

The First Ten Years of JSP: A Retrospective

By Gordon Arthur

Abstract

This article gives an overview of the first ten years of the *Journal of Space Philosophy* along with some of the backstory of its formation that has not previously been documented. It summarises some of its achievements so far, and it concludes with a brief look to the future.

Keywords: Space philosophy, history, first ten years, looking to the future.

Introduction

In 2012, the late Bob Krone saw a need for a journal on space philosophy. Since he could not find one, he decided to create one. He therefore assembled an editorial panel of experts on space and commissioned twenty articles for the inaugural issue. As I am qualified in philosophy and I have the necessary publication skills, he invited me to become Associate Editor while he took the Editor-in-Chief role, and this led to a productive collaboration that lasted until his death in late 2021. Shortly before his death, we both independently realised that Mark Wagner would be an excellent successor for him. I became Editor-in-Chief, retaining my publication duties, and Mark took over commissioning articles as Associate Editor.

Starting Out

Our initial intention was to set up an online-only journal that would work as well in print as on the screen and in which the authors would retain copyright on their articles. This resulted in the first issue being in a hybrid, compromise format that was not entirely successful. We also used broadly generic Kepler-branded covers at first, subsequently replacing them after we introduced graphic covers in Volume 4 in Spring 2015. However, as always with journals, the most important element was the content. The lead article in the first issue was by Joel Isaacson on recursive distinctioning, a subject that was dear to Bob's heart and to which the journal returned on several occasions. In addition, Bob set the tone for the journal going forward in his article "Philosophy for Space: Learning from the Past—Visions for the Future," in which he addressed the questions, what should be the philosophical foundation for the future of humans in Space? What beliefs and values will drive human Space settlements? What is the future for humankind if it remains on Cradle Earth? These questions led him to propose that Kepler's philosophy should be to encourage reverence for life within ethical civilization using the policy sciences as tools. Frank White began a three-part series on the Overview Effect, and the subjects of other articles ranged from the art of staying human and circumventing Armageddon to the philosophy of kids in space and the benefits of renewable energy.

By the second issue, the layout and formatting had improved somewhat, and the referencing standard had been set as Chicago (at that point, v16). Volume 2 explored dark energy, space law, and faith in space. It ventured into fiction with a journey into the unknown. It explored ways to unlock universal truths from philosophers' dreams, in parallel with applying them to developments in space science. It also introduced another mainstay, space settlement, to which it has returned on several occasions. Volume 3 built upon these ideas, and it also introduced space-based solar power, another main theme, concerning which Mike Snead compared the Earth to the Titanic sailing into an ice field, demonstrating that America's continuing reliance on fossil fuels is likely to lead to economic and cultural disaster. It also introduced material on leadership, with Yehezkel Dror stating that concern for the good of all humanity holds the key to the advancement of civilization into space. By this time, the journal had largely reached a stable format. The final element was graphic covers, which were introduced in the Spring 2015 issue. The journal retained this layout until it was revised to its current format in January 2021.

Becoming Established

Volumes 4–10 built on the foundation of earlier issues. Steven Wolfe expounded on our obligation to expand life beyond Earth, and David Norris and Frank White transferred the lessons from the Overview Effect to leadership in a terrestrial context, emphasizing the importance of action and creativity. Yehezkel Dror wrote about preventing hell on Earth. Paul Werbos and Edward McCullough argued that America's space program should be resurrected by focusing on new technology. I wrote a reflection on crossing a border to see the solar eclipse of August 21, 2017 in Oregon, an eclipse that led to a brief revival in public interest in astronomy (the next major eclipse in North America is on April 8, 2024). Kim Peart and Madhu Thangavelu reflected on peace and the spiritual dimensions of space, and Ayse Oren wrote on space architecture. David Schrunk and Bob Krone wrote on the science of laws. Richelle Gribble wrote on art in space. Barry Elsey and Amina Amarova wrote on education in space (a subject on which Mark Wagner and others subsequently contributed). Larry Downing wrote on ethics, values, and moral leadership in space settlements. Bob Krone wrote on machine intelligence, and I wrote on the beginnings of the academic philosophy of space travel. There were special issues on recursive distinctioning and Yehezkel Dror's legacy.

Due to production problems and other commitments, we missed two issues, and there were also a few delayed issues. However, we felt it important to persevere through these problems and to keep publishing material. This is just a sample of the contents of these volumes. Our aim was and is to publish on all philosophical aspects of space exploration, and our authors have all made valuable contributions to that effort, covering a wide range of subjects and perspectives in the process. We have also made a point of inviting new writers as well as established authors, so that we can see new perspectives and viewpoints,

and this intention remains. However, nothing lasts forever, and in mid-2021, we learned that change was in the air.

Changing of the Guard

In summer 2021, it became clear that Bob was not well, and that he would have to step back. Accordingly, he suggested that we swap titles so that I became Editor-in-Chief, and he became Associate Editor. It was not long after that that he realised he would have to retire altogether and suggested Mark as his successor. I had seen where things were going, and I had already concluded that Mark was right for the job. Accordingly, Mark and I took over during the preparation of the Fall 2021 issue. This was a special issue in memory of Joel Isaacson, who had died earlier in the year, and it focused heavily on recursive distinctioning. It was also a transitional issue, as we worked out how we would do things going forward. Spring 2022 was our first complete issue together. We decided that we would continue to follow the path set in 2012, and that the inevitable changes would be incremental and evolutionary, rather than revolutionary.

Trends

In the first issue, there was a broad range articles on a variety of different subjects. While we have attempted to continue that diversity of both articles and authors in subsequent issues, a few definite trends have emerged. Early on, there were foci on recursive distinctioning and its consequences, and the policy sciences. As time went on, however, streams of articles on space settlement, its prerequisites, and its consequences, along with space-based solar power and resource mining in space also emerged, and the focus slowly shifted from an initially fairly theoretical approach to a more practical and applied one. There is always a place for both theory and practice, however, so our aim is to seek a balance of both going forward.

Conclusion

So what of the future? Our intention is to build on this legacy and to continue to develop and refine our processes and our thinking, while adjusting the presentation as necessary from time to time. We remain open to good, new material from both established and new writers. We celebrate our contributors so far, and we remember their contributions with gratitude. In short, we look forward to continuing and developing what has gone before as we move into the future.

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About the Author: Gordon Arthur is Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Space Philosophy* and Dean of Space Philosophy and Theory at Kepler Space Institute. He has taught courses in both philosophy and governance at Kepler. He has published books in theology and journal articles in both philosophy and theology.

Editor's Notes: This issue is both a retrospective of the past ten years in space philosophy, and a prospective look at the next ten years. We begin with several articles highlighting the changes we've seen in the field since this journal began in 2012. Dr. Gordon Arthur, who served as the associate editor of the journal from its inception until 2021, and who now serves as the editor-in-chief since the passing of Dr. Bob Krone, offers his unique perspective on the founding and evolution of the journal. We are grateful that he has captured these stories and shared them here for posterity. **Mark Wagner.**