



Stanford eCorner

When We Colonize Mars

Elon Musk, *SpaceX*

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Starting from a lofty vision of the first Mars colony, Elon Musk and Steve Jurvetson – both heavily invested in the future of space exploration – discuss issues of democratic governance on the red planet. Musk recalls a conversation with Google Co-Founder Larry Page, who suggested laws be limited to 1,000 words, while also pondering other ways to streamline policymaking.



Transcript

That's fascinating. I'm just wondering-- if you were to start over with a clean sheet of paper on governance, do you think a framework that could be envisioned that encompasses other sentient beings to come-- meaning the AIs and others who might clamor for their rights? It's difficult to predict, but I can say they probably would look aim for a more direct democracy. And then I was talking to Larry Page about this. And he had a good suggestion-- we should limit the number of words in a law. Because we have these 1,000 page laws in the past. And nobody's read them. Twitter equivalent of parsimony. Yeah, like a thousand word/letter count or something like that. If you can't write the law in a thousand words, then probably it shouldn't be there. And we shouldn't have a single law passed that's the size of Lord of the Rings.

And literally not a single person in Congress has read the whole thing. Like the tax code-- it's inscrutable. Yes, exactly. So there's that. And I think laws also have an infinite lifespan, unless they're given some sort of sunset period. So probably it would be good to default laws to have a sunset period. And if it's not good enough to be renewed, then it goes away. And maybe some hysteresis in making it easier to remove a law than to put one in place. You can just imagine, over time, the body of law just gets bigger and bigger and bigger. How do you avoid that? And you have inertia associated with laws.

And so maybe it would take 60% to create a law, but only 40% to remove a law. Interesting, fascinating. Yeah, something like that. Those are like the rules of a Constitutional democracy. It's such a profound impact. And to have a new playground would be fantastic.