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#### Ambiguities in the OST that allow private appropriation have kicked off a race to develop space, setting the stage for a debris crisis and the domination of space by unaccountable billionaires. Current laws fail due to lax rules and forum shopping.

Dovey 21 [Ceridwen Dovey, “Space Exploration At What Price?,” Readers Digest Asia Pacific, 5/1/21. <https://www.pressreader.com/australia/readers-digest-asia-pacific/20210501/281487869174485>] CT

One environmental risk all stakeholders agree on is that posed by space debris. There’s already about 5000 satellites in orbit around Earth, of which roughly 2000 are operational, plus hundreds of millions of tiny pieces of debris. Ninety-five per cent of the stuff in low-Earth orbit is classified as ‘space junk’. More space debris makes accessing space costlier in terms of loss of equipment (and possibly of human life). There’s also the risk of the Kessler effect: a cascade of collisions, to the point where the most useful orbital slots become permanently clogged. “We are in the process of messing up space, and most people don’t realise it because we can’t see it the way we can see fish kills, algal blooms or acid rain,” Michael Krepon, an expert on nuclear and space issues, said in 2015. Maybe we’ll understand only when it’s too late, “when we can’t get our satellite television and our telecommunications ... when we get knocked back to the 1950s”. The current clashes over space are rooted in the nitty-gritty of international space law. There are five multilateral UN treaties governing space, most importantly the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST), which has been ratified by 109 states, including all major spacefaring nations. It defines outer space as a global commons, the province of all humanity, free to be used and explored “for the benefit and in the interests of all countries”, “on a basis of equality” and only for “peaceful purposes”. Article II of the OST has become the major sticking point in the new space race. It forbids “national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means”. No nation can make a territorial claim on the Moon or on any other celestial bodies, such as asteroids. While the OST contains no explicit ban of appropriation by private enterprise, Steven Freeland, a professor specialising in space law at Western Sydney University and Australia’s representative to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), says discussions at the time of the OST negotiations clearly show the states parties, including the US, were “of the opinion that Article II prohibited both public and private appropriation”. Yet this perceived legal uncertainty is the loophole that commercial companies are now exploiting. They’ve actively lobbied for an interpretation of OST Article II in the domestic space law of certain countries, to allow for private ownership of resources extracted from the Moon or other celestial bodies. They argue that, because the OST declares all humans are free to “use” space, companies can exercise this right by mining anywhere they like. They won’t claim ownership of the land itself, but will claim ownership of the resources they mine there. They’ve already had a major win in this regard. The space industry lobby in the US put pressure on members of Congress to reinterpret the US’s obligations under international space law, to become more ‘business friendly’. The outcome was the 2015 Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act, signed into law by President Obama. Since then, companies owned by US citizens have been given the right to claim ownership of – and sell – any resources they mine off-Earth. Further emboldened by the Trump administration, the “commercial [space] industry is becoming far more aggressive in how it lobbies for its own interests” in the US, Freeland says. There have been Acts proposed in recent years to enable a corporate space culture of “permissionless innovation”, with little regulatory oversight. In a 2017 speech, President Trump’s space law adviser Scott Pace said, “It bears repeating: outer space is not a ‘global commons’, not the ‘common heritage of mankind’, not ‘ res communis’ [area of territory that is not subject to legal title of any state], nor is it a public good.” Even if you accept the US government’s interpretation of Article II – that space resources, but not the territory on which they’re located, can be owned – what happens if someone mines an asteroid out of existence, which is an act of outright appropriation? Should the public trust that companies mining in space will do the right thing? We’re still uncovering the full extent of terrestrial mining companies’ cover-ups. For instance, inhouse scientists at Exxon – now Exxon-Mobil, one of the biggest oil and gas companies in the world – knew long ago that burning fossil fuels was responsible for global warming, but they actively buried those findings and discredited climate change science for decades. We live in a world where ‘meta-national’ companies can accrue and exercise more wealth and power than traditional nation-states. Silicon Valley is believed to be becoming more powerful than not only Wall Street but also the US government. Branson and other space billionaires like to reassure the masses they’re “democratising” space: just as plane travel started out for the wealthy and gradually became cheaper, so too will space travel. Yet this conveniently overlooks the fact that railroads, airlines and now space industries have all been heavily subsidised by taxpayers. “When we take a step back and notice that private corporations are often even less accountable than governments, then it seems mistaken to say these decisions have been democratised,” Ryan Jenkins, an emerging sciences ethicist at California Polytechnic State University, says. “They’ve merely been privatised.” Lenient supervision. In 2017, Luxembourg – already a corporate tax haven, complicit in international investor tax avoidance and evasion – followed the US’s lead and passed a space-resources law that allows companies to claim resources they extract from space as private property. Guardian journalist Atossa Araxia Abrahamian recounted a chilling comment from an American space executive: “We just want to work with a government who won’t get in the way.” Companies anywhere in the world can stake resource claims in space under this new law; their only requirement is an office in Luxembourg. This sets a murky precedent of ‘regulatory forum-shopping’, where companies choose to incorporate in states where they’ll be most leniently supervised. In 2018, a Silicon Valley start-up called Swarm Technologies illegally launched four miniature satellites known as CubeSats into space from India. They’d been refused launch permission in the US due to safety concerns over whether the satellites could be tracked once in orbit. Fined US$900,000 by the US Federal Communications Commission, the company was subsequently given permission to start communicating with its satellites, and launched more CubeSats as part of a payload on a SpaceX rocket that November. In January 2019, the company raised $25 million in venture capital. Space start-ups that are prepared – unlike Swarm Technologies – to play by the rules are nonetheless still proposing to launch their own swarms of hundreds or thousands of satellites into very low orbits around Earth. SpaceX has already launched over 1000 internet-beaming Starlink satellites, aiming to have a constellation of at least 30,000 in orbit eventually. The UK’s Royal Astronomical Society said these satellites will “compromise astronomical research” due to light pollution, and questioned why there’d been no proper consultation with the scientific community before launch.

### Advantage 1: Space Debris

#### Space debris is appropriation – permanently occupies and precludes free use. Requires regulation.

De Man 19 [Philip De Man, *Exclusive Use in an Inclusive Environment: The Meaning of the Non-Appropriation Principle for Space Resource Exploitatio*n, Springer (2019)] CT

It is only when a state refuses to remove a space object whose non-functional status is objectively established, that the exercise of the freedom to use outer space by other states is denied on the basis of an act or negligence that originates from a discretionary exercise of positive authority by a single state not grounded in the actual exercise of its own freedom to explore or use outer space. From this perspective, it is rather diffi cult, if not impossible, to distinguish the refusal to remove nonfunctional satellites at the end of their life from an infringement of Article II OST . Every activity in space entails an exclusion of others. 387 Only when this exclusion is enforced in the absence of justification by the enjoyment of the freedom to explore and use outer space does the denial of the correlative freedom of others amount to an unlawful form of appropriation. For, without use, the justifi cation of exclusivity can only be found in the primordial authority as arrogated by the owner to himself, on this same basis. Though they constitute a minority, a number of authors have construed the refusal to remove inactive satellites as a violation of the principles of the UN space treaties as well. As such, Williams has noted that it is to be wondered whether inactive satellites are complying with the requirements of Article I of the 1967 Space Treaty, particularly the « benefi t and interest of all countries» and «freedom of scientifi c investigation». It is submitted that, on these grounds, inactive satellites using up orbital positions, particularly in the GEO, are open to question. 388 While the author primarily analyses the problem from the perspective of Article I OST , Sterns and Tennen rightly contend that the refusal to remove a derelict craft from orbit is the functional equivalent of appropriation of outer space, prohibited by Article II of the Outer Space Treaty. […] Similarly, a nonfunctioning satellite remaining in orbit for an extended period of time could be considered as equivalent to a place-saving object. 389 Combining the fi nality of Articles I and II OST , Fernández-Brital suggests that the placement of non-functional artificial objects in space constitutes a form of appropriation, as it occupies a position that would otherwise be free for the use of others. Though the language is wanting for linguistic accuracy, the author’s observation demonstrates considerable legal perspicacity: [a]s it is a physical truth that two objects [cannot occupy] the same place at the same [time,] when somebody leaves a debris [ sic ] in outer space, [he] is performing the appropriation of the place occupied by the same [, which is] an [action] forbidden by the [Outer Space] Treaty as it is [known]. […] The Treaty allows the «use» of outer space. Placing or leaving rubbish in outer space is not using it in accordance with the Treaty, it is against the rules. 390 Considering the unlawful nature of the act of keeping a non-functional satellite in space to be established, Christol then proposes that due consideration would have to be given to the situation where a non-functional space object was occupying an orbital position of great value for telecommunication or factgathering purposes. The presence of such a space object in orbit does not serve the interests of anyone. Thus, legal and practical means must be devised imposing a legal duty on the launching authority to remove or have removed, if it does not have the capabilities, such an object from orbit. The station-keeping procedures which allow it to remain in a preferred orbital position must be employed to put it into a non-utilitarian [ sic ] and non-interfering orbit. 391 Such a legal obligation already exists, however. As such, a number of authors have argued that, if Article VIII OST should not yield to the powers of other states to remove the disused space object , the failure to remove such an object or to disown it should be construed as a fault or negligent action, or should at least trigger a presumption to this effect. 392 As to the international obligation that has been violated, it has been suggested that the failure to respect the UN space debris guidelines may serve as a point of reference to determine whether a state has exercised due diligence in launching and operating a space object in the sense of Article IX OST . 393 As the statements of the authors cited above have made clear, however, there is no need to rely on indirect indications derived from a set of unenforceable guidelines to suggest a violation of a binding principle of the Outer Space Treaty. For, by virtue of the failure to fulfi l the conditions of the ITU regulations to acquire the protected use of a particular orbital position, the active refusal to remove a disused space object from its occupied position, considering the conditionality of the right not to be interfered upon actual operation, constitutes a violation of the letter and spirit of the legal system established by Article II jo. Article I OST .

#### Increasing space debris levels will inevitably set off a chain of collisions.

Chelsea **MuñOz-Patchen, 19** - ("Regulating the Space Commons: Treating Space Debris as Abandoned Property in Violation of the Outer Space Treaty," University of Chicago, 2019, 12-6-2021, https://cjil.uchicago.edu/publication/regulating-space-commons-treating-space-debris-abandoned-property-violation-outer-space)//AW

Debris poses a threat to functioning space objects and astronauts in space, and may cause damage to the earth’s surface upon re-entry.29 Much of the small debris cannot be tracked due to its size and the velocity at which it travels, making it impossible to anticipate and maneuver to avoid collisions.30 To remain in orbit, debris must travel at speeds of up to 17,500 miles per hour.31 At this speed even very small pieces of debris can cause serious damage, threatening a spacecraft and causing expensive damage.32 There are millions of these very small pieces, and thousands of larger ones.33 The small-to-medium pieces of debris “continuously shed fragments like lens caps, booster upper stages, nuts, bolts, paint chips, motor sprays of aluminum particles, glass splinters, waste water, and bits of foil,” and may stay in orbit for decades or even centuries, posing an ongoing risk.34 Debris ten centimeters or larger in diameter creates the likelihood of complete destruction for any functioning satellite with which it collides.35 Large nonfunctional objects remaining in orbit are a collision threat, capable of creating huge amounts of space debris and taking up otherwise useful orbit space.36 This issue is of growing importance as more nations and companies gain the ability to launch satellites and other objects into space.37 From February 2009 through the end of 2010, more than thirty-two collision-avoidance maneuvers were reportedly used to avoid debris by various space agencies and satellite companies, and as of March 2012, the crew of the International Space Station (ISS) had to take shelter three times due to close calls with passing debris.38 These maneuvers require costly fuel usage and place a strain on astronauts.39 Furthermore, the launches of some spacecraft have “been delayed because of the presence of space debris in the planned flight paths.”40 In 2011, Euroconsult, a satellite consultant, projected that there would be “a 51% increase in satellites launched in the next decade over the number launched in the past decade.”41 In addition to satellites, the rise of commercial space tourism will also increase the number of objects launched into space and thus the amount of debris.42 The more objects are sent into space, and the more collisions create cascades of debris, the greater the risk of damage to vital satellites and other devices relied on for “weather forecasting, telecommunications, commerce, and national security.”43 The Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines44 were created by UNCOPUOS with input from the IADC and adopted in 2007.45 The guidelines were developed to address the problem of space debris and were intended to “increase mutual understanding on acceptable activities in space.”46 These guidelines are nonbinding but suggest best practices to implement at the national level when planning for a launch. Many nations have adopted the guidelines to some degree, and some have gone beyond what the guidelines suggest.47 While the guidelines do not address existing debris, they do much to prevent the creation of new debris. The Kessler Syndrome is the biggest concern with space debris. The Kessler Syndrome is a cascade created when debris hits a space object, creating new debris and setting off a chain reaction of collisions that eventually closes off entire orbits.48 The concern is that this cascade will occur when a tipping point is reached at which the natural removal rate cannot keep up with the amount of new debris added.49 At this point a collision could set off a cascade destroying all space objects within the orbit.50 In 2011, The National Research Council predicted that the Kessler Syndrome could happen within ten to twenty years.51 Donald J. Kessler, the astrophysicist and NASA scientist who theorized the Kessler Syndrome in 1978, believes this cascade may be a century away, meaning that there is still time to develop a solution.52

#### It cascades with catastrophic results including nuclear war, mass starvation, and economic destruction.

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Whatever the initial cause, the result may be the same. A satellite destroyed in orbit will break apart into thousands of pieces, each traveling at over 8 km/sec. This virtual shotgun blast, with pellets traveling 20 times faster than a bullet, will quickly spread out, with each pellet now following its own orbit around the Earth. With over 300,000 other pieces of junk already there, the tipping point is crossed and a runaway series of collisions begins. A few orbits later, two of the new debris pieces strike other satellites, causing them to explode into thousands more pieces of debris. The rate of collisions increases, now with more spacecraft being destroyed. Called the "Kessler Effect", after the NASA scientist who first warned of its dangers, these debris objects, now numbering in the millions, cascade around the Earth, destroying every satellite in low Earth orbit. Without an atmosphere to slow them down, thus allowing debris pieces to bum up, most debris (perhaps numbering in the millions) will remain in space for hundreds or thousands of years. Any new satellite will be threatened by destruction as soon as it enters space, effectively rendering many Earth orbits unusable. But what about us on the ground? How will this affect us? Imagine a world that suddenly loses all of its space technology. If you are like most people, then you would probably have a few fleeting thoughts about the Apollo-era missions to the Moon, perhaps a vision of the Space Shuttle launching astronauts into space for a visit to the International Space Station (ISS), or you might fondly recall the "wow" images taken by the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope. In short, you would know that things important to science would be lost, but you would likely not assume that their loss would have any impact on your daily life. Now imagine a world that suddenly loses network and cable television, accurate weather forecasts, Global Positioning System (GPS) navigation, some cellular phone networks, on-time delivery of food and medical supplies via truck and train to stores and hospitals in virtually every community in America, as well as science useful in monitoring such things as climate change and agricultural sustainability. Add to this the [disabling] ~~crippling~~ of the US military who now depend upon spy satellites, space-based communications systems, and GPS to know where their troops and supplies are located at all times and anywhere in the world. The result is a nightmarish world, one step away from nuclear war, economic disaster, and potential mass starvation. This is the world in which we are now perilously close to living. Space satellites now touch our lives in many ways. And, unfortunately, these satellites are extremely vulnerable to risks arising from a half-century of carelessness regarding protecting the space environment around the Earth as well as from potential adversaries such as China, North Korea, and Iran. No government policy has put us at risk. It has not been the result of a conspiracy. No, we are dependent upon them simply because they offer capabilities that are simply unavailable any other way. Individuals, corporations, and governments found ways to use the unique environment of space to provide services, make money, and better defend the country. In fact, only a few space visionaries and futurists could have foreseen where the advent of rocketry and space technology would take us a mere 50 years since those first satellites orbited the Earth. It was the slow progression of capability followed by dependence that puts us at risk. The exploration and use of space began in 1957 with the launch of Sputnik 1 by the Soviet Union. The United States soon followed with Explorer 1. Since then, the nations of the world have launched over 8,000 spacecraft. Of these, several hundred are still providing information and services to the global economy and the world's governments. Over time, nations, corporations, and individuals have grown accustomed to the services these spacecraft provide and many are dependent upon them. Commercial aviation, shipping, emergency services, vehicle fleet tracking, financial transactions, and agriculture are areas of the economy that are increasingly reliant on space. Telestar 1, launched into space in the year of my birth, 1962, relayed the world's first live transatlantic news feed and showed that space satellites can be used to relay television signals, telephone calls, and data. The modern telecommunications age was born. We've come a long way since Telstar; most television networks now distribute most, if not ali, of their programming via satellite. Cable television signals are received by local providers from satellite relays before being sent to our homes and businesses using cables. With 65% of US households relying on cable television and a growing percentage using satellite dishes to receive signals from direct-to-home satellite television providers, a large number of people would be cut off from vital information in an emergency should these satellites be destroyed. And communications satellites relay more than television signals. They serve as hosts to corporate video conferences and convey business, banking, and other commercial information to and from all areas of the planet. The first successful weather satellite was TIROS. Launched in 1960, TIROS operated for only 78 days but it served as the precursor for today's much more long-lived weather satellites, which provide continuous monitoring of weather conditions around the world. Without them, providing accurate weather forecasts for virtually any place on the globe more than a day in advance would be nearly impossible. Figure !.1 shows a satellite image of Hurricane Ivan approaching the Alabama Gulf coast in 2004. Without this type of information, evacuation warnings would have to be given more generally, resulting in needless evacuations and lost economic activity (from areas that avoid landfall) and potentially increasing loss of life in areas that may be unexpectedly hit. The formerly top-secret Corona spy satellites began operation in 1959 and provided critical information about the Soviet Union's military and industrial capabilities to a nervous West in a time of unprecedented paranoia and nuclear risk. With these satellites, US military planners were able to understand and assess the real military threat posed by the Soviet Union. They used information provided by spy satellites to help avert potential military confrontations on numerous occasions. Conversely, the Soviet Union's spy satellites were able to observe the United States and its allies, with similar results. It is nearly impossible to move an army and hide it from multiple eyes in the sky. Satellite information is critical to all aspects of US intelligence and military planning. Spy satellites are used to monitor compliance with international arms treaties and to assess the military activities of countries such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Figure 1.2 shows the capability of modem unclassified space-based imaging. The capability of the classified systems is presumed to be significantly better, providing much more detail. Losing these satellites would place global militaries on high alert and have them operating, literally, in the blind. Our military would suddenly become vulnerable in other areas as well. GPS, a network of 24-32 satellites in medium-Earth orbit, was developed to provide precise position information to the military, and it is now in common use by individuals and industry. The network, which became fully operational in 1993, allows our armed forces to know their exact locations anywhere in the world. It is used to guide bombs to their targets with unprecedented accuracy, requiring that only one bomb be used to destroy a target that would have previously required perhaps hundreds of bombs to destroy in the pre-GPS world (which, incidentally, has resulted in us reducing our stockpile of non-GPS-guided munitions dramatically). It allows soldiers to navigate in the dark or in adverse weather or sandstorms. Without GPS, our military advantage over potential adversaries would be dramatically reduced or eliminated.

### Advantage 2: Corporate Colonialism

#### Tech-billionaires promote private space colonization as a source of infinite resources. This rationalizes unrestrained consumption and replicates the logic of imperialism.

Mccormick 21 [Ted McCormick writes about the history of science, empire, and economic thought. He has a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University and teaches at Concordia University in Montreal. “The billionaire space race reflects a colonial mindset that fails to imagine a different world”. 8-15-2021. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/the-billionaire-space-race-reflects-a-colonial-mindset-that-fails-to-imagine-a-different-world-165235. Accessed 12-15-2021; //marlborough JH]

It was a time of political uncertainty, cultural conflict and social change. Private ventures exploited technological advances and natural resources, generating unprecedented fortunes while wreaking havoc on local communities and environments. The working poor crowded cities, spurring property-holders to develop increased surveillance and incarceration regimes. Rural areas lay desolate, buildings vacant, churches empty — the stuff of moralistic elegies. ¶Epidemics raged, forcing quarantines in the ports and lockdowns in the streets. [Mortality data](https://wellcomecollection.org/works?query=%22bills+of+mortality%22&production.dates.from=1600&production.dates.to=1699&sortOrder=asc&sort=production.dates) was the stuff of weekly news and [commentary](https://doi.org/10.7227/TSC.27.3.2). ¶Depending on the perspective, mobility — chosen or compelled — was either the cause or the consequence of general disorder. Uncontrolled mobility was associated with political instability, moral degeneracy and social breakdown. However, one form of planned mobility promised to solve these problems: colonization. ¶Europe and its former empires have changed a lot since the 17th century. But the persistence of colonialism as a supposed panacea suggests we are not as far from the early modern period as we think. ¶Colonial promise of limitless growth ¶Seventeenth-century colonial schemes involved plantations around the Atlantic, and motivations that now sound archaic. Advocates of expansion such as the English writer Richard Hakluyt, whose [Discourse of Western Planting (1584)](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/exploration/text5/hakluyt.pdf) outlined the benefits of empire for Queen Elizabeth: the colonization of the New World would prevent Spanish Catholic hegemony and provide a chance to claim Indigenous souls for Protestantism. ¶But a key promise was the economic and social renewal of the mother country through new commodities, trades and territory. Above all, planned mobility would cure the ills of apparent overpopulation. Sending the poor overseas to cut timber, mine gold or farm cane would, [according to Hakluyt](https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=70), turn the “multitudes of loiterers and idle vagabonds” that “swarm(ed)” England’s streets and “pestered and stuffed” its prisons into industrious workers, providing raw materials and a reason to multiply. Colonization would fuel limitless growth. ¶As English plantations took shape in Ulster, Virginia, New England and the Caribbean, “[projectors](https://doi.org/10.1163/15733823-00215p01)” — individuals (nearly always men) who promised to use new kinds of knowledge to radically and profitably transform society — tied mobility to new sciences and technologies. They were inspired as much by English philosopher Francis Bacon’s vision of a tech-centred state in [The New Atlantis](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2434/2434-h/2434-h.htm) as by his advocacy of observation and experiment. ¶Discovery and invention ¶The English agriculturalist Gabriel Plattes cautioned in 1639 that “[the finding of new worlds is not like to be a perpetual trade](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?cc=eebo2;c=eebo2;idno=a68588.0001.001;node=A68588.0001.001:5;seq=29;vid=15242;page=root;view=text).” But many more saw a supposedly vacant America as an invitation to transplant people, plants and machinery. ¶The inventor Cressy Dymock (from Lincolnshire, where fen-drainage schemes were turning wetlands dry) sought support for a “[perpetual motion engine](https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/view?docset=main&docname=62A_08)” that would plough fields in England, clear forest in Virginia and drive sugar mills in Barbados. Dymock identified private profit and the public good by speeding plantation and replacing costly draught animals with cheaper enslaved labour. Projects across the empire would employ the idle, create “elbow-room,” heal “unnatural divisions” and make England “[the garden of the world](https://www.dhi.ac.uk/hartlib/view?docset=main&docname=64_18).” ¶Extraterrestrial exploration ¶Today, the moon and Mars are in projectors’ sights. And the promises billionaires Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos make for colonization are similar in ambition to those of four centuries ago. ¶As Bezos told an audience at the [International Space Development Conference](https://www.geekwire.com/2018/jeff-bezos-isdc-space-vision/) in 2018: “We will have to leave this planet, and we’re going to leave it, and it’s going to make this planet better.” Bezos traces his thinking to Princeton physicist Gerald O’Neill, whose 1974 article “[The Colonization of Space](https://space.nss.org/the-colonization-of-space-gerard-k-o-neill-physics-today-1974/)” (and 1977 book, The High Frontier) presented orbiting settlements as solutions to nearly every major problem facing the Earth. Bezos echoes O’Neill’s proposal to move heavy industry — and industrial labour — off the planet, rezoning Earth as a mostly residential, green space. A garden, as it were. ¶Musk’s plans for Mars are at once more cynical and more grandiose, in timeline and technical requirements if not in ultimate extent. They center on the dubious possibility of “[terraforming](https://www.businessinsider.com/nasa-just-quashed-elon-musks-plans-to-make-mars-habitable-for-humans-2018-7)” Mars using resources and technologies that don’t yet exist. ¶Musk planned to [send the first humans to Mars in 2024](https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-spacex-mars-plan-timeline-2018-10), and by 2030, he envisioned breaking ground on a city, [launching as many as 100,000 voyages from Earth to Mars](https://www.businessinsider.com/elon-musk-says-we-could-put-a-million-people-on-mars-within-a-century-2015-6) within a century. ¶As of 2020, the timeline had been pushed back slightly, in part because terraforming may require bombarding Mars with 10,000 nuclear missiles to start. But the vision – a Mars of thriving crops, pizza joints and “entrepreneurial opportunities,” preserving life and paying dividends while Earth becomes increasingly uninhabitable — remains. Like the colonial [company-states](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120928127) of the 17th and 18th centuries, [Musk’s SpaceX leans heavily on government backing but will make its own laws on its newly settled planet](http://bostonreview.net/science-nature/alina-utrata-lost-space). ¶A failure of the imagination ¶The techno-utopian visions of Musk and Bezos betray some of the same assumptions as their early modern forebears. They offer colonialism as a panacea for complex social, political and economic ills, rather than attempting to work towards a better world within the constraints of our environment. ¶And rather than facing the palpably devastating consequences of an ideology of limitless growth on our planet, they seek to export it, unaltered, into space. They imagine themselves capable of creating liveable environments where none exist. ¶But for all their futuristic imagery, they have failed to imagine a different world. And they have ignored the history of colonialism on this one. Empire never recreated Eden, but it did fuel centuries of growth based on expropriation, enslavement and environmental transformation in defiance of all limits. We are struggling with these consequences today.

#### If only wealthy elites can tap the vast resources of outer space, we lock in a permanent and unconscionable inequality. Private space colonization amounts to unchecked exploitation and authoritarian corporate control of future settlements. Spencer ‘17

Spencer, Keith A. [senior editor at Salon]“Against Mars-a-Lago: Why SpaceX's Mars Colonization Plan Should Terrify You.” Salon, Salon.com, 7 Jan. 2020, https://www.salon.com/2017/10/08/against-mars-a-lago-why-spacexs-mars-colonization-plan-should-terrify-you/.

When CEO Elon Musk announced last month that his aerospace company SpaceX would be [sending cargo missions](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2017/09/29/elon-musk-says-his-next-spaceship-could-not-only-take-to-you-the-moon-and-mars-but-from-n-y-to-london-in-29-minutes/?utm_term=.85279aa2076a) to Mars by 2022 — the first step in his tourism-driven colonization plan — a small cheer went up among space and science enthusiasts. Writing in the New York Post, Stephen Carter [called](http://nypost.com/2017/10/07/elon-musks-inspiring-vision-for-reaching-mars-and-the-stars/) Musk’s vision “inspiring,” a salve for politically contentious times. “Our species has turned its vision inward; our image of human possibility has grown cramped and pessimistic,” Carter wrote: "We dream less of reaching the stars than of winning the next election; less of maturing as a species than of shunning those who are different; less of the blessings of an advanced technological tomorrow than of an apocalyptic future marked by a desperate struggle to survive. Maybe a focus on the possibility of reaching our nearest planetary neighbor will help change all that." The Post editorial reflected a growing media consensus that humankind’s ultimate destiny is the colonization of the solar system — yet on a private basis. American government leaders generally agree with this vision. Obama egged on the [privatization of NASA](http://blogs.discovermagazine.com/80beats/2010/02/01/obamas-nasa-budget-so-long-moon-missions-hello-private-spaceflight/) by legislating a policy shift to private commercial spaceflight, awarding government contracts to private companies like SpaceX to shuttle supplies to the International Space Station. “Governments can develop new technology and do some of the exciting early exploration but in the long run it's the private sector that finds ways to make profit, finds ways to expand humanity,” [said](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/03/08/nasa_private_space_nasa/) Dr. S. Pete Worden, the director of the NASA Ames Research lab, in 2012. And in a Wall Street Journal [op-ed](https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-will-return-to-the-moonand-go-beyond-1507158341?mod=e2fb) this week, Vice President Mike Pence wrote of his ambitions to bring [American-style capitalism to the stars](https://www.salon.com/2017/08/06/tacoma-the-next-video-game-from-gone-home-creators-imagines-the-gig-economy-in-space/): “In the years to come, American industry must be the first to maintain a constant commercial human presence in low-Earth orbit, to expand the sphere of the economy beyond this blue marble,” Pence wrote. One wonders if these luminaries know their history. There has be no instance in which a private corporation became a colonizing power that did not end badly for everyone besides the shareholders. The East India Company is perhaps the finest portent of Musk’s Martian ambitions. In 1765, the East India Company forced the Mughal emperor to sign a legal agreement that would essentially permit their company to become the de facto rulers of Bengal. The East India Company then collected taxes and used its private army, which was over 200,000 strong by the early 19th century, to repress those who got in the way of its profit margins. “It was not the British government that seized India at the end of the 18th century, but a dangerously unregulated private company headquartered in one small office, five windows wide, in London, and managed in India by an unstable sociopath,” [writes](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/04/east-india-company-original-corporate-raiders) William Dalrymple in the Guardian. “It almost certainly remains the supreme act of corporate violence in world history.” The East India Company came to colonize much of the Indian subcontinent. In the modern era, an era in which the right of corporations to do what they want, unencumbered, has become a [sacrosanct](https://www.salon.com/2017/09/19/trumps-interior-secretary-on-national-monuments-sell-em-and-strip-em/) [right](https://www.salon.com/2016/12/15/exxonmobil-ceo-and-trump-pick-rex-tillerson-my-philosophy-is-to-make-money_partner/) in the eyes of many politicians, the lessons of the East India Company seem to have been all but forgotten. As Dalrymple writes: Democracy as we know it was considered an advance over feudalism because of the power that it gave the commoners to share in collective governance. To privately colonize a nation, much less a planet, means ceding governance and control back to corporations whose interest is not ours, and indeed, is always at odds with workers and residents — particularly in a resource-limited environment like a spaceship or the red planet. Even if, as Musk suggests, a private foundation is [put in charge](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/mars-elon-musk-space-exploration-nasa-colonization) of running the show on Mars, their interests will inherently be at [odds with the workers](http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/5/5/1372730/-Skylab-and-the-Sit-Down-Strike-in-Space) and employees involved. After all, a private foundation [is not a democracy](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/11/philanthropy-charity-banga-carnegie-gates-foundation-development); and as major philanthropic organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [illustrate](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/11/philanthropy-charity-banga-carnegie-gates-foundation-development), often [do the bidding](http://www.peterfrase.com/2011/08/the-decay-of-the-capitalist-class/) of their rich donors, and take an [important role in ripening industries](https://www.salon.com/2016/02/21/corporate_reformers_wreck_public_schools_billionaire_foundations_and_wall_street_financiers_are_not_out_to_help_your_kids_learn/) and regions for exploitation by Western corporations. Yet Mars’ colonization is a bit different than Bengal, namely in that it is not merely underdeveloped; it is undeveloped. How do you start an entirely new economy on a virgin world with no industry? After all, Martian resource extraction and trade with Earth is not feasible; the cost of transporting material across the solar system is astronomical, and there are no obvious minerals on Mars that we don’t already have in abundance on Earth. The only basis for colonization of Mars that Musk can conceive of is one based on tourism: the rich pay an amount — Musk quotes the ticket price at [$200,000 if he can get 1 million tourists](https://www.recode.net/2016/9/27/13081488/elon-musk-spacex-mars-colony-space-travel-funding-rocket-nasa) to pay that — that entitles them to a round-trip ticket. And while they’re on Mars and traveling to it, they luxuriate: Musk has [assured](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/06/21/elon-musk-create-city-mars-million-inhabitants/) that the trip would be “fun.” This is what makes Musk’s Mars vision so different than, say, the Apollo missions or the International Space Station. This isn’t really exploration for humanity’s sake — there’s not that much science assumed here, as there was in the Moon missions. Musk wants to build the ultimate luxury package, exclusively for the richest among us. Musk isn’t trying to build something akin to Matt Damon’s spartan research base in "The Martian." He wants to build Mars-a-Lago. And an economy based on tourism, particularly high-end tourism, needs employees — even if a high degree of automation is assumed. And as I’ve written about [before](https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/02/mars-elon-musk-space-exploration-nasa-colonization), that means a lot of labor at the lowest cost possible. Imagine signing away years of your life to be a housekeeper in the Mars-a-Lago hotel, with your communications, water, food, energy usage, even oxygen tightly managed by your employer, and no government to file a grievance to if your employer cuts your wages, harasses you, cuts off your oxygen. Where would Mars-a-Lago's employees turn if their rights were impinged upon? Oh wait, this planet is run privately? You have no rights. Musk's vision for Mars colonization is inherently authoritarian. The potential for the existence of the employees of the Martian tourism industry to slip into something resembling indentured servitude, even slavery, cannot be underestimated. We have government regulations for a reason on Earth — to protect us from the fresh horror Musk hopes to export to Mars. If he's considered these questions, he doesn't seem to care; for Musk, the devil's in the technological and financial details. The social and political are pretty uninteresting to him. This is unsurprising; accounts from those who have worked closely with him hint that he, like many CEOs, [may be a sociopath](http://www.businessinsider.com/working-with-elon-musk-tesla-2015-5). Even as a space enthusiast, I cannot get excited about the private colonization of Mars. You shouldn’t be either. This is not a giant leap for mankind; this is the next great leap in plutocracy. The mere notion that global wealth is so unevenly distributed that a small but sufficient sum of rich people could afford this trip is unsettling, indicative of the era of astonishing economic inequality in which we suffer. Thomas Frank, writing in Harpers, once [wrote of](https://harpers.org/archive/2011/11/the-bleakness-stakes/) a popular t-shirt he sighted while picnicking in a small West Virginia coal town: “Mine it union or keep it in the ground.” The idea, of course, is that the corporations interested in resource extraction do not care whatsoever about their workers’ health, safety, or well-being; the union had their interests at heart, and was able to negotiate for safety, job security, and so on. I’d like to see a similar t-shirt or bumper sticker emerge among scientists and space enthusiasts: “Explore Mars democratically, or keep it in the sky.”

### Advantage 3: Conflict

#### National Appropriation -- Private appropriation guts the prohibition on national appropriation since states are obligated to authorize and supervise their own citizens in space, which is the exercise of sovereignty. AND, if states don’t actively restrict private appropriation national appropriation is inevitable, triggering interstate conflict – legal precedent, responsibility to supervise, and economic incentives. Counterplans don’t solve.

Ferreira-Snyman 21 [Anél Ferreira-Snyman, "Challenges to the Prohibition on Sovereignty in Outer Space - A New Frontier for Space Governance" PER / PELJ 2021(24) – DOIhttp://dx.doi.org/10. 17159/17273781/2021/v24i0a8685] CT

The role of the state in the establishment of private property rights in space cannot be ignored, however. Article VI of the Outer Space Treaty determines that states parties to the Treaty shall bear international responsibility for national activities in outer space including when such activities are carried on by non-governmental entities. The activities of nongovernmental entities in outer space, including on the moon and other celestial bodies, must also be authorised and continuously supervised by the appropriate state. Both the American and Luxembourg legislation on space resource extraction confirm this role of the state. Thus, since the state exerts control over the private company, the latter's activities may be attributed to the state.182 In this sense, the lines between private ownership and state sovereignty become blurred, as both require control over the space object to the exclusion of others. Therefore, de facto appropriation by private companies could arguably become legal once states start to recognise such rights,183 as already illustrated by the American and Luxembourg laws’ recognition of at least private appropriation of space resources. In this regard, Pershing submits that the acceptance of resource appropriation may lay the foundation for a "second shift" 184 in customary international law's interpretation of the non-appropriation principle:185

Should States buckle to private commercial pressure or independently recognize the economic benefits of domestic companies obtaining private property in celestial territory, States would have a newfound interest in recognizing and protecting in situ rights. The legal justifications for de jure or de facto cooperation in non-recognition would likely become subordinate to economic incentives – spurring the adoption of new legal arguments to support shifting State interests.

It therefore seems inevitable that once a private company has de facto control over a space object such as the moon or an asteroid, such control may become legal once the majority of states recognises or at least does not object to such appropriation. Arguably, this may open the door for a state to assert sovereignty (at least over time) over the space objects occupied by the private companies that are authorised and supervised186 by the particular state. In other words, the state could thus achieve "extraterrestrial sovereignty through its citizen's actions."187 In this regard Durkee188 argues that "private companies are themselves developing the international law of outer space." She explains this "attributed lawmaking" as follows:189

When a corporation whose activity is attributed to the state publically asserts a legal rule and acts on it and a nation does nothing, the nation implicitly accepts the corporate rule. In the absence of direct evidence if a nation's acts and assertions in support of a customary rule, the actions of private companies – which are attributed to the nation – become the best evidence of a nation's embrace of a particular interpretation of the Outer Space Treaty. The result … is that private companies may be forcing development of an international legal rule that is permissive to appropriation of space resources.

It has been suggested by some that the rule of first possession would inevitably be applied in outer space, analogous to the "first in time, first in right" property principle that was applied on Earth for centuries.190 In this regard Gruner even submits191 that the existing outer space treaty regime lacks legal certainty pertaining to property issues since it "overturns centuries of international law by rejecting the longstanding principle of national sovereignty."192 He therefore proposes applying the first possession rule in outer space by implementing a new concept of property where the discovering nation declares the particular space object res nullius humanitatus

meaning that it is a place where people can still have individual property rights and be rewarded for their labor based on first possession, but where settlers will act on behalf of the interests of humanity rather than a single terrestrial nation. In this manner, res nullius humanitatus would guarantee all humans equal access to the rewards offered by outer space, rather than a de facto equal share in the rewards reaped from such exploration and exploitation simply because they are human.193

The above suggestion thus still adheres to the principle of the common heritage of humankind, but argues for a wider interpretation of the principle, allowing for individual property rights.194 It remains to be seen, however, whether the major space-faring nations would be willing to consider such a suggestion, especially since the United States' executive order on space resources specifically states that the USA does not consider outer space to be a global commons.

Although the rule of first possession have been criticised for promoting a space race, colonialism and the possibility of an "unmitigated land rush", 195 it is agreed with arguments that this principle, if properly regulated, might provide the basis for establishing a property rights regime in outer space. As MacWhorter proposes:196

To avoid the conflicts inherent between rivalrous nations, though, acknowledging only limited rights in property through first possession is the appropriate first step. By ensuring that private property will be enforced once a mining venture has brought space material back to Earth, many of the practical consequences of total first possession incorporation may be avoided.

To circumvent the non-appropriation principle, a number of other alternatives to create some kind of sui generis right of ownership have been suggested 197 that could make the commercial development of outer space possible and viable for developers. These suggestions include certain "property-like rights" not constituting ownership, such as "concessions, mining licences, prospecting rights, and certain contractual rights"; 198 a "credit-swap" system;199 the leasing of outer space to nations and private companies;200 the creation of a public trust to manage property in outer space; 201 a hybrid property regime; 202 stewardship’ 203 lotteries; tradable credits; 204 and tenders.205 None of these proposals is without criticism and all of them require some involvement of the state, opening the door once again for the establishment of sovereignty through the activities of private entities under the control of the state. Nevertheless, suggestions like these are at least indicative of the dire need to start re-evaluating property rights in outer space law.

3 The way forward for space governance?

In response to the adoption of the United States Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act, the Board of Directors of the International Institute of Space Law stated as follows:206

Whether the United States interpretation of Art. II of the Outer Space Treaty is followed by other states will be central to the future understanding and development of the non-appropriation principle. It can be a starting point for the development of international rules to be evaluated by means of an international dialogue in order to coordinate the free exploitation and use of outer space, including resource extraction, for the benefit and in the interest of all countries.

Different suggestions have been made by commentators on the way international legal rules pertaining to the use and development of outer space should be developed. These vary from adapting or amending the current Outer Space Treaty207 and/or Moon Agreement208 to developing a completely new legal framework209 to address specific issues.

The urgency of the need to clarify and develop legal rules relating to the exploitation of outer space, including the establishment of property rights, is vividly illustrated by the USA's recent unilateral release of the Artemis Accords.210 The Accords – named after NASA's Artemis programme, which aims to send the first women and the next man to the moon by 2024 - is a set of standards for the exploration of the moon211 and is intended to create a framework agreed on by the United States and its partners212 in the Artemis programme by clarifying some of the lacunae in the Outer Space Treaty. 213 The idea is to create an agreement without utilising the often cumbersome and long treaty-making process in the United Nations.214 Instead, the USA aims to reach agreement with "like-minded" nations since, according to American officials, working with non-space faring states would be unproductive.215 The unilateral creation of the Artemis Accords, however, has already been sharply criticised by Russia as an attempt by the United States to side-line the United Nations and to invade the moon in a manner similar to that in which it invaded Iraq and Afghanistan.216 It is also to be expected that China will not react favourably to the Accords,217 which are perceived by some academic commentators as expressing an "ambition for space hegemony" 218 by the United States. In addition, the deliberate exclusion of non-space-faring states from the creation of the legal framework is another clear confirmation of the United States' stance that outer space is not a global commons.

At first glance, the guiding principles of the Artemis Accords merely confirm the current outer space treaties, for example by determining that space activities must be conducted for peaceful purposes, that assistance must be provided to astronauts in distress and that space objects must be registered. The most controversial issues provided for in the Accords are the extraction and use of space resources219 and the intended establishment of so-called "safety zones" 220 around lunar landing sites.

Although the Artemis Accords do not mention property rights explicitly, they confirm the United States' interpretation of the Outer Space Treaty as expressed in its domestic legislation and subsequent executive order on the exploitation of space resources by determining that "space resource extraction and utilization can and will be conducted under the auspices of the Outer Space Treaty." 221 Therefore, by signing the Accords partners agree with this interpretation made by the United States. Should this interpretation be generally accepted by space-faring nations through bilateral and multilateral agreements, these rules for space mining and property rights may eventually become customary international law. This remains to be seen, however, since Russia has already indicated that any attempts to privatise space would be unacceptable.222

To avoid harmful interference with space activities, the Artemis Accords make provision for the establishment of safety zones around lunar bases. Although American officials have indicated that these zones do not technically amount to a territorial claim over the affected areas,223 it may be argued that such zones at least display some characteristics of territorial sovereignty by exerting control over a particular area on the moon to the exclusion of others. As Weaver points out, "'commercial' appropriation is much more subtle than outright legal appropriation" since the claimant does not make any (explicit) proclamation of sovereign control to the international community.224 Nevertheless, the outcome is in essence the same, since the benefits are gathered to the exclusion of others. The establishment of lunar safety zones seems to be similar to the rule of first possession, which strengthens the earlier argument that the principle of "first in time, first in right" might provide the basis for establishing property rights in space. According to American officials, a state nearing another state's operations in a safety zone has to consult the latter state first to prevent damage or interference.225 Although the Artemis Accords confirm that outer space must be used for peaceful purposes, one might expect that the United States' Space Force226 would play some role in the protection of American safety zones. This has obvious implications for the prohibition on the (active) militarisation and, even more seriously, weaponisation of outer space.227 One may also expect that states would want first to stake their claims to those lunar areas that are the richest in resources, a tendency which may create conflict between competing states.

The practical implications of the Artemis Accords remain to be seen. However, in order to prevent that outer space "turns into the Wild West of the twenty-first century", 228 legal rules for the exploitation of outer space bodies have to be developed under the auspices of an international institution and not left to individual states or, for that matter, selected private companies. This would not only result in the fragmentation of outer space governance, which could create more legal uncertainty,229 but might also encourage "forum-shopping" by commercial operators to find domestic systems with minimum regulation of their activities.230

Given that time is of the essence, it is suggested that the UNCOPUOUS as an established body that has been specifically created to address issues relating to outer space is best suited to addressing this task. Although it may be argued that the UNCOPUOS's decision-making processes, which are based on the rule of consensus, are too slow, it is currently the only multilateral forum for the discussion of outer space matters.231 The creation of a completely new international law-making body to address urgent space issues is simply not realistic and would take even longer. Once the rules have been established, a permanent regulatory body, perhaps similar to the International Seabed Authority, could be created to oversee their implementation,232 also by means of states' national legislation, and to protect the rights of developing states.

After the conclusion of the core UN space treaties in the 1960s and 1970s it became apparent that states were no longer willing to adopt further binding obligations regulating space activities and that international space law could therefore be developed only by adopting "soft law" instruments.233 Because of their non-mandatory character, these instruments are generally more easily negotiated by states than is the case with treaties.234 Thus, soft law235 documents are currently the main instruments for further developing and defining the norms of outer space.236 It is therefore to be expected that the rules for exploiting outer space bodies would also (initially at least) be in the form of soft law. Nevertheless, soft law guidelines have a legal value237 as they impact on the international law-making process by providing the premises from which customary international law might develop, and might eventually lead to the conclusion of a treaty.238 The work of the Hague International Space Resources Governance Working Group239 could play an important role in this process. The Working Group reflects a so-called bottom-up approach to norms development240 by representing the wider outer space community, including industry, states, international organisations, academia and NGOs. On 12 November 2019 the Working Group adopted the "Building Blocks for the Development of an International Framework on Space Resource Activities".241 The Building Blocks could thus form the basis for multilateral discussions on the development of softlaw rules for the regulation of commercial activities in outer space.

The unregulated exploitation of outer space is not only a catalyst for conflict between states, but could also cause irreparable harm to the outer space environment because of human contamination and the creation of more space debris.242 The international community will have to act swiftly if the aspirations of using outer space for peaceful purposes and preserving it for future generations are to be fulfilled.

#### Ownership disputes -- Private appropriation inevitably leads to overlapping claims causing armed conflict.

Tennen 10 [Leslie I. Tennen, Esq.\* “ Towards a New Regime for Exploitation of Outer Space Mineral Resources,” Nebraska Law Review, 88 (2010), 794. <https://advance-lexis-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/api/document?collection=analytical-materials&id=urn:contentItem:50MP-12V0-00CT-T042-00000-00&context=1516831>.] CT

a. Should Article II be Abrogated?

It has been asserted that the non-appropriation principle is an obstruction to the commercial development of space, and that article II, if not the entire Outer Space Treaty, should be abrogated. 61 The Outer Space Treaty permits states party to withdraw on one year's notice. 62 It seems unlikely that a major space power will seek to withdraw from the Outer Space Treaty in the foreseeable future, or that article II will be repealed anytime soon. Nevertheless, the abrogation of article II would not benefit the commercial development of space. First and foremost, the reasons which warranted the adoption of the non-appropriation principle in 1961 continue to be applicable today, notwithstanding the end of the Cold War. Abrogation of article II would result in a multitude of claims to orbits, locations, and entire moons and other celestial bodies. These claims would not have any uniformity in terms of method of discovery. That is, claims could be founded on any basis on which the claimant can assert that it was the first to "discover" the subject of the claim, 63 whether by exploration, use, landing, imaging, mapping, surveying, or telepossession. 64 As a matter of equity, the Russians, as successors to the Soviet Union, would have an historic justification to assert vast claims of ownership to near-Earth and cis-lunar space, and the Moon, Venus, and perhaps other celestial bodies, from their early triumphs during the initial days of the space age. However, claims would not be restricted to the technologically advanced states, as other nations would assert claims to space "properties." It can be anticipated that the Bogota Declaration, 65 [\*808] declaring claims to the geostationary orbit, would be resurrected in one form or another. In addition, private entities, if permitted to engage in appropriation, would overlay yet another level of claims, separate and distinct from the claims of states. Whether individual states would enact domestic laws recognizing and enforcing such private claims is a matter of pure speculation. It is difficult to envision a scenario whereby the various claims would not overlap and thereby conflict. Thus, it is foreseeable that international tensions between claiming states would arise, with the concomitant potential for the export of armed conflict from the confines of this planet to the heavens. 66 Pop has identified several theories which conceivably could give rise to claims to property, 67 but no matter what basis is utilized to provide theoretical justification for the assertion of claims, the enforcement of claims (i.e., the exclusion of others therefrom) in the final analysis ultimately devolves upon the successful application of military force. Armed conflict in space obviously would not engender an atmosphere conducive to private commercial ventures. Even where conflict or the threat of conflict may be averted, states claiming sovereign rights over space and celestial resources would be able to impose taxes, royalties, duties, auction fees, or other forms of economic tribute upon private entrepreneurs in exchange for the right to utilize the resources within the claimed territories, even where claims to those areas and resources overlap. 68 The corpus juris spatialis provides that states have the right to explore and utilize areas on or below the surface of celestial bodies. The abrogation of the non-appropriation principle of article II would transform the right to explore and utilize areas of celestial bodies into a commodity available only to those willing to pay the highest price. Monopolies and other anti-competitive practices could result. In this regard the non-appropriation principle is double-edged: article II not only prevents an entity from establishing a monopoly, it also prevents the competition from establishing one as well, and thereby creates a level playing field. 69 Those who advocate for the abrogation of article II fail to recognize that the non-appropriation principle is not solely dependent upon the Outer Space Treaty. As noted above, the prohibition on national appropriation was expressed by the community of nations in U.N. resolutions dating back to the early 1960s. The substance of article II of [\*809] the Outer Space Treaty was reaffirmed in article 11.2 of the Moon Agreement. More than 125 nations have signed or ratified the Outer Space Treaty; thus, the non-appropriation doctrine has received widespread acceptance among states for almost fifty years. In addition, state practice during the space age has been consistent with article II. 70 Thus, the non-appropriation principle has become part of customary international law, and as such, is binding on states independently of the Outer Space Treaty. 71 That is not to say, however, that a majority of the community of nations would not be able to agree to abrogate article II, or the entire Outer Space Treaty, if so inclined. However, there is no indication that states have expressed any official interest is so doing at this time.

#### Military-industrial complex -- Private appropriation in space inevitably causes militarization to protect corporate interests which triggers conflict.

Saah 21 [Jasper Saah, “War or peace in space? 2021 in review,” Liberation News, December 31, 2021. Accessed 2/7/21. https://www.liberationnews.org/war-or-peace-in-space-2021-in-review/] CT

2021 has been a record setting year for space development, accompanied by relentless capitalist propaganda to shape how people relate to the increasing importance of the space industry worldwide. China has made great strides in developing its own space exploration capacity, launching its own space station and landing a rover on Mars over the summer. U.S. hostility toward China and Russia has created the conditions for a new space race with parallel plans for lunar bases, crewed Mars missions, and additional Earth orbital stations coming from the United States on one hand and Russia and China on the other. U.S. emphasis on private development and militarization adds another layer of complexity to an already unstable situation. Bruce Gagnon is the coordinator of The Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space and sat down to discuss these crucial issues with Liberation News.

Privatization and militarization: Two sides of the same coin

Since 1969, the basis of international space law has been the Outer Space Treaty which provides that space, the Moon, and other celestial bodies be the “province of all mankind” and “not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.” Additionally, the treaty stipulates that the deployment or testing of weapons of mass destruction in space is prohibited along with the creation of military bases or installations. In recent decades, the limitations of this treaty and the related Moon Treaty have become apparent. Since 1981, the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space Treaty has been forwarded by countries like Russia and China to expand the existing canon of international space law through the UN. This has been blocked by the United States repeatedly, and over the past decade in particular, the United States has also been moving rapidly to use it’s current dominant position in the space industry to set international norms on its own terms. In 2015, President Obama signed the Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act which permits U.S. companies to “engage in the commercial exploration and exploitation of space resources.” The U.S. government claims that this is not an attempt to exert national sovereign or exclusive rights, which is tied to the increasingly privatized landscape in the U.S. space industry. From the perspective of capital, President Trump took the next logical step in 2019 by establishing the U.S. Space Force as an independent branch of the military. The history of private property on Earth shows us that it always requires military might to ultimately back up the claim. As the United States seeks to allow private enclosure of the Solar System, militarization will inevitably develop apace. The risks of a space arms race is a terrifying prospect, but that is exactly what both the traditional NASA contractors and the new private launch companies want. SpaceX has already partnered with the Pentagon to provide rapid weapon delivery via rocket to any point on the planet in under an hour.

Record-setting year

The record for most people simultaneously in space was broken twice in 2021. For a weekend in September, there were 14 people spread across the International Space Station, China’s Tiangong Station, and SpaceX’s Inspiration-4 mission. While exceedingly brief in duration, on December 11 Blue Origin’s New Shepard 19 flight brought six TV personalities and venture capitalists to the edge of space, briefly setting a new record of 19 people. These “tourist” flights have been widely criticized even as the corporate-owned media breathlessly covers these short excursions of the ultra wealthy to the edge of space. In July, Forbes published a surprisingly critical column titled “Space Flight For Fun: Billionaire Egotism Trumps Sustainability.” Criticism from other large news outlets is along similar lines — the environmental cost of space launches, which is equivalent per flight to the lifetime emissions of billions of working people, cannot be justified. Despite the private ownership, both SpaceX and Blue Origin are built on decades of publicly funded research and development, as well as heavily reliant on NASA and Pentagon contracts for their funding. “This stuff is funded by destroying the social safety net” and the ever ballooning military budget, Bruce Gagnon emphasized. The development of a space tourism industry is the tip of an iceberg. China has had a strong year in space: the successful landing of a Mars rover on their first attempt, the launch and installation of Tianhe — the core module of a new space space station, Wang Yaping became the first Chinese woman to conduct a space walk, and China accounted for the most orbital launches of any country in 2021. Development of the next generation Long March 9 rocket, which will enable crewed lunar landings and more complex deep space missions, is nearing the end of its development stage. The United States is attempting to use its current position to set international norms while it remains the dominant space power in the world. A recent paper in the journal Science describes in detail the ways in which U.S. policy is undermining international cooperation in space: “Shortly after, NASA announced a plan for bilateral Artemis Accords, which, if accepted by many nations, could enable the U.S. interpretation of international space law to prevail and make the United States — as the licensing nation for most of the world’s space companies — the de facto gatekeeper to the Moon, asteroids, and other celestial bodies.”

The fight back

It’s just this rapid pace of development combined with the anarchy of capitalist production that concerns the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space. The prospect of using nuclear reactors for power generation and propulsion has been gaining traction within NASA posing a multitude of potentially catastrophic risks when launching radioactive material from Earth. A conflict in space could set off a chain reaction of debris, called Kessler Syndrome, that could take out hundreds or thousands of satellites and fill low Earth orbit with debris for decades. While many of these concepts may still sound more like science fiction, the coming decade or two is the period where long lasting precedents for how humanity engages with the solar system will be set. The richest men on Earth are obsessed with establishing private space industries, whether Elon Musk’s longshot plan to colonize Mars or Jeff Bezos’ vision of moving industry to orbit, beginning with a private space station “business park.” The propaganda offensive goes beyond fawning coverage of ultra-rich tourist flights and fear mongering about Russia and China. The vision propagated by Jeff Bezos of moving industry to space coincidentally resembles greatly the world of the TV show The Expanse produced by Bezos’ Amazon where generations of exploited workers mining the asteroid belt have become second class humans, subject to brutal corporate colonialism. Similar dystopian visions of the future are commonplace across all sorts of popular culture, but they are not inevitable. “We have to get this right,” is the point Bruce Gagnon of the Global Network kept returning to.

#### Space conflicts go nuclear- both fast and probable.

Grego 15 [Laura Grego, an expert in space weapons and security; ballistic missile proliferation, and ballistic missile defense, "Preventing Space War", Union of Concerned Scientists, 07-05-2015 <https://allthingsnuclear.org/lgrego/preventing-space-war>] JDN

So says a very good New York Times editorial “Preventing a Space War” this week. Sounds right, if X-Wing fighters come to mind when you think space conflict. But in reality conflict in space is both more likely than one would think and less likely to be so photogenic. Space as a locus of conflict The Pentagon has known that space could be a flash point at least since the late 1990s when it began including satellites and space weapons in earnest as part of its wargames. The early games revealed some surprises. For example, attacking an adversary’s ground-based anti-satellite weapons before they were used could be the “trip wire” that starts a war: in the one of the first war games, an attack on an enemy’s ground-based lasers was meant to defuse a potential conflict and protect space assets, but instead was interpreted as an act of war and initiated hostilities. The games also revealed that disrupting space-based communication and information flow or “~~blinding~~” could rapidly escalate a war, eventually leading to nuclear weapon exchange. The war games have continued over the years with increased sophistication, but continue to find that conflicts can rapidly escalate and become global when space weapons are involved, and that even minor opponents can create big problems. The report back from the 2012 game, which included NATO partners, said these insights have become “virtually axiomatic.” Participants in the most recent Schriever war games found that when space weapons were introduced in a regional crisis, it escalated quickly and was difficult to stop from spreading. The compressed timelines, the global as well as dual-use nature of space assets, the difficulty of attribution and seeing what is happening, and the inherent vulnerability of satellites all contribute to this problem. Satellite vulnerability & solutions Satellites are valuable but, at least on an individual basis, physically vulnerable. Vulnerable in that they are relatively fragile, as launch mass is at a premium and so protective armor is too expensive, and a large number of low-earth-orbiting satellites are no farther from the earth’s surface than the distance from Boston to Washington, DC.

### Solvency

#### Since, in a just world, outer space would be treated as a global commons, and a global commons model precludes appropriation by private entries, then the appropriation of outer space by private entries is unjust.

#### Thus, the plan: States ought to adopt a binding international agreement that bans the appropriation of outer space by private entities by establishing outer space as a global commons subject to regulatory delimiting and global liability.

#### The aff:

#### solves debris and space colonialism by ensuring the sustainable and equitable use of outer space resources.

* prevents circumvention by aligning the interests of state parties
* is normal means since it models numerous successful agreements governing all other global commons.

Vollmer 20 [Sarah Louise Vollmer (St. Mary's University School of Law), “The Right Stuff in Geospace: Using Mutual Coercion to Avoid an Inevitable Prison for Humanity,” 51 ST. MARY'S L.J. 777 (2020). <https://commons.stmarytx.edu/thestmaryslawjournal/vol51/iss3/6?utm\_source=commons.stmarytx.edu%2Fthestmaryslawjournal%2Fvol51%2Fiss3%2F6&utm\_medium=PDF&utm\_campaign=PDFCoverPages> ]CT

IV. NECESSITY FOR REGULATION TO PRESERVE THE HERITAGE OF MANKIND—A PROPOSAL

Conceptually, all persons hold an implied property right in the space commons.111 As such, spacefaring entities and developing nations possess an equitable right to access and use orbital resources.112 But the sui generis nature of geospace presents a paradox requiring a unique regime for the sustainable usage of its resources.113 The international community cannot realize the advantages of the common heritage principle under a property regime because any conceivable assignment would violate the non-appropriation clause or unjustly enrich a particular interest.114 This means that only regulatory solutions can protect the interests inherent in a commons protected for the common heritage of mankind.

A. The Motivations for International Compliance

The crux of a workable treaty lies in the consent of the parties to the agreement.115 Thereafter, signatories internalize the agreement’s object and purpose into their domestic law, or in the case of international organizations, into an institutional framework.116 To implement a binding international instrument, we must therefore ask the question: Why do nations follow international law,117 and how can we use those behavioral realities to construct a workable framework to ensure geospace survives?118

At the dawn of civilized society, depending on a particular jurisdiction’s values, the laws of nature and morality compelled obedience and social order.119 When nation-states concluded international agreements, it represented the coalescence of the various values-based systems, the overlap of which formed a universal understanding of the law of mankind.120 “[The] fundamental conceptual boundary between municipal and international law . . . view[s] international law largely in terms of contractual relations, therefore assigning to the ‘sovereign’ a central place in the construction of the two orders.”121 In other words, transnational cooperation operated through balancing the competing autonomy and values of the parties involved. Despite centuries of debate, values systems remain the principal motivating factor of compliance with international law.122 Effective regulatory regimes must, therefore, strike at the heart of what nation-states value the most, which is often related to national security.123

When entering an international agreement, whether or not a nation-state will ratify it informs us of the value a nation-state places on the instrument’s subject matter. That value equates to the utility a nation-state places on certain allowances or prohibitions.124 Incorporating these motivating factors with Hardin’s regulatory solution, any freedoms infringed upon must manifest a higher utility than currently realized. If COPUOS proposes a protocol for sustainable uses of space, the provisions must either have a negligible effect on the global community’s perceived utility of space access or substantially increase that utility. Assuming the propositioned regulatory scheme aligns with the values system of each nation-state, the probability of internalizing such regulations through domestic codification is high.

To ascertain the interests of nation-states, we must look to the factors motivating current space utilization. Routine access to space undeniably aids our technological advancement. The ISS’s antigravity environment provides unique conditions to study medicine.125 Satellites provide real-time tracking of environmental conditions and transmit crucial information for disaster recovery planning.126 Space telescopes track objects with the potential to cause the extinction of life of Earth.127 Free from the veil of our hazy atmosphere, satellites can produce better imagery and ascertain the composition of potential resource deposits on celestial bodies.128 And simply receiving satellite imagery of our planet forces us to confront the realities of our fragile existence. These benefits signify the tangible realization of the OST’s object and purpose, which flow to all members of the global community.129 If we do not begin active decontamination and mitigation of space debris, the utility of geospace will cease to exist. Imagining our existence without these advances is a potent method to stress the criticality of unabated pollution in geospace.

B. Existing Proposals

Legal scholars have formulated several frameworks to mitigate space debris. Some recommend implementing a market-share liability regime, which assigns liability according to the volume of each nation-states’ exploits.130 Opponents of this construction rightfully highlight the inequities inherent in such a scheme. Considering the United States, Russia, and China make up the bulk of spacefaring activity, market-share liability would unduly burden these nations, and coerce a categorical exit from the space industry or a repeat of the Moon Treaty.131 Another scholar advocates for an environmental law approach, asserting that the space commons would benefit from a protocol closely mirroring the Madrid Protocol.132 While prospective applications of such a model could prevent additional accumulations, it would not feasibly abate the current collection of debris.133 The strengths of Mary Button’s mitigation proposal lie in the binding nature of the Madrid Protocol and compulsory environmental impact requirements. And though it advocates for a more collaborative conference mechanism, rather than the strict unanimous consent required of UNCOPUOS’s resolutions, it still shies away from compulsory requirements for active debris removal. Along with the Antarctic Treaty (ATS), the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) also served as a model for the Corpus Juris Spatialis. But oddly, the law of salvage was omitted from the treaties. Unlike abandoned objects at sea, once a nation-state places an object into space, ownership exists in perpetuity. Sandra Drago addressed removing the OST’s property-in-perpetuity mechanism134 so as to permit the active salvage of inoperable satellites.135 Drago’s proposal is vital to any mitigation framework. But while this removes a substantial bar currently restricting debris removal, it does not address free-riding, and spacefaring enterprises are free to choose more lucrative space activities other than salvage operations.136

C. A Coercive Proposal

Mutual coercion lies at the core of Hardin’s solution.137 To summarize, law-abiding citizens make concessions to regulatory social constructs in the interest of conserving some utility otherwise lost.138 The coercive element lies in relinquishing one’s ability to exploit some freedom, the detriment of which cannot be realized at that moment in time.139 Conceding to a regime that tempers free exploitation of the commons allows everyone to benefit from the positive externalities of individual usage. Equated to space, nation-states currently concede to non-appropriation in the interest of maintaining equitable access. But because of the sui generis nature of geospace, even non-participants receive a benefit from the use of the commons. In effect, beneficiaries are free-riding from the capital investment of spacefaring nations and entities. This informs the structure of the ensuing two-part framework: geospace delimitation and global liability

1. Geospace Delimitation

The history of regulatory delimitation illustrates its effectiveness at balancing the rights of individuals, sovereigns, and mankind. Each instance explained in Part II infra, arose out of public necessity to ensure and protect the maximum utility of the global commons, without the deleteriousness of inhabitability, sovereign interference, or over-exploitation.140 The regimes governing Antarctica, the High Seas, the Atmosphere, and the radio-frequency spectrum evidence that mutually coercive delimitation can honor the common heritage of mankind, without encroaching on the peaceful enjoyment and benefits attributable to these areas.

a. Antarctica

In the 1950s, there was concern that Antarctica would succumb to Cold War hysteria, becoming a target for international discord and nuclear arms testing.141 In a move to reestablish global scientific exchange, the international scientific community hosted the International Geophysical Year project, and after identifying the potential of Antarctica, sought to protect it from any ruinous power posturing.142 This necessity for regulating permissible activity resulted in the formation of the ATS.143 Subsequent technological advancement revealed mineral deposits, triggering commercial interest in exploiting its natural resources. The threat catalyzed the promulgation of the Madrid Protocol.144 Again, these delimitations did not sever humanity’s utility in Antarctica. Rather, mankind conceded to the prohibition of deleterious usage in the interest of preserving its scientific utility.145

b. The High Seas

Similar to Antarctica, the High Seas faced threats in the 1960s when nation-states began unilaterally and arbitrarily, extending resource recovery activities further into the depths of international waters.146 In the interest of equity, particularly the interests of landlocked nations, UNCLOS delimited sovereign access to the seas, allowing usage only within the established exclusive economic zones (EEZs).147 An annex to UNCLOS provided a procedural framework in which resource recovery enterprises could operate in international common areas beyond the EEZs, precluding the unilateral capture of global resources by one nation.148 Once more, a mutually coercive framework removed certain freedoms in the interest of mankind without unjustly limiting equitable access to resources.

c. The Atmosphere

Divergent from the problems of the ice and sea, atmospheric regulation resolved an issue more analogous to geospace debris proliferation. Atmospheric utility is quite simple: breathable air and protection from deadly cosmic radiation. When satellite imagery revealed the sizable hole in the ozone layer, the Montreal Protocol to the Vienna Convention placed an outright ban on ozone-depleting chemicals in everyday consumables.149 This prohibition directly addressed the source of the negative externality, forcing humanity to internalize the externality through alternate investment in refrigerants. Recent evidence of the reduction of ozone loss validates the mutually coercive delimitation within the Montreal Protocol.150

d. Regulating the Telecommunication Spectrum

The business model and financial strategy of telecommunications entities influence satellite deployment planning. Typically, orbital placement aims to “maximize [a] potential user base,” and if that base happens to encompass, for instance, the continental United States, market competition drastically narrows the availability of slots for satellite positioning.151 Realizing that satellite acquisition becomes moot without conscientious “use of telemetry and control . . . required for spaceflight,”152 the Space Radiocommunication Conference convened to revise the Radio Regulations in 1963,153 granting the ITU authority to allocate radio frequencies among spacefaring entities.154 Originally, the ITU:

[A]llocated orbits and frequencies solely through a first-in-time system. This led to concern that developed countries would secure all of the available slots before developing countries had the technological capacity to use them. Although some orbits and frequencies are still allocated on a first-in-time basis, each state is now guaranteed a certain number of future orbits and frequencies, regardless of its current technological capacity.155

The FCC regulates the segment of the electromagnetic spectrum allocated to the United States.156 Arguably, the ITU and agencies like the FCC engage in de facto appropriation of the more highly sought-after orbits.157 Yet to an extent, the ITU’s delimiting of the radio-frequency spectrum remedied the negative externalities of non-appropriation in geospace, such as the overcrowding of active satellites and the resultant interference. Where the ITU’s scheme does not remedy the byproduct of geospace resource use, it succeeds in ensuring communication capabilities remain free from inequitable use.158

e. The OST’s Ineffective Delimitations

The recurrent theme among the aforementioned regulatory schemes is the preservation of utility within the commons concerned.159 The frameworks each provide a means to enjoy shared resources while removing the potential for destruction. The OST’s nonproliferation provisions properly regulate the usage of the space commons to further the enjoyment of space’s true utility: scientific discovery and telecommunications. Likewise, the Liability Convention reinforces the necessity to maintain heightened situational awareness to guarantee the mutual, uninterrupted enjoyment of activity in space.160 But nation-states exploit the loop-holes within these documents to avoid internalizing some of their externalities. Specifically, the Liability Convention only assigns liability for damage caused to space objects when fault can actually be determined.161 Though it would be simple to assign fault to a collision caused by an intact and inoperative satellite, it is virtually impossible to identify the owner of smaller pieces of debris. Further, while the ITU reserves slots for nations not represented in space,162 it does nothing to stop those capable of reaching geospace from littering the commons and destroying the utility of reserved slots.163 Holistically, none of the delimitations in the Corpus Juris Spatialis negate the cause of the growing belt of debris in geospace.

As a sui generis resource, the mere occupation of LEO or GSO equates to the reduction of the overall utility of geospace. When an entity launches a rocket into space, the accompanying payload causes either (1) temporary reduction of the aggregate utility of geospace or (2) permanent reduction of the aggregate utility of geospace.164

The first delimitation prong will recommend bifurcating the applicability of the Corpus Juris Spatialis, with separate regimes for outer space and geospace. While the commercialization of outer space is not overly injurious to the international commons or interests of developing nations, the overcrowding of affluent spacefaring entities vying for orbital acquisition puts immense pressure on the finite resources within geospace. Therefore, demarcating the upper limit of geospace will allow entities to continue exploring the universe without imposing the restrictions placed on those seeking geospace positioning.165 This modification will allow continued use of both regions, but coerce more sustainable usage of geospace with the assistance of the secondary prong below.

2. Global Liability

Operating under the theory that humanity holds an implied property right in the global commons but limited under the non-appropriation clause to protect those interests through traditional property mechanisms, the logical alternative is to impose liability on actions violative of the global interest.166 Further, assuming humanity collectively benefits from utilization of this commons, then humanity likewise must internalize the cost of the negative externalities imposed.167 This means that spacefarers, as members of the global collective, hold both the right and obligation to protect that right for others.168 Therefore, anyone utilizing or benefitting from the utilization of the geospace commons has an equitable duty to ensure its sustainability. Under traditional tort theories, when one has a duty, breach of that duty causally linked to a measurable injury is actionable. In terms of the duty to humanity when utilizing geospace, the culmination of Kessler Syndrome represents the measurable injury.

Kessler informed the scientific community in 1970 of the probable cataclysmic chain-reaction and destructive conclusion of unabated geospace debris pollution.169 This theory, reiterated consistently since its dissemination, materialized in 2009.170 Fundamentally, every spacefaring entity and approving launching state knows of this monumental threat to the utility of geospace. Yet to date, mitigation guidelines remain non-binding, and four-figure satellite constellations continue to receive approval.171 To incorporate a time-honored risk calculation method, the Hand Formula is instructive and evidences a trend toward unapologetic endangerment to the utility of geospace in isolation of the associated tort regime.

Let us assume the burden to mitigate space debris is $18.5 million172 but the probable magnitude of not mitigating the accumulation of space debris equates to reverting our technological capabilities back to the 1800s. Considering the accumulation of debris from the accidental or intentional breakup of geospace satellites, the probability of Kessler Syndrome fully concluding in the absence of a comprehensive mitigation protocol is one hundred percent.173 While difficult to quantify, the value of our scientific progress attributable to the advent of space travel far outstrips the burden to mitigate space debris. Should Kessler Syndrome become our reality, the measurable injury is the cost of reestablishing global communications without the usage of satellite relays. To add insult to injury, the invaluable utility of geospace will cease to exist.

A viable alternative would institute a regime of shared global liability which makes consideration of capital investors as well as nonparticipating beneficiaries in the interest of equity. That is, should the inevitable prison for humanity become a reality, the entire global community will be liable to pay an equitable share of the overall cost of recovery efforts.174 The Liability Convention should undergo a similar trifurcation, adding this new scheme to the current strict and absolute liability mechanisms.175 As such, shared global liability will consider the responsibility of nation-states and private entities in isolation.176 This will coerce cooperation among all agencies, nations, and private entities because the equitable share of responsibility will drive collective resolution.

V. CONCLUSION

In light of the emerging global sentiments regarding environmental conservation and sustainability, instituting a regime that clearly defines a legal consequence in the event of environmental ruin boasts greater coercive force than non-binding resolutions. 9 This international agreement aligns with the universal value that the international community places on the utility of geospace.177 In essence, it protects geospace by forcing the signatory to face the reality of their negative externalities. It is unlikely that a nation-state exists that does not value space exploration and the benefits attributable.

In April of 2019, in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), COPUOS adopted an agenda that focused on the long-term sustainability of the space commons, space traffic management, equitable uses of GSO, and the mitigation of space debris.178 Mindful of space’s critical role in attaining many of the SDGs, the Committee put forth guidelines to facilitate capacity building without prejudice to any one nation-states’ economic capabilities. To be sure, the Guidelines for the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities are an important step forward, but many delegates reiterated the importance of developing binding instruments, particularly in light of developments in “space resource exploitation, large constellations, and space debris remediation.”179

Looking forward, research continues to advance the availability of debris mitigation mechanisms, such as the European Space Agency’s newly-commissioned ClearSpace-1 satellite.180 Mission objectives increasingly include end-of-life procedures to place satellites in appropriate orbits to decrease clutter in areas where active satellites operate.181 In the context of private entities, Planetary Resources—originally positioned to become a principle player in the space mining industry—merged with Consensys Space and quickly launched TruSat, a crowd-sourced situational awareness forum that compiles the reports of private citizens to track objects in geospace.182 These developments instill confidence in the international community’s sentiments toward ameliorating this ever-approaching catastrophe. It is with great hope that this trend continues, and COPUOS promulgates binding regulations to ensure the sustainability of geospace for the common heritage of mankind. “But we can never do nothing. That which we have done for thousands of years is also action. It also produces evils.”183

#### Since the national appropriation is banned by the OST, banning private appropriation would ipso facto result in space being a global commons, so the plan is not extra T and is normal means.

Neto 21 [Bittencourt Neto, Olava de O. “Chapter 1: Outer Space as a Global Commons and the Role of Space Law,” A Research Agenda for Space Policy, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK, 2021. https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781800374737/9781800374737.00009.xml] CT

Over the past years, the proliferation of space activities and the diversification of space actors have offered plenty of opportunities but also posed challenges to outer space’s long-term sustainability. The rapidly transforming space sector and growing global space economy have enabled many satellite applications and services, while outer space and orbital slots have become more congested with an increasing space debris population. The commercialization of space activities has denounced a growing interest in private, non-governmental uses of outer space, including space resources. As such, outer space continues to prove itself as a strategic domain from scientific, economic, and security standpoints. As far as international law is concerned, novel debates have emerged about the ontological nature of outer space. Incredibly vast, magnificent, and complex by nature, it constitutes a unique domain, unlike anywhere else on Earth. Throughout the years, outer space has been subject to a specific international framework based on legal principles established at the dawn of the Space Age, notably open access to and non-appropriation of outer space. Space law treaties and international instruments govern space activities and provide relevant input concerning the legal status of outer space. The 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST), in its first article, solemnly declares that the exploration and use of outer space “shall be the province of mankind”. Therefore, a common interest and shared fate await humankind as we advance through the cosmos. Collective action, based on international cooperation and mutual assistance, is of the essence. Nevertheless, a universal definition and delimitation of outer space, as a distinct domain on Planet Earth, remains to be multilaterally accorded (Bittencourt, 2015). Given the evolving nature of space activities and economy, the legal status of outer space has led to intensive debates in various fora. By constituting a resource domain to which all nations have access, but to which none has the right to claim sovereignty, outer space may be understood as an example of global commons – similarly to the high seas, deep seabed, and Antarctica (Buck, 1998, p. 6). Therefore, outer space and its natural resources, including those located at the Moon and other celestial bodies, are not subject to national appropriation by any means. The legal status of outer space as a global commons is of extraordinary importance and relevance for space law and space policy. Indeed, it influences the application and interpretation of the legal framework developed for the governance of outer space activities, vis-à-vis the domain and its resource units. To accurately assess this scenario, a comparative approach is followed. The specific features of global commons and legal ramifications justify further appraisal to comprehend definitions and correlated concepts well.

2. Key problems and conflicts

In space law as in space policy, words matter. By legally classifying outer space as a global commons, relevant political consequences, both national and international, naturally ensue. In order to properly understand the nuances and avoid misconceptions, one should revisit principles of international law. Centuries of customs, often based on Roman law concepts, have led to important regulations and definitions. The proper evaluation of those concepts may illuminate the path forwards.

Global Commons Concept

Legally defining “global commons” has proved to be a challenge, leading to incompatible views. Global commons are socially constructed, as explained by John Vogler, being determined by “shifts in human knowledge, capability and perceptions of scarcity” (Vogler, 2012, p. 61). As a legal concept, its roots may be traced back to Roman law. More specifically, reference should be made to the notions of res nullius and res communis, applicable to domains not subjected to rights of a specific subject. Res nullius is understood as encompassing things belonging to no one or areas free to be acquired by occupatio.1 Terrae nullius, a derivative international law concept, is applicable to unclaimed areas that may be occupied by states (Rose, 2003; Shaw, 2017, p. 372). Not subjected to exclusive sovereignty, global commons may either be unowned resource domains, or deemed as belonging to the international community in totum. Soroos explains that unowned domains can be regarded as commons if generally understood that they cannot be claimed by any individual actor, neither partially nor as a whole. A regulatory scheme may eventually be accorded by users, to reflect shared interests. On the other hand, domains considered as belonging to the international community presume that all states are their partial owners, therefore legitimized to take part in the decision-making processes related to its uses (Soroos, 2001, p. 45).

#### Development of space resources is still possible with a commons model. Property rights are not necessary. Existing models governing commons encourage responsible development, numerous examples prove.

Saletta Sterling & Orrman-Rossiter 18 [Sterling Saletta, Morgan; Orrman-Rossiter, Kevin (2018). Can space mining benefit all of humanity?: The resource fund and citizen's dividend model of Alaska, the ‘last frontier’. Space Policy, (), S0265964616300704–. doi:10.1016/j.spacepol.2018.02.002] CT

On the other hand, it has also been suggested that modifications and additions to the OST based on terrestrial models will provide sufficient guarantee of the right to make profits from the exploitation of outer space resources. Henry Hertzfeld and Frans von der Dunk argue the current regime does not pose a problem for exploitation rights and that terrestrial models would allow private ventures the right to reasonable returns on investment from resource exploitation in space [41]. Furthermore, in addition to important, and possibly irreconcilable, differences between a California gold rush style approach and the OST [42], arguments suggesting fee-simple or similar ownership is necessary for profitable private outer space resource exploitation simply do not stand in the face of contrary evidence from numerous terrestrial examples. These include offshore oil drilling, mining, timber and grazing operations in the United States and internationally which are regularly and profitably undertaken without ownership [43]. Thus P. M. Sterns and L. I. Tennen argue that the current international regime does provide an adequate framework for commercial development in space, that fee-simple ownership is unnecessary and:

“those who advocate the renunciation and abandonment of the nonappropriation principle are either seeking to increase their own bottom line by disingenuous and deceptive constructs, or lack an appropriate appreciation and respect for international processes [[44], p. 2439]”.

Thus, claims that a lack of private property rights in outer space will be a deterrent to commercial resource exploitation ventures in space do not reflect an adequate reflection and analysis of the manner in which current terrestrial practices might be extended into outer space without abrogating the current treaty regime. Nor would a system based on fee simple ownership be likely to tangibly benefit more than a small proportion of the world's population. Instead, the eventual wealth from exploiting celestial bodies would be concentrated in the hands of a few, exacerbating rather than alleviating existing problems for humanity and global sustainable development.

The Outer Space Treaty has provided an effective legal framework for the exploration of outer space for over 50 years. Based on the history of treaty regimes governing other international spaces, UNCLOS and the ATS, it seems likely that, in future, additional protocols and agreements will be layered onto the OST and that calls to abrogate and to negotiate a wholly new treaty system are unlikely to succeed. While low participation in the Moon Agreement, also known as the Moon Treaty of 1979, which has not been ratified by either the United States, Russia, or China, has raised questions of legitimacy, it has recently been argued that the Moon Treaty may receive renewed interest in the international community. René Lefeber argues that, far from stifling commercial ventures, the Moon Agreement “provides the best available option for mankind, states and industry to develop space mineral resources in a harmonious way [[5], p. 47]”, and that, as resource exploitation in outer space now seems likely, the need to elaborate an international regime to prevent conflict over resources may bring other parties to ratify, accede to, or sign the treaty.

Ultimately, some form of international governance of outer space as a global commons [45] building on the OST and the current corpus juris spatialis seems both more likely and more desirable than an abrogation of the OST and its replacement with an entirely new treaty regime. Thus, an international regime built upon this existing regime will need to be constructed which takes a balanced approach to space exploration, development and exploitation and which encourages entrepreneurial development but also moves beyond vague utopian platitudes to real and concrete benefits for all of humanity.

#### Treating space as a commons solves orbital debris. States already agree to a limited regime of this type.

Silverstein & Panda ‘3/9 - Benjamin Silverstein [research analyst for the Space Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. MA, International Relations, Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs BA, International Affairs, George Washington University] and Ankit Panda [Stanton Senior Fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. AB, Princeton University], “Space Is a Great Commons. It’s Time to Treat It as Such.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (Web). March 9, 2021. Accessed Dec. 13, 2021. <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/09/space-is-great-commons.-it-s-time-to-treat-it-as-such-pub-84018>> AT

The failure to manage Earth orbits as a commons undermines safety and predictability, exposing space operators to growing risks such as collisions with other satellites and debris. The long-standing debris problem has been building for decades and demands an international solution.¶ Competing states need to coalesce behind a commons-based understanding of Earth orbits to set the table for a governance system to organize space traffic and address rampant debris. New leadership in the United States can spur progress on space governance by affirming that Earth orbits are a great commons. So far, President Joe Biden and his administration have focused on major space projects, but a relatively simple policy declaration that frames Earth orbits as a great commons can support efforts to negotiate space governance models for issues like debris mitigation and remediation. The Biden administration can set the stage to pursue broad space policy goals by establishing a consensus among states, particularly those with the most invested in Earth orbits, that space is a great commons.¶ THE PRESSING NEED FOR SPACE GOVERNANCE¶ The Earth orbits that provide the majority of benefits to states and commercial ventures represent only a tiny fraction of outer space as a whole. Competition for the limited volume of these Earth orbits is especially fierce since two satellites cannot be in the same place at the same time and not all orbits are equally useful for all missions. The number of objects residing in Earth orbits is now at an all-time high, with most new objects introduced into orbits at altitudes of between 400 and 700 kilometers above sea level. Millions of pieces of debris in Earth orbits pose a threat to continuing space operations. For instance, the final U.S. space shuttle missions faced 1-in-300 odds of losing a space vehicle or crew member to orbital debris or micrometeoroid impacts.¶ Collisions with fragments of orbital litter as small as a few millimeters across can ruin satellites and end missions. Current technologies cannot track all of these tiny pieces of debris, leaving space assets at the mercy of undetectable, untraceable, and unpredictable pieces of space junk. Some researchers have determined that the debris population in low Earth orbit is already self-sustaining, meaning that collisions between space objects will produce debris more rapidly than natural forces, like atmospheric drag, can remove it from orbit.¶ States—namely the United States, Russia, China, and India—have exacerbated this debris accumulation trend by testing kinetic anti-satellite capabilities or otherwise purposefully fragmenting their satellites in orbit. These states, along with the rest of the multilateral disarmament community, are currently at an impasse on establishing future space governance mechanisms that can address the debris issue. A portion of this impasse may be attributable to disparate views of the nature of outer space in the international context. Establishing a clear view among negotiating parties that Earth orbits should be treated as a great commons would establish a basis for future agreements that reduce debris-related risks.¶ Beyond debris-generating, kinetic anti-satellite weapons tests, revolutionary operating concepts challenge existing space traffic management practices. For instance, commercial ventures are planning networks of thousands of satellites to provide low-latency connectivity on Earth and deploying them by the dozens. States are following this trend. Some are considering transitioning away from using single (or few) exquisite assets in higher orbits and toward using many satellites in low Earth orbits. These new operational concepts could lead to an increase in collision risks.¶ Without new governance agreements, problems related to debris, heavy orbital traffic, and harmful interference will only intensify. Debris in higher orbits can persist for a century or more. The costs of adapting to increasingly polluted orbits would be immense, and the opportunity costs would be even higher. For instance, all else being equal, hardening satellites against collisions increases their mass and volume, in turn raising launch costs per satellite. These costs, rooted in a failure to govern space as a commons, will be borne by all space actors, including emerging states and commercial entities.¶ EXISTING FORMS OF SPACE GOVERNANCE¶ A well-designed governance system, founded on a widespread understanding of Earth orbits as a great commons, could temper these risks. Currently, space is not wholly unregulated, but existing regulations are limited both in scope and implementation. Many operators pledge to follow national regulations and international guidelines, but decentralized accountability mechanisms limit enforcement. These guidelines also do not cover the full range of potentially risky behaviors in space. For example, while some space operators can maneuver satellites to avoid collisions, there are no compulsory rules or standards on who has the right of way.¶ At the interstate level, seminal multilateral agreements provide some more narrow guidance on what is and is not acceptable in space. Most famously, the Outer Space Treaty affirms that outer space “shall be free for exploration and use by all states without discrimination of any kind” and that “there shall be free access to all areas of celestial bodies.” Similar concepts of Earth orbits being a great commons arise in subsequent international texts. Agreements like the Liability Convention impose fault-based liability for debris-related collisions in space, but it is difficult to prove fault in this regime in part because satellite owners and operators have yet to codify a standard of care in space, and thus the regime does not clearly disincentivize debris creation in orbit. Other rules of behavior in Earth orbits have been more successful in reducing harmful interference between satellite operations, but even these efforts are limited in scope.¶ States have acceded to supranational regulations of the most limited (and thus most valuable) Earth orbits. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) coordinates, but does not authorize, satellite deployments and operations in geosynchronous orbits and manages radiofrequency spectrum assignments in other regions of space to reduce interference between satellites. These coordination activities are underpinned by the ITU’s constitution, which reminds states “that radio frequencies and any associate orbits . . . are limited natural resources,” indicating a commons-based approach to governing the radiofrequency spectrum. However, the union’s processes are still adapting to new operational realities in low Earth orbit, and these rules were never designed to address issues like debris.

#### Space resources must be distributed democratically—that’s normal means for a global commons and requires limiting private appropriation. CP fails. Levine 15

Nick Levine, MPhil candidate in history of science at the University of Cambridge, 3-21-2015, "Democratize the Universe," Jacobin, <https://jacobinmag.com/2015/03/space-industry-extraction-levine>

The privatization of the Milky Way has begun. Last summer, the bipartisan ASTEROIDS Act was introduced in Congress. The legislation’s aim is to grant US corporations property rights over any natural resources — like the platinum-group metals used in electronics — that they extract from asteroids. The bill took advantage of an ambiguity in the United Nations’ 1967 Outer Space Treaty. That agreement forbade nations and private organizations from claiming territory on celestial bodies, but was unclear about whether the exploitation of their natural resources would be allowed, and if so, on what terms. The legal framework governing the economic development of outer space will have enormous effects on the distribution of wealth and income in the Milky Way and beyond. We could fight for a galactic democracy, where the proceeds of the space economy are distributed widely. Or we could accept the trickle-down astronomics anticipated by the ASTEROIDS Act, which would allow for the concentration of vast amounts of economic and political power in the hands of a few corporations and the most technologically developed nations. Given the pressing problems of inequality and climate change on Earth, the US left has been understandably uninterested in or largely dismissive of any space pursuits. For this reason, it remains unprepared to organize around extraterrestrial economic justice. The Left’s rejection of space has effectively ceded the celestial commons to the business interests who would literally universalize laissez-faire. Organizing around extraterrestrial politics wasn’t always treated as an escapist distraction. In the 1970s, fighting for a celestial commons was a pillar of developing countries’ struggle to create a more equitable economic order. Starting in the 1960s, a coalition of underdeveloped nations, many recently decolonized, asserted their strength in numbers in the United Nations by forming a caucus known as the Group of 77. In the early 1970s, this bloc announced its intention to establish a “new international economic order,” which found its expression in a series of UN treaties governing international regions, like sea beds and outer space, that they hoped would spread the economic benefits of the commons more equitably, with special attention to less developed nations. For these countries — as well as for the nervous US business interests that opposed them — their plan to “socialize the moon,” as some put it at the time, was the first step toward a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and power in human society. It will be years before the industrialization of outer space is economically viable, if it ever is. But the legal framework that would shape that transition is being worked out now. The ASTEROIDS Act was submitted on behalf of those who would benefit most from a laissez-faire extraterrestrial system. If we leave the discussion about celestial property rights to the business interests that monopolize it now, any dream of economic democracy in outer space will go the way of jetpacks, flying cars, and the fifteen-hour workweek. As Below, So Above Left critics of space proposals make the same mistakes as the most techno-utopian starry-eyed industrialists. From the point of view of the latter, celestial development will provide ultimate salvation to the human race by making us a multi-planetary species; the former see outer space as an infinite void essentially antagonistic to human life, interest in which is only orchestrated for cynical political ends. Each side misconceives extraterrestrial pursuits as qualitatively different from economic activities on Earth. Venturing into space may be a greater technical challenge; it may cost more, be more dangerous, or be a mistaken use of resources. But to understand these prospects in existential terms rather than as a new episode in the familiar history of industrial development and resource extraction — with all the political-strategic dangers and organizing opportunities that come with them — is to be blinded by the space romanticism that is a peculiar vestige of Cold War geopolitics. Whether and how we should go to space are not profound philosophical questions, at least not primarily. What’s at stake is not just the “stature of man,” as Hannah Arendt put it, but a political-economic struggle over the future of the celestial commons, which could result in a dramatic intensification of inequality — or a small step for humankind toward a more egalitarian state of affairs on our current planet. Undoubtedly, there are good reasons to be skeptical about going to space. Some have argued that it shifts attention away from solving the difficult problems of economic and environmental justice on Earth — think of Gil Scott-Heron’s spoken-word poem “Whitey on the Moon,” which juxtaposes the deprivation of the American underclass with the vast resources diverted to space. Scott-Heron’s critique is powerful, but it’s important to remember that he was denouncing an unjust economic system. He wasn’t issuing a timeless condemnation of space pursuits as such. Whether the aims of providing for all and developing outer space are mutually exclusive depends on the political forces on the ground. We might also question whether mining asteroids would be detrimental to our current planet’s environment in the medium term. If we don’t find a renewable way to blast off into outer space, the exploitation of these resources could lead to an intensification of, not a move away from, the fossil-fuel economy. If the environmental impact of space mining turns out to be large, it would be analogous to fracking — a technological development that gives us access to new resources, but with devastating ecological side effects — and ought to be opposed on similar grounds. On the other hand, some speculate that mining the Moon’s Helium-3 reserves, for example, could provide an abundant source of clean energy. The terrestrial environmental impact of space activity remains an open question that must be explored before we stake our hopes on the economic development of outer space. Philosophers have suggested that we might have ethical duties to preserve the “natural” states of celestial bodies. Others fear that our activities might unknowingly wipe out alien microbial life. We should remain sensitive to the aesthetic and cultural value of outer space, as well as the potential for extinction and the exhaustion of resources misleadingly proclaimed to be limitless. But if the Left rejects space on these grounds we abandon its fate to the will of private interests. These concerns shouldn’t cause us to write off space altogether — rather, they should motivate us even more to fight for the careful, democratic use of celestial resources for the benefit of all. There is also reason to be cautiously optimistic about extending economic activity to outer space. For one, the resources there — whether platinum-group metals useful in electronics, or fuels that could be central to the semi-independent functioning of an outer space economy — have the potential to raise our standards of living. Imagine, a superabundance of asteroid metals that are scarce on Earth, like platinum, driving the sort of automation that could expand output and reduce the need to work. Of course, there’s nothing inevitable about the benefits of productivity gains being distributed widely, as we’ve seen in the United States over the past forty years. This is a problem not limited to space, and the myth of the “final frontier” must not distract us from the already existing problems of wealth and income distribution on Earth. While the industrialization of the solar system isn’t a panacea for all economic ills, it does offer a significant organizing opportunity, since it will force a confrontation over the future of the vast celestial commons. The democratic possibilities of such a struggle have been recognized before: one conservative American citizens’ group in the 1970s called a progressive UN space treaty a “vital component of Third World demands for massive redistribution of wealth so as ultimately to equate the economic positions of the two hemispheres.” Many in the 1970s identified the egalitarian potential in the development of outer space, and the Left must not overlook it today. Back to the Future One of the Group of 77’s major goals was to apply some of the redistributive functions of the welfare state on a global scale. In 1974, that coalition issued a “Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order,” which called for a fairer system of global trade and resource distribution, one that could alleviate historical inequality. One of the battlegrounds for the Group of 77 was the negotiation over extraterrestrial property rights. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967, signed by over ninety countries in the heat of the first sprint to the moon, rejected the notion that celestial bodies fell under the legal principle of res nullius — meaning that outer space was empty territory that could be claimed for a nation through occupation. It forbade the “national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means” of outer space. But the treaty was not just restrictive. It also had a positive requirement for extraterrestrial conduct: “The exploration and use of outer space,” it declared, “shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development, and shall be the province of all mankind.” However, nobody knew what this would mean in practice: was it a call for egalitarian economics, or an empty proclamation of liberal benevolence? Complicating matters, it was unclear whether the extraction and sale of natural resources from outer space fell under the category of “appropriation,” which had been forbidden. And what exactly was this benefit to all countries that our outer space pursuits were supposed to bring? How would its distribution be enforced? Which interpretation would win out was more a question of political power than of esoteric legal maneuvers. The Group of 77 took an activist approach to these issues, proposing amendments to the Outer Space Treaty regime that would spread the economic benefits of the celestial commons to less developed countries that did not have the resources to get to space, let alone mine it. Thus in 1970, the Argentine delegate to the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space proposed to legally designate outer space and its resources “the common heritage of mankind.” First applied in negotiations over maritime law a few years earlier, the “common heritage” concept was intended to give legal grounding to the peaceful international governance of the commons. As an alternative to the laissez-faire approach advocated by many private interests, the “common heritage” principle also provided a legal framework for the democratic distribution of revenues derived from the international commons. In 1973, the Indian delegation to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space tried to put this idea into celestial practice, proposing an amendment to the Outer Space Treaty that called for equitable sharing of space benefits, particularly with developing countries. The Brazilian delegate to the committee summarized the group’s position: “It does not seem justifiable . . . that space activities . . . should evolve in a climate of total laissez-faire, which would conceal under the cloak of rationality new ways for an abusive exercise of power by those who exert control over technology.” Despite opposition from both the Soviet Union and the United States, the final draft of this new outer space agreement included a version of the “common heritage of mankind” doctrine. When the finalized treaty was brought to the US in 1979 for ratification, business groups balked. The vision of egalitarian galactic democracy suggested by the document was rightly seen as contrary to narrow American interests. The United Technologies Corp­oration, a designer and manufacturer of aircrafts and other heavy machinery (including the Black Hawk helicopter) took out a large advertisement in the Washington Post and a number of other newspapers, warning that the treaty would establish an “OPEC-like monopoly, require mandatory transfer of technology, and impose high international taxes on profits as a way of shifting wealth from the developed to the less developed countries.” The president of the corporation, Alexander Haig, also testified against the treaty in Congress in 1979, warning that “the common heritage concept expressed in the treaty underlies Third World efforts directed at a fundamental redistribution of global wealth.” Haig was hired as Ronald Reagan’s secretary of state in 1981, and political opposition to the bill forced NASA’s chief counsel to abandon defense of the treaty. In the end, the Moon Treaty, as the 1979 document came to be known, failed to gain more than a few signatories, leaving open the question of how the benefits of outer space were to be shared. In 1988, a different coalition of developing countries added the question of space benefits to the UN outer space committee’s agenda. But they failed to gain traction, and by 1993 they had to concede, as two long-time delegates to the outer space committee put it, that “their attempt [at] a redistributive revolution in international space cooperation had failed.” The conversation had shifted from the distribution of economic benefits to a narrower emphasis on international scientific coordination and development aid. This retreat culminated in a 1996 declaration that limited the interpretation of the “benefit” clause of the Outer Space Treaty to vague promises to help less developed countries improve their space technologies. The ultimate failure of the Moon Treaty was representative of broader developments in international politics, as the influence of the Group of 77 declined. The fact that the structural adjustment policies of the Washington Consensus won out over the Third World’s redistributive goals was the result of contingent factors — the oil shock’s exacerbation of debt crises, for instance — but it also indicated the limits of the power the Group of 77 had wielded in the first place. In October 2014, the UN outer space committee issued a press release summarizing its most recent session. Its headline: “Outer Space Benefits Must Not Be Allowed to Widen Global Gap between Economic, Social Inequality, Fourth Committee Told.” Despite paying lip service to its past concerns, the outer space committee now emphasizes equal access, voluntary technology transfers, and modest development aid over the direct redistributive approach it took in the 1970s. This shift from struggling for equality of outcome to equality of opportunity, with no accountability mechanism in place to ensure even the latter, represents a striking regression. The egalitarian dreams of the “revolution of the colonized” in the UN, as it was called at the time, have been forgotten. The Empire Strikes Back Recent US plans for outer space development, shaped overwhelmingly by Silicon Valley’s intuitions and capital, stand in stark contrast to the futuristic democratic dreams of the Group of 77. The most prominent of these entrepreneurial visions has been Elon Musk’s plan to colonize Mars. For now, international law seems to unequivocally forbid territorial claims on Mars and other celestial bodies. The legal status of resource extraction, on the other hand, remains an open question. A vocal group of entrepreneurs is hoping to set a precedent for the private appropriation of natural resources from asteroids, without internationally redistributive obligations. Planetary Resources, an asteroid-mining company whose backers include Larry Page, Eric Schmidt, and James Cameron, plans to launch satellites to prospect for valuable asteroids in the next two years. Another US firm, Deep Space Industries, will launch exploratory satellites as soon as next year. These entrepreneurs hope to extract the valuable platinum-group metals, essential for manufacturing electronics, that are rare on Earth. Sensationalist articles on space mining will tell you about an asteroid worth $20 trillion. Investors also believe that asteroids might provide water that could be broken down into oxygen and hydrogen in space, yielding air for astronauts and fuel for their ships. This could facilitate a dramatic acceleration in the economic development of outer space. The CEO of Deep Space Industries said he hopes asteroids near Earth will be “like the Iron Range of Minnesota was for the Detroit car industry last century — a key resource located near where it was needed. In this case, metals and fuel from asteroids can expand the in-space industries of this century. That is our strategy.” Another entrepreneur called the industrialization of outer space the “biggest wealth-creation opportunity in modern history.” Before this value can be generated, however, the legal wrinkles have to be ironed out. And so in the summer of 2014, the ASTEROIDS Act was introduced in the House of Representatives to “promote the right of United States commercial entities to explore and utilize resources from asteroids in outer space, in accordance with the existing international obligations of the United States, free from harmful interference, and to transfer or sell such resources.” The legislation was intended to clarify US interpretations of international space law, explicitly granting American companies the right to extract asteroid resources and bring them to market. The conclusion of Congress’s last session means that the bill will have to be reintroduced for it to move forward, and it is uncertain exactly when and how this will happen. But its appearance marked another clear attempt to unilaterally push international norms toward the free extraction of outer space resources, with limited democratic responsibilities attached — and it will not be the last. Joanne Gabrynowicz, editor emerita of the Journal of Space Law, said that an adviser to Planetary Resources had drafted the bill. Deep Space Industries also sent a letter supporting it directly to the space subcommittee of the House of Representatives. Moreover, Congressman Bill Posey, a cosponsor of the act, represents Florida, a state that Gabrynowicz pointed out has recently been forced to try to attract commercial space business — a direct response to the economic hardship caused by the decommissioning NASA’s space shuttle program. Such extraterrestrial special interests will no doubt continue to exert legislative pressure. In addition to asteroids, companies are investing millions in mining the moon, despite legal uncertainties. One such company, Moon Express, has already received a $10 million data-sharing contract from NASA. One of that company’s founders, a former dot-com billionaire, told the Los Angeles Times: There is strong legal precedent and consensus of “finders, keepers” for resources that are liberated through private investment, and the same will be true on the moon. You don’t have to own land to have ownership of resources you unlock from it. Moon Express will use existing precedents of peaceful presence and exploration set by the US government forty years ago. This redeployment of the finders-keepers principle is anathema to the redistributive regime imagined by the Group of 77. Private companies like Planetary Resources and Moon Express, with support from the federal government, are betting not only on the viability of space industrialization, but also on their ability to push through a legal regime that will validate their property claims on their terms. But the universalization of laissez-faire is not inevitable. Final Frontier Thesis The history of the Moon Treaty serves as a reminder that outer space is not just a screen onto which we project techno-utopian fantasies or existential anxieties about the infinite void. It has been, and will continue to be, a site of concrete struggle over economic power. The politics of the present are undoubtedly different from those of the 1970s. The egalitarian project of the Group of 77 has given way to BRICS-style market liberalism. Global capital has gained power where international labor efforts have stagnated. Domestic inequalities have skyrocketed. The rapid proliferation of information technologies has temporarily masked the reality that the future, to paraphrase William Gibson, is not being very evenly distributed. Without international political organization to challenge galactic market fundamentalism, a twenty-first century space odyssey could mean the concentration of even more wealth and income in the hands of a few powerful corporations and the most technologically advanced countries. At the same time, and for the same reasons, the prospect of preserving the final frontier as a celestial commons presents an opportunity to fight for a more democratic political economy. Sharing the benefits of the celestial commons is key to expanding democracy to a galactic scale. One time-tested means of distributing the benefits of natural-resource extraction universally is the sovereign wealth fund, which Alaska uses to deliver oil revenue to its residents. As an international commons, outer space offers an opportunity to experiment with such redistributive mechanisms beyond the traditional confines of the nation-state. Organizing around an issue of such scale may seem utopian, but it’s also necessary. From regulating capital to mitigating climate change, the problems that confront us are inherently global in scope and require commensurate strategies. At the very least, the global left ought to demand the creation of an independent Galactic Wealth Fund to manage the proceeds of outer space resources on behalf of all human beings. At first, it would amount to little, divided up among all of us. But as the space economy grows relative to the terrestrial one, social dividends from the Galactic Wealth Fund could provide the basis for a truly universal basic income. This is just one component of a broader platform for galactic democracy that must be developed collectively. Extraterrestrial economic justice — not just shiny technological advances — will be central to any truly egalitarian politics in the twenty-first century. It’s time to start building a democratic futurism.