

Preface

Faced with a political decision, a law or even an entire government that we find disagreeable, how are we to dissent? The question has perplexed social scientists for a long time and the resolution to this question has been extraordinarily diverse. From a minor and non-violent act of civil disobedience (such as refusing to pay taxes) to a full-scale geographically widespread bloody revolution, humanity has embarked on a dizzying array of methods to change ‘the system’.

However, it is not clear if these methods (or at least the ones we might decide are desirable) can simply be transplanted into the space frontier; for example, a revolution that destroys infrastructure and causes depressurisation might kill everyone. Consequently, it is necessary to embark on a new discussion on the nature of dissent in space. How can we go about disagreeing with, and changing, the structures of governance put in place? How can liberty be preserved in the process?

On 11 and 12 June 2015 we continued the third and final discussion on extraterrestrial liberty begun by the UK Centre of Astrobiology and the British Interplanetary Society in 2013. It focused on the means by which dissent can be organised in outer space. It built on the previous two volumes resulting from our meetings on extraterrestrial liberty. The first volume 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 (Cockell 2014). In the second volume, we took these concepts of liberty and gave them form by considering in more practical terms governance structures in space and how they might influence the type of liberty experienced by people in space (Cockell 2015).

This third and final volume in our trilogy on extraterrestrial liberty considers how we might rebel against the very social and governance structures we have created in space. How can we disagree with or dismantle organisational structures that no longer serve the purposes they were intended for?

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

As has been said in the prefaces of the previous two volumes, the trilogy we have created has two functions. First, it is a set of essays written with the intention of contributing to a new branch of political philosophy concerned with extraterrestrial liberty. Second, these essays are a record of some of the thoughts of people in the twenty-first century who have never lived in space, but with the benefit of the expansive literature on liberty developed on Earth, the authors offer their ideas and thoughts on how liberty might develop among permanent denizens of the space frontier. At the end of this exercise, all of us who have taken part in these discussions and written these essays have only one message for those on the space frontier: good luck with your efforts to build spacefaring societies in which liberty can flourish!

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References

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Dissent, Revolution and Liberty Beyond Earth

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