

Ethics in Business Practice
201/22, Epiphany Term, Lectures 9&10
The Ethics of Private Space Exploration
Summary and Reading

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Further notes/readings may be added closer to the time. Take the notes below as a guide at this stage.

Lecture 9

The Ethics of Private Space Exploration (I): Property and Appropriation

To what extent should activities in space and on celestial bodies be the proper domain of commercial enterprise? This depends to a large extent on the rights of ownership and appropriation that are properly applicable in these domains. Here judgments differ. Some regard private enterprise in space as problematic based on the view that space is a commons or that privatisation would make space the domain of the rich (and only the rich).

Core Questions:

1. Who owns space?
2. Should private enterprise be encouraged and/or permitted in space?

Reading:

The first two pieces are very short, popular pieces expressing a broad scepticism about private enterprises in space. The next two pieces are academic (and at least in part philosophical) and more pro private enterprise. The final piece is an interesting mix.

- (1) Oduntan, Gbenga. Who owns space? US asteroid-mining act is dangerous and potentially illegal. *The Conversation* (November 2015).
<https://theconversation.com/who-owns-space-us-asteroid-mining-act-is-dangerous-and-potentially-illegal-51073>
- (2) Badham, Van. 2018 Space exploration should be an initiative of nations, not just some rich guy. *The Guardian*. (February 2018).
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/09/space-exploration-should-be-an-initiative-of-nations-not-just-some-rich-guy>
- (3) Pop, Virgiliu. Appropriation in Outer Space: The Relationship between Land Ownership and Sovereignty on the Celestial Bodies. *Space Policy* (2000).
- (4) Cooper, Laurence. Encouraging Space Exploration through a New Application of Space Property Rights. *Space Policy* (2003).
- (5) Miligan, Tony. Property Rights and the Duty to Extend Human Life. *Space Policy* (2011).

Lecture 10

The Ethics of Private Space Exploration (I): Space Exploration as Mega-Philanthropy

Musk, Bezos and Branson have been widely criticised – including recently by HRH Prince William - for spending vast sums of money on commercial space exploration when their money could do a lot of good back here on earth. But is there a case to be made for saying that their space ventures are in fact the ultimate act of philanthropy? Perhaps, if a controversial way of thinking about philanthropic giving, *longtermism*, is true...

Core Questions:

1. Are Space X and/or Deep Blue morally defensible enterprises?
2. Does longtermism justify spending money on attempting to colonise Mars rather than preventing world hunger today?

Reading:

- (1) Musk, Elon. Making Humanity a Multi-Planet Species. *New Space* (2017). Widely available (e.g.) <http://www.lloydthomas.org/5-SpecialStudies/space.2017.29009.emu.pdf>
- (2) Singer, Peter. What Should a Billionaire Give? And What Should You? In Illingworth, Pogge and Weinar (eds.) *Giving Well* (2011). <http://www.inf.fu-berlin.de/lehre/pmo/eng/Singer-WhatShouldYouGive.pdf>
- (3) Gottlieb, Joseph. Space Colonization and Existential Risk. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2019).
- (4) Greaves, Hilary and MacAskill, Will. The Case for Strong Longtermism. *Global Priorities Institute Working Paper*. (June 2021). <https://globalprioritiesinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Case-for-Strong-Longtermism-GPI-Working-Paper-June-2021-2-2.pdf>