



travel and space inhabitation would inspire their thinking upon crucial issues such as the changing place of humanity in the universe, the implications of our growing understanding of the cosmos, and our increased appreciation of the interdependence of life on earth.

Some will say that we have already done this, through bringing politicians into space. Moreover, another such attempt led to tragedy, when the first recipient of the NASA Teacher in Space Project, elementary teacher Christa McAuliffe, perished in the Challenger disaster. Bringing citizens into space is itself a worthy goal, but it does not address the need of bringing artists, humanists, social scientists and religious scholars into space to help us clarify the meaning and goals of space travel.

Some may object to the suggestion of bringing religious perspectives into a publicly funded venue, seeing it as a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." But this misreads the Constitution. The Founding Fathers were interested only in preventing the establishment of one church over all others. More to the point, exploring the lived experience of the sacred (whether at the Grand Canyon, or in outer space) is distinct from questions about the place of organized, doctrinal religion in public life.

It is worth noting that NASA has recently given some attention to these wider concerns. Some of the research within the NASA Astrobiology Institute (NAI) has considered philosophical issues. So, for instance, the Center for Astrobiology at the University of Colorado lists *philosophical and societal issues in astrobiology* as one of its research themes. Tellingly, however, this research has been focused on fairly narrow epistemological issues such as the difference between historical and experimental sciences, rather than more interesting questions of how the discovery of extra-terrestrial life might affect our conception of ourselves.

In general, then, we have not taken up the task of sustained thinking about the humanistic aspects of space exploration. While NASA's Astrobiology Roadmap lists three questions as setting the agenda of its work—how does life begin and evolve? Does life exist elsewhere in the universe? What is the future of life on Earth and beyond?—a fourth bullet is needed: how might such a discovery affect our sense of our selves and our cultural institutions?

Such questions are properly the province of humanities policy—humanistic reflection that seeks engagement with the wider world. We are unlikely to make much progress in understanding our fundamental motivations concerning space travel until we commit ourselves to this crucial and difficult task.