volume are mainly derived from this second discussion at the British Interplanetary Society (Extraterrestrial Liberty II: Human Governance) with added contributions to build a coherent volume.

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

As with our first volume, this book is in one sense a present-day stimulus for discussion. Our motivation was to explore the notion of liberty beyond Earth as a genuinely interesting and important discussion essential to the effort to establish a permanent human presence beyond Earth. However, in another sense, it is also a set of ideas for the benefit of the future inhabitants of the space frontier. Living in these environments, they will have a much better concept of what liberty is and how they

¹Cockell, C.S. (ed.) (2014). *The Meaning of Liberty Beyond Earth*. Berlin: Springer.

are to realise it than we can probably imagine. Nevertheless, with volumes on liberty, they may at least find themselves with a set of historical ideas that will add to the richness of the totality of available thought. The more ideas there are, the more likely balanced concepts of freedom can be formulated. And, as this volume makes clear, in the lethal extremes of outer space, ideas and concepts of freedom will be in high demand.

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Implications for Freedom

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