

Chapter 2

Constrained Dissent and the Rights of Future Generations

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Abstract The following paper will defend the viability, and constructive importance, of dissent within stable and more or less autonomous space settlements. That is to say, settlements of the sort which will come after the establishment of an initial human presence. (Which may have to be carried out under some form of command structure of a sort familiar from existing space programs.) The paper will, however, locate dissent and the entitlement to dissent within a broader cluster of commitments, placing it in tension with various other goods and duties which we are properly concerned to secure and fulfil. The politics of dissent in space are likely to be the politics of balancing out competing concerns. Specifically, it is assumed that some of us have a duty to try and help extend the presence of humans to nearby regions of space; that we also have duties towards future generations (and cannot inflict intolerable conditions upon them; and that we are and ought to be committed to various broadly-liberal freedoms including those concerning dissent). These concerns are individually plausible, difficult to abandon and also difficult to balance. It may be difficult to try to meet our duties without neglecting the legitimate interests of those who come after us and who cannot simply be sacrificed, in an illiberal manner, to our goals. Given that scope for dissent is basic to the freedom of any future generation, but also potentially dangerous, what seems to be important is that dissent of at least some kinds is (up to a point) both tolerated and constrained. The paper finishes with some comments upon the kind of political system which might be able to cope with the arising task of balancing out competing claims.

Keywords Dissent • Duty • Future generations • Authoritarianism • Liberal norms

What follows will suggest that there are some things which, surprisingly, we can and ought to do in space. Things such as engage in dissent: strikes, occupations, public demonstrations, non-cooperation, civil disobedience and (more generally)

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acts which publicly challenge those in authority and their right to dictate policy or to command allegiance. This is surprising because it would involve dissent in a life-threatening situation. The paper is also, in light of the very real dangers of disagreement and dissent under extreme conditions, at least implicitly concerned with what we cannot and ought not to do, i.e. engage in reckless actions of the sort which feature in various familiar instances of science fiction. Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966) is a case in point. It depicts lunar colonists in revolt against the Earth, hurling rocks at the latter. This is something which (trivially and obviously) we ought not to do and something which others also should not do. What I am proposing, instead, is a moral license for what we might call 'constrained dissent'.

As a point of clarification, there is nothing specifically novel or second-rate about a discussion of dissent as constrained rather than unconstrained. There are, after all, traditions of dissent which stretch to the violation of the law, but are in various respects *limited* by a concern to avoid harm. One obvious example is industrial action by members of the emergency services. (A problem explored elsewhere in this volume by James Schwartz.)¹ Another is civil disobedience, understood in a broadly Gandhian sense as protest which abides by non-violence and by civility towards the other. (A problem explored in the paper by Charles Cockell.)²

Constraint, in this Gandhian sense, does not imply passivity or half-heartedness but rather a determination to protest while avoiding certain sorts of dreadful, unintended, consequences or a spiraling out of control. (There are occasions on which a temporary setback or defeat is simply better than the likely outcome of pressing on regardless.)

In at least some respects, a non-destructive dissent in space would have to be constrained in a broadly similar sense. Everything could not be permissible, everything could not be possible. Revolution would be an extremely risky business, a rare and possibly catastrophic exception within a broader more routine pattern of dissent. It is dissent of the latter sort that I will focus upon. Such dissent would have to be tailored to the restrictive circumstances of life in a lethal environment. What follows will explore the bounds of such dissent and the way in which the constraining of dissent on the part of future generations might lead us to regard at least some settlements as ethically flawed projects, as projects which (all other things being equal) should not be undertaken. The attempt to say something about the permissibility and socially useful role of dissent will also point towards broader political requirements about the nature of the political system, the kind of democracy, which might work best elsewhere as a successor to the command structures of the first human settlements.

¹See J.S.J. Schwartz, 'Lunar Labor Relations' in this volume.

²C. Cockell 'Disobedience in Outer Space', in this volume. For the Gandhian roots of this approach see Milligan (2014).

2.1 Picturing a Space Community

The initial human presence in a Moon base or on Mars will, no doubt, inherit the military-derived command structure of familiar forms of space exploration complete with mission commanders and the authorization of autonomous decision-making combined and ultimate answerability to agents back on Earth. The most appealing part of this picture is perhaps autonomy and it is likely to be part of this picture because of the difficulties of time-lags and the impracticality of distant decision making. We know this much from the Apollo program where the initial landing required a local over-ride of the targeted landing site in order to avoid mission failure. Even so, in combination with a degree of autonomy, a broadly military chain of command, stretching back to the Earth, is likely to be preserved. This is not, however, a political structure which would be indefinitely sustainable in the face of a more expanded human presence anywhere except perhaps on the Moon or in some sort of O'Neill habitat parked conveniently at a Lagrange point within easy reach of the Earth. The decisive issue is, again, proximity and practicality. Even on Mars, the pressures towards a preponderance of autonomy and of local control would be difficult, over the course of time, to resist. At some point, any settled community is likely to regard the Earth as too distant and lacking in an immediate grasp of local realities. The more distant the colony is from the Earth, the stronger the pressure towards local autonomy is likely to be. Yet autonomy is consistent with the shortening of lines of communication between elites, bureaucracies and security personnel. It is consistent with the local dominance of authoritarian and military-style command structures rather than anything resembling a democracy.

Nonetheless, from a settlement survival point of view and assuming a capacity for any settlement to be self-supporting (if necessary), the promotion of autonomous-control could be possible and could be the right thing to do. There is an obvious sense in which the hands-on practicalities of community building are likely to be understood far better by those in situ rather than by agents who are months away in terms of journey time and perhaps more distant still in terms of mindset. (Again, Mars is a better model here than the Moon, which is still nearer to us in journey time than the Americas were to the main seats of colonial power in early modern Europe.) This 'locals know better' claim does not, of course, apply to all knowledge or to all survival requirements. Sometimes those on Earth will have a better breadth of vision and will know what has to be done far better than a settler community. They may have a better appreciation of the bigger picture of what makes a community sustainable over the course of time. Arising from this, there are ethical issues in play concerning the disclosure of risk and levels of difficulty. There is information that authorities on Earth might sometimes be tempted to withhold in order to sustain trust, co-operation and morale. Yet there will still be at least some epistemic advantages which settlers will (almost unavoidably) have over agents who are situated within a terrestrially-based command system. Most obviously, settlers will have a better grasp of the terrain and the phenomenology of 'being a settler', a better grasp of 'what it is like' to experience such a situation. While the

motivating rationale for settlement may include the interests of agents who remain emphatically Earth-bound, too much terrestrial resistance to settlement autonomy may be unwise for all concerned, although timing may matter. The outlook of those born into a settler community is likely to be very different from that of the pioneers, adventurers, misfits and escapists who are deemed to have the right stuff to join an initial settler body. Too rapid a transfer of control may be as bad as too slow a transfer. One upshot of this way of regarding matters is that it may be better to speak, in the above manner, of ‘settlement’ as the ultimate goal of an offworld expansion rather than ‘colonization’, given the answerability to a power elsewhere which the latter implies. ‘Colonization’ also carries unwelcome overtones of exploitation and dominance which may, similarly, be something of a bad start. ‘Settlement’ and talk of ‘settler communities’ may not be entirely free of negative associations however these associations are at least somewhat weaker.

In what follows, the focus will not only be upon routine dissent, but upon such dissent within a particular type of context, the type of context supplied by more or less autonomous and stable non-terrestrial communities of a scale which is greater than that of any initial settlement party and, a little more precisely, beyond the scale on which an initial quasi-military command structure would be either appropriate or adequate. We might, of course, argue about exactly how large the population would have to be before this was the case and somewhere in such a discussion appeal might be made to the thousands-strong communities of humans already living in the polar extremes on Earth. The population of Antarctica is about 4000 throughout the year with about 1000 people wintering over. However the fluctuating numbers of such communities indicates that they are not communities of the right, more or less stable, sort. Stable communities will, instead, have a concern for social reproduction, for the reproduction rather than the replenishment of population from elsewhere; for the local reproduction of the means of existence (assuming the self-sufficiency specified above); and for the reproduction of various social goods, such as solidarity, respect and mutual recognition as well as any material goods which might be required to avoid the alienation associated with a strong sense of deprivation and inequality of circumstance.

I will take it as important (for survival purposes and not simply morale) that members of such settlements do not feel themselves to be, in relation to the Earth, permanently at the edge of the fun fair but never quite able to join in the festivities. In short, for the sake of sustaining a sense of social hope, some approximation to a good life must be possible. Social hope of this sort, although it has been defined in various different ways (by philosophers such as Richard Rorty, social theorists such as Manuel Castells, and political figures such as Vaclav Havel), seems to be an important factor in convincing agents that some sacrifices are necessary for the common good and that the common good itself is the good of a community which is actually worth safeguarding (Rorty 1998, 1999; Castells 2015; Havel 1991). And while hope and sacrifice may also be consistent with penal settlements, in which compulsory labour is followed by freedom and citizenship, what I will assume here is that settlement membership will not be either a form of punishment or an idealistic sacrifice for the sake of mankind (and not a foolish mistake by those who do

not realize what they are getting). What is envisaged is neither a penal community nor a saintly community, and certainly not a ship of fools, but rather a modestly sized ordinary, stable community of people living out their lives under extraordinary circumstances. People who, moreover and by virtue of their ordinariness, will be inclined to complain about their lot when they regard it as in some way intolerable or at least unjust.

Finally, in line with previous work (Schwartz 2015; Milligan 2015b), I will assume that such deliberation need not be mere conjecture and may reasonably be constrained by appeal to a Rawlsian ‘veil of ignorance’ test for extraterrestrial political systems (Rawls 1971). In brief, to consider whether a candidate proposal or approach to political organization is at all viable, we should consider whether or not we would agree to it under circumstances where we happened to be unaware of how it would impact upon us. While this might not be the best approach to terrestrial political arrangements (because we know already happened to know what it is like to be terrestrial agents, how we are actually situated in the world and what would and would not constitute terrestrial justice) it is an approach which has a good deal to offer in relation to deliberation about the novel (as yet unlive) circumstances of life in space. Until we have a better constraining strategy for deliberation, a variant of the Rawlsian ‘veil of ignorance’ may offer the best test of the *fairness* of any extraterrestrial political theory.

2.2 The Problem of Competing Goods

Our attitude towards any such stable but ordinary community faces something of a difficulty, beyond lack of experience concerning actual space settlement. The difficulty arises because a number of our more plausible ethico-political commitments concerning power, rights, dissent and the state, turn out to be in tension with one another. Such tension is not, however, a sign of any obvious adherence to one-commitment-too-many or mistaken allegiance to a belief which need only be removed in order to secure a tension-free consistency. Rather, I want to suggest that tensions of the relevant sort tell us something about what it is to be human and consequently to value different goods at one and the same time. Elsewhere, I have suggested that space ethics is, in certain irreducible respects, dilemmatic for precisely this reason (we are naturally and perhaps inescapably pluralists when it comes to goods). This is a claim which I would like to extend now to ethico-political matters. More specifically, the following three claims identify different sorts of duties which go hand in hand with the goods of human survival, the opportunity of a good life for future generations and the goods associated with liberal freedoms. While they are individually plausible, when brought together they generate difficulties:

- (1) Some (not all) currently-existing agents have a duty to try to extend human life through space settlement.
- (2) Assuming that we are agents of the sort specified in (1), we are also agents who have duties towards future generations (wherever situated).

And

- (3) We are and ought to be committed to the survival of at least some basic liberal political norms, such as those concerning the permissibility of dissent.

These claims do not generalize in a way which places an impossibly demanding burden upon any humans. Those who are extremely poor and, to all intents and purposes powerless with regard to consciously exerted influence upon humanity's future, cannot reasonably be said to have duties of the sort specified in the first two claims. Only some of us can have duties of the relevant sort and the assumption here is that some of us do indeed have such duties. However, this fact alone does not remove the tension between these claims. Nor is it obvious that such a tension should always be resolved in favour of fulfilling the duty which is specified in (1) at the expense of the liberal norms alluded to in (3). Indeed, one of the running themes of the Extraterrestrial Liberty discussions out of which this text has emerged is the suitability of deliberating about short and medium term space objectives from a broadly liberal and pragmatic standpoint rather than from a standpoint which is dominated entirely by a sense of the need for survival and by what Stephen Baxter has referred to as 'the cold equations' of some kind of neo-Darwinian survivalist ethic, an ethic which would simply be unlivable over any protracted period of time for most human agents (Baxter 2015).

Additionally, some space settlements (even if they could be stabilized) would not obviously be worth establishing even if doing so helped to further the duty specified in (1). As an extreme example, a settlement which would require or collapse into a dictatorially abusive junta-dominated system does not seem to be an ethically worthwhile goal. Solving the justification problem for space settlement (explaining why it might *sometimes* be worth the required resources) is a difficult task. Doing so for some manner of 'Iron Skies' option is likely to prove impossible. Here, I allude to a popular, and rather lightweight, science-fiction film about a Fourth Reich on the Moon and also to Jack London's classic dystopian novel of resistance to tyranny, *The Iron Heel* (1908). But even without the introduction of space-juntas, jackboots or tanks upon the lawn, more common or garden curtailments of freedoms may be anticipated as a real possibility. Abortion rights as well as freedoms to carry to term without severe penalties may be compromised in the interests of community sustainability depending upon the carrying capacity of a local settlement and the difficulty of becoming pregnant and producing offspring under non-terrestrial conditions (Milligan 2015b). More generally, if a space settlement is too liberal in its freedoms and entitlements to dissent then it is unlikely to

survive. But if it is too illiberal then establishing it might not be a worthwhile or defensible goal (and, for such a strongly-illiberal settlement, survival problems are also likely to emerge over the course of time, for reasons specified below). Beyond a certain point, we may well decide that the exercise of settling some location *L* may be too likely to compromise our understanding of basic liberal norms.

Admittedly, some of these comments take us into a very grey area but, in a sense, that is the natural element of liberal political discourse and it gives no immediate reason for us to retrace our steps in order to look for a better way to smooth out all tensions or to reconcile all competing commitments. What we can say with some confidence is that an entitlement to dissent is basic to liberal political norms, basic to stability and to social solidarity and basic also to respect for persons. So too is an entitlement to *tolerant response* in the case of protest which, even if sometimes illegal, abides by reasonable standards of civility such as the avoidance of reckless endangerment. Legal penalties may be expected in the latter case, but they should differ in terms of stigma and severity from those applied in response to more commonplace forms of lawbreaking and in response to life-threatening political violence (such as terrorism or the use of revolutionary political force). A difficulty still arises here because it is by no means obvious that this approach *can* be put in place for *all* extraterrestrial communities in *all* places and at *all* points in time. Dissent which might have no great detrimental terrestrial impact on Earth could, conceivably, yield a Hobbesian meltdown in at least some contexts elsewhere, given prevailing conditions of extreme vulnerability. What does not constitute reckless or life-threatening action *here* might constitute both *elsewhere*.

And two further points make matters even worse. Firstly, a point stressed on several occasions by Charles Cockell: the conditions of vulnerability and dependence in space will generate a tendency towards authoritarian political control within any settlement. Whoever controls the air, food and water will be in a position to control the people (Cockell 2013). Secondly, a point which owes something to Mikhail Bakhtin's Classic study of popular early modern carnival and dissent: authoritarianism creates its own counter-culture (Bakhtin 2009). This claim seems to be borne out by any reasonably detailed examination of human history at any historical period. Dissent, like the poor, seems always to be with us. It is not something we can reasonably wish away even if we wanted to do so. It is not something which could be eradicated from communities of the sort specified above, even through the use of determined authoritarian measures and even though the dissenting agents will be acting in the life-threatening environment of space. Accordingly, even if it was morally permissible to support an Iron Skies option of radically authoritarian political control, such an option would not actually eradicate the pressures towards dissent and it might, because of its extreme inflexibility, prove to be ultimately counterproductive. Rather than imposing obedience by main force, it might generate problems which could well cut across the fulfilment of the duty specified in (1) to extend human life.

2.3 A Closer Look at the Commitments

The first two commitments are broadly communitarian, the third is more ambiguous and may be read in either an individualist or a communitarian manner, as a concern for individual rights and entitlements or as a concern for collective entitlements such as the right to strike, to form and join trades unions, and to protest or speak out against the government. Upon closer examination, all three commitments have a degree of ambiguity about them. The idea of extending human life in (1) can be read in at least two quite different ways, as a claim about the preservation of our species or as a claim about the preservation of our ‘moral community’ (the bounds of which are not necessarily set by common biological origins or shared patterns of DNA). The idea of duties to future generations, cited in (2), can also be read as an obligation to particular future agents or to future groups of humans no matter who they turn out to be. In line with a previously supported position (Milligan 2015a) I will suggest that we resolve the former ambiguity by endorsing the idea that our primary obligation to humanity is to a moral community (rather than a species) and that we resolve the latter ambiguity by accepting that our duty to future humans is, in some sense, to a collectivity rather than to particular individuals.

One important reason for the former move is that a species-focused reading of our duty to humanity generates too many anomalies. For example, if it were discovered that a section of the population were ‘Spock-like’ and did not actually share human DNA would this in any way entitle us to exclude them, or their descendants, from our survival plans? Doing so would look suspiciously like a form of prejudice as well as being practically unwise. By virtue of their biological difference they might turn out to be better equipped to survive and to preserve the legacy of our shared community. Moreover, it is the species reading of a duty to extend human life which is connected to the kind of narrow and impractical consequentialism which holds that *any* sacrifice is legitimate if it is required to secure survival. The moral community reading of our duty to humanity is, contrastingly, tied to the possibility that through certain kinds of moral failures a community might (figuratively) ‘forfeit its right to survive’ or might undermine the value of community survival through a betrayal of the basic values on which the sense of community is based. In less abstract terms, it is better to be part of a short lived but good community rather than a long lived but morally bankrupt or even repugnant community. A Fourth Reich in space, no matter how long it lasted, could not count as success. With this understanding of our duty to humanity in place, we can begin to appreciate that while there is a tension between (1) and (3) there is also a commonality of concern. Together they combine into a commitment to survival under conditions which do not dehumanize but instead offer some manner of freedom, even if it is of the paradoxical sort referred to by Cockell (2015) as ‘freedom in a box’.

The second commitment, concerning duties towards future generations, is like the first in the sense that it is a more obviously communitarian than individualist concern. Duties towards future generations really do seem to be duties towards

generations and not towards specific individuals for reasons specified in what is known as the ‘non-identity problem’ (Parfit 1986). If action ϕ involves environmental degradation which might, in 100 years time, lead to harm to members of a future generation, *Bob, Mary, Elizabeth* et al. I might try to avoid it. But in doing so I am likely to alter who comes into existence (which may no longer be *Bob, Mary, Elizabeth* et al.) because who ends up coming into existence is sensitive to even minor alterations in our current behaviour. (This is also the reason why time travelers in popular television programs and films are warned not to change anything because they might then end up not being born.) I can do ‘the right thing’ for the sake of (a) future generations whoever their constituents are, and (b) those particular future agents who will come into existence no matter what I do (and the number of these will tend towards zero as we move beyond the next generation). But I cannot ‘do the right thing’ for anyone whose existence I cannot actually and reliably foresee. This, again, stresses the broadly communitarian nature of the duties in question. And this is no bad thing. The right kind of ethic for space may (I think ‘should’) acknowledge the value of individuals as unique and irreplaceable, but it is unlikely to be a strong form of individualism. Although not focused upon particular discrete known-in-advanced individuals, such future-oriented duties do seem to be real. As a symptomatic but extreme illustration: we do not get to plant time bombs in the public square just so long as no currently living and determinate or identifiable agents will be harmed. There is no requirement that the likely victims of our actions must enjoy the terra firma of existence in order for us to have duties to avoid the actions in question. This kind of future-oriented deliberation is familiar from discussions of nuclear waste management and environmental harm more generally (Routley and Routley 1978). In short, we do not get to ignore any likely and dire consequences of our actions even if currently existing agents will not live to see or be harmed by them.

The third commitment is more focused upon individual rights or at least upon a combination of individual and collective entitlements. And so the way of resolving its ambiguity is not as clear cut as opting for one thing or another as an important good. It certainly does not reduce simply to a liberal valuing of choice. My suggestion that a problem arises from of our duties towards future generations in space settlements is not the familiar one that it may be wrong to bring individual agents, involuntarily, into existence under the compromised circumstances of having to live somewhere other than in the midst of the lush greenery of the Earth. The latter claim may have something to it, but is problematic if pressed too far. After all, every human agent is brought into being under compromised circumstances which are also not of their own choosing. What matters is not so much choice as such but rather the nature of the (admittedly unchosen) circumstances. Those who think of space exploration in terms of a basic biological survival imperative may consider such issues moot because humans will breed no matter what ethicists say. But here we would do well to remember that not all humans will do so, that many couples in the West now choose to have only one child or none at all, and that slaves often tried to entirely avoid reproduction precisely because of the conditions under which any offspring would have to live. Yet here we may wonder about just how bad

circumstances would have to be before we were justified in thinking about matters in the same way in relation to bringing agents into being in space. On a crude consequentialist account it might be tempting to say that we ought only to bring humans into being where there is likely to be a preponderance of happiness over suffering within their lives, or where the net balance is likely to be at least neutral. But what makes it difficult to buy into this view is that it would make most human reproduction, now and throughout history, a mistake. We need not lapse into some manner of philosophical pessimism in order to accept the inconvenient truth that life has generally been quite difficult for most humans at most times in the past and this remains the case in many parts of the world even today.

Rather than appealing to some dubious consequentialist claim (in which things, overall, shall be well) it seems more plausible to hold that whoever we bring into being should have at least the *opportunity* for some sort of good life (on a complex understanding of the latter) even if suffering figures as a component part of such a life just as it figures as a component part of our lives and most human lives. It should be a life, in short, which the agent themselves could readily accept as meaningful in spite of suffering and meaningful and worthwhile in its own right rather than being simply a part of someone else's grand plan. To say this much is precisely to regard such a life in terms which are familiar from a liberal discourse of respect, integrity and individual worth. It is also to appeal to a sense of inter-generational justice. And this is where a Rawlsian test seems to fit quite well. Under imaginary conditions where we do not know which generation we were going to belong to (the present generation or a future generation in a space settlement) we might well hold that enough had been done to offer a good life no matter where we happen to end up situated, and no matter when. This being so, the opportunity of a good life is the kind of requirement which might lead us to regard arrangements as just or as an approximation to justice. They might well pass a Rawlsian test for political deliberation about the unfamiliar conditions of life in space.

To deny basic freedoms and any entitlement to dissent, simply in order to fulfil our terrestrially-derived plans, when we are sure of actually living in better times than those who might come later, looks like a way of regarding future generations only as a means to our ends rather than as groups of beings who will have ends and aspirations of their own, beings who will (in a familiar philosophical terminology derived from Kant) be *ends in their own right* and beings towards whom justice is due. In the light of this, the case for upholding claim (3) in relation to space starts to look strong. Indeed, the case for deliberating about an orderly transition from first landing to at least some political freedoms and entitlements to dissent within a settled autonomous community, looks more or less clear cut. If we cannot look ahead to the realistic possibility of political freedoms then the project of settlement will involve, from the outset, a notable moral failure of duty towards future generations. We may, of course, become trapped at some point in a tragic dilemma where some form of wrongdoing is tolerable because it is unavoidable, because we face only a choice of moral failures. But we may also have a reasonable hope for something better and this goes to the heart of what it is to have 'social hope' of the sort which political justice ultimately requires.

2.4 Dissent and Political Structure

Even so, embedded rights and entitlements to dissent are unlikely to reproduce anything which will look closely similar to terrestrial liberty in a modern liberal democracy. Liberty is always likely to be compromised and constrained or boxed-in. And so, as conceded at the outset, violence of the sort which helped to bring various of the Western democracies into being (the American and French Revolutions, the revolutions of 1848, two major international wars and multiple militarized civil conflicts) are likely to be mutually destructive for the contending parties. In space, there can be no question of destroying and then rebuilding vital infrastructure at some later point in time. Rather, life support systems must be maintained and emergency measures of an authoritarian sort may sometimes have to be tolerated as the only way in which this can be done speedily and efficiently. And this may have to be accepted even though it is a circumstance which would probably be exploited in unfair ways by elites under the cover of acting in the general interest. And their position too is worthy of note.

While the focus of this volume has predominantly been upon the position of ordinary citizens or subjects of extraterrestrial political systems, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the standpoint of elites on the assumption that the latter may well exist in the kinds of stable societies which are envisaged. We need not, of course, exclude the possibility of some more radically egalitarian option but we may have to exclude any reasonable possibility of arriving at it as the immediate successor arrangement following on from the command systems of initial settlement. The ideologically tempting option for elites faced with dissent is likely to be broadly Hobbesian. That is to say, the message that safety is simply too fragile to justify *any* defiance of the powers that be will appeal. When Thomas Hobbes penned *Leviathan* (1651), the classic defense of authority as outside of any social contract and beyond answerability to the population at large, he may have been wrong about the ever-present precariousness of safety, but his picture of a life without absolute, top-down, sovereignty tending to be ‘nasty, brutish’ and, above all, ‘short’ will, no doubt, be a tempting picture for those who would benefit most directly from authoritarian rule.

Nonetheless, the Hobbesian option is short-termist in a context where attention to the bigger picture of securing longer-term stability is required. I say this because many if not most settlements in space are likely to fail at some point in the face of external obstacles and internal weaknesses although the nature of failure may vary from continuing dependence upon the Earth through to actual starvation and system collapse. Of the difficulties making success so hard to achieve, the internal problems may at least be mitigated, but not entirely removed, by tapping into the socially advantageous side of dissent and into the collective wisdom which it often represents. There are, after all, matters which no individual should face alone for the simple reason that they are too large to fully appreciate. Our individual ethical sensibilities have been formed through coming to terms with much more restricted, localized and personal predicaments. Familiar ethical experiences have not

equipped us with the kind of practical wisdom which would be required to individually come to grips with survival issues where the future of humanity as a whole is at stake. Shared deliberation, but also dissent and certain kinds of democratic constraining, may be ways of getting beyond this limitation and tapping into something more distributed and greater.

For this reason, although I have favoured Rawlsian deliberation and liberal political norms, there is a strongly communitarian dimension to the picture painted above and this feeds through into a valuing of dissent rather than a Hobbesian suspicion about the latter as a socially-destructive threat. Dissent would have to be a feature of any healthy political system for several reasons. The most obvious of these is the psychological constraint that agents cannot actually live in a constantly future-oriented mindset with every action shaped by a primary concern for humanity's future. The needs and desires of currently-existing agents must always be addressed as one of the goods towards which a functioning political system aims. And while it may be only one of the goods pursued by a stable and functioning state (because elite interests invariably do shape policy) it is still necessarily a part of the mix. The most likely outcome of, instead, promoting only elite interests or a continuous sacrifice for the future, out of a sense of moral idealism, would be a deep resentment against the state, against future generations and against those whose grandiose plans have generated this unfair predicament in the first place. (That would be 'us'.)

Alexander Herzen's classic 19th century warning about this kind of mentality is still striking. 'Do you truly wish to condemn all human beings alive today to the sad role of caryatids supporting a floor for others some day to dance on...or of wretched galley slaves, up to their knees in mud, dragging a barge filled with some mysterious treasure and with the words "progress in the future" inscribed on its bows?' (Herzen 1979, p. 37). Some years ago, as part of the anniversary of another rather well known, dystopian, text about the future, Glover (1984) reflected upon Herzen's warning by suggesting that such a heavy emphasis upon future people combined with persistent sacrifice for their sake would be not only unfair but would risk a constant deferral of benefits. These points still hold. Future-orientedness would not work in the present and there is no reason to believe that the future generations of agents who might live in a stable settlement would or should be willing to sacrifice so much and still sustain the levels of solidarity and commitment required to survive. A technologically advanced world without liberties, including certain kinds of dissent, is also likely to be a world without hope.

More broadly (and these are considerations which borrow again from Rawls) dissent seems able to perform (i) basic expressive functions; (ii) communicative functions; and (iii) a corrective function in the face of democratic deficits and political failures. In addition, borrowing rather more from the political experience of the early 21st century, dissent can be a corrective to the problem of intransigent majorities who are unwilling to make concessions in order to secure social solidarity. Of course, as Rawls points out, there is a danger that dissent, even in its most useful and constructive forms such as civil disobedience, can overwhelm a political system if it is badly timed: when, for example, broadly justifiable political

institutions are already reeling under multiple sources of protest and discontent (Rawls 1971). Similarly, dissent can widen social divisions when those in authority dig their heels in and refuse to budge.

What this may steer us towards is not a pathological or Hobbesian hostility towards political protest and unrest but rather a conception of constrained-dissent tolerant political systems as the best candidate systems to move towards after an initial command-control settlement. And here, what counts a constrained-dissent rather than recklessness will vary from case to case and from settlement to settlement. (Just as there are variations in what these might involve when we contrast the Earth and anywhere else. What is reasonable here may not be reasonable elsewhere.) As for the more distant future, that really is a matter of conjecture, although we may doubt that anything akin to the utopia envisaged by some early space pioneers, such as Konstantin Tsoilkovsky will ever arrive. But with regard to a level of tolerance for dissent, we may still do rather more than suggest (or rely upon) an enlightened survival-oriented attitude on the part of ruling elites. Indeed, a reliance upon elites looks suspiciously like a losing political strategy under any circumstances and particularly so given their epistemically-compromised situation, their tendency to become enclosed, trapped in their own privileged word to the detriment of society as a whole. Rather, tolerance for dissent or more specifically for *certain kinds of* dissent is something which is best structured into the political process in ways which do not leave goodwill (a scarce resource at the best of times) to do most of the heavy lifting.

As a closing point, there is at least one kind of political process which attempts to do just this, one which has gained increasing attention in recent years both among protest movements (such as the Occupy movement of 2011) and among those aiming to instate peace processes (such as the process in Northern Ireland), i.e. consensus deliberation (Graeber 2014; Castells 2015). All other things being equal, if we are ever faced with the task of trying to build settled communities, there is a case for saying that we ought to be aiming and planning for a transition to something like consensus deliberation systems. In other words, democracy but not quite as we know it (at least with regard to the treatment of minorities). Consensus in the relevant specialized sense is not about getting an impossible 100 % agreement as to the *best* course of action, but rather involves arriving at an option which everyone, or almost everyone, and not just electoral victors, can live with. This approach contrasts strongly with the dominant versions of parliamentary democracy in which policy tends to be shaped by majorities (which are often majorities only in the sense of parliamentary outcomes rather than actual popular support) who give way to the Cromwellian urge of imposing their will. A constrained dissent, which acknowledges that the risks of widespread political violence are too great, and a consensus politics through which the authority of majorities (or of the larger of several competing minorities) is acknowledged but constrained by constitutional rights and minority vetoes, may even be potential allies. This is all very pragmatic territory with the rough edges of political monomania removed.

Constrained dissent, where the constraint is built into the very culture of dissent, and is not itself simply a matter of following the guide-rails established and

tolerated by political elites, may not only be an (admittedly fallible) way of avoiding a violent political meltdown, it may also be a way of acknowledging the standing of majorities while providing an informal mechanism (in addition to formal vetoes and constitutional rights) to hold their power in check and to show the extent of feeling among non-dominant groups. Dissent, in this sense, provides a ‘check’ for emerging social divisions which might be addressed while there is still time, before they reach threatening proportions. If a popular culture of constrained dissent and consensus structures could be married together then there is a possibility that some version of democracy off-world might just be inclusive enough and stable enough *for long enough* to allow a chance of a good life for its citizens and a decent chance of community survival up to the point of settlement division. This could give at least some autonomous settlements a fighting chance of defying the odds by evolving the new and unanticipated political tools which will, no doubt, be needed if any such settlements are ever to survive under the unprecedented pressures of life in space.

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