

Logic and Space Colonies

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Well before the midpoint of the 21st century, space colonization will become entirely technologically feasible.

The technical projections are widely available on the internet. The larger question, unresolved, is the human element. It is both fair and important to ask: Where is the criminal element in these space colony projections? Where is the vandalism? The fanaticism? The mental illness? Where are all the labor strikes? The political upheavals? The drug casualties? The plain old bad attitudes? Space will be an utterly unforgiving environment. There will be no margin for the kinds of problems we see incessantly here on Earth.

In the past, when things went sour on Earth, one could always just pack up and move on, even to the point of becoming a refugee. That prospect will not exist in space colonies for many generations to come.

Space colonies will be Spartan places to live in at best, claustrophobic at worst. Most of the space exploration done so far has been by military men, possessing the best discipline the military can provide. And they have needed every bit of it, for their brief flings in orbit. But now we are seriously talking about large scale, permanent colonization of the solar system, and eventually beyond. The key word being permanent. This means civilians, and it means children being born in the colony and growing up there, never knowing anything else. Do you suppose that some among the future generations of spacefarers will be less enthusiastic about their lot in life than their parents, who idealistically made the trip out? These kids, or their kids, may actually resent their restrictive environment, and dream of the oceans and forests of Earth.

This is certainly not to say that space colonization cannot happen. The technological elements are in the pipeline now, and it was inspiring to read Steven Hawking calling for us to make the effort. However, we have not addressed the psychological pressures, or the elements of human nature involved. We like to imagine the valiant Captain Kirk sailing through the cosmos. Okay, well, how about Timothy McVeigh in a space station?

The sanguine attitude that some people have about space colonization is disturbing. Forget the comparisons of Columbus venturing to America, or the wagon trains rolling west. There is no comparison in human history to the colossal challenges that will face space colonists. We cannot imagine the psychological impact such a life will have on those people, at least during the critical first two generations. This is apart from the physical changes they will face, living permanently in reduced gravity and a recycled environment.

The only way it will work will be in very slow baby steps, with the good Earth being not too far away. The first colonists would live there in shifts of a year or two. A lunar colony would have to be established, and well established, before anything else could be contemplated. The fact that

frozen water exists on the Moon makes the whole endeavor much more doable. Mining, zero gravity labs, and tourism will provide the initial economic drives. Get people excited about this and the problems can be overcome.

Space colonization can happen, and Dr. Hawking was right about the need for it to happen. There is also a need for a very thorough, realistic public discussion on it, and that should begin at once.

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