



Case For Moon: New Positive Future For Humans In Space - Open Ended With Planetary Protection at its Heart

Robert Walker

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Are you keen on humans in space, but skeptical about Mars as our first objective for human space exploration or for colonization? Do you think we will start with settlements supported from Earth, such as we already have in inhospitable places such as Antarctica? Do you think our exploration should be open ended with science as a core objective, and planetary protection and reversible biological exploration as core principles?

Do you see the Moon as an exciting first place to visit and explore, and see robots as our mobile sense organs in the solar system? Do you think that it's not yet the time to relax planetary protection guidelines, and that there is nothing special about microbes on human spacecraft that would make Mars less vulnerable to them? Then this may be a vision for you.

The Moon is interesting in its own right. To ignore the Moon is like ignoring Antarctica because someone landed there in the nineteenth century, saying that Antarctica is already "done". It's the closest place to us in space which we can explore on the ground, and also the easiest, and safest to explore. If we can't explore our Moon, we have no chance of exploring Mars.

Also - why rush humans as quickly as possible to the place in the inner solar system most vulnerable to Earth microbes? We want to find native Mars life there, if it exists. It is easy to find life if you bring it with you yourself, but that would be the worst possible anticlimax of our search for life in the solar system. Especially if we found that there was some vulnerable form of early life on Mars, say, RNA based life which on Earth got made extinct by DNA life, until just before the humans got there. We must make sure this can't happen.

The Moon is also resource rich. It has some resources that Mars doesn't have indeed. It is also a safer place to explore, closer to Earth, and more likely to have economic value for Earth.

We can start with small robotic missions first, followed by Antarctic base type settlements on the peaks of eternal light at the lunar poles

Then as we do so, we continue robotic exploration of the solar system, and find out what humans do best, and what robots do best, starting off with humans on the Moon. Then continue outwards in an open fashion, building on what we've learnt.

Later on we can explore Mars from orbit and its two moons, Phobos and Deimos. Meanwhile continue to explore Mars robotically, and also later, telerobotic exploration from orbit. We can also send human explorers to the Venus clouds, and eventually to the asteroids, to Mercury and to Jupiter's moon Callisto.

In this approach, science and planetary protection is central. Space settlement happens because you are there for a purpose. And as with the Antarctic bases - once we are there doing good science, with science as the motivation, then it would be an on going permanent first step into space.

Missions motivated by science continue to grow, and engage the public. No suggestion that we should stop exploring Antarctica because of the cost of the science exploration there. What's more, they can also have overwhelmingly positive outcomes too, especially if we make new discoveries about biology and evolution.

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