Value Resolution Background Paper

Resolved: In the exploration and utilization of outer space, international cooperation should be prioritized.

What we value determines what we do. For every decision we make, there is a value underlying that decision whether or not we are aware of it. If I value innovation more than safety, I will be willing to take risks. If I value taste and pleasure more than health, I might choose to eat sweets whenever I want. If I value human life more than economy, I might refuse to buy cheap products produced by slave labor.

Before we make decisions, it is wise to first ask what we value and whether or not the decision we make is in line with our values. Christians especially should train themselves to think about how their decisions align with their values, and value debate provides just such an opportunity. Instead of asking *what* we should do as policy debate asks, value debate asks *why* we should prefer a certain position. Looking at the new resolution, for example, why should we prioritize international cooperation in the exploration and utilization of outer space? The answer to this question, and the substance of value debate, is philosophical in nature.

Background

This year, debaters are invited to think philosophically about space exploration, an exciting frontier of human ambition, ingenuity, and groundbreaking endeavors. Within the last century, mankind has found its exploration of the heavens no longer confined to the naked eye or a telescope, but amongst the stars themselves. Interplanetary missions, extraterrestrial colonization, space tourism, and space mining are increasingly becoming tangible possibilities. However, value debaters are not primarily concerned about what is possible but rather what is ethical. The foundational question that value debaters must answer is how *should* mankind explore and use outer space and all that it contains? This question gives rise to a variety of foundational philosophical considerations, such as:

- Does a nation's right to self-determination mean that it should prioritize national interests over international cooperation?
- Does competition or cooperation between national and/or corporate entities lead to the most effective exploration and utilization of space?
- Do individual or international interests best produce space innovations?
- Is national or corporate ownership of space property just?
- Does the prioritization of international cooperation or individual interests best steward space resources?
- Should the collective good be prioritized over individual achievement in the exploration and utilization of space? And if so, why?

The affirming side of the resolution is rooted in a strong belief that outer space belongs to all people equally; therefore, the most appropriate method for the exploration and use of outer space is through international *cooperation*. As noted by the United Nations' Fourth Committee Hearing (UN) on October 23, 2023, "Outer space must become an arena for international cooperation for global sustainable development, and not a theatre for an arms race. . ."[1] There are varied arguments the affirmative may utilize to support the overarching question of *why* international cooperation should be prioritized. Yet, many of these arguments will tie back to a utilitarian framework of choosing the path of action that leads to the greatest benefit to the most people. The UN provides the following value for international cooperation: "The exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out ***for the benefit*** and ***in the interests of all*** countries and shall be ***the province of all*** mankind."[2] Anything besides cooperation will sacrifice the interests of all for the one.

However, the negative side of the resolution challenges this view by questioning whether international cooperation is always the best approach for space exploration. The negative could argue that national self-interest, rather than collective cooperation, is a more effective and justifiable path to progress. This was clearly emphasized by the Space Race of the mid-20th century, where intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union led to rapid technological advancements, including the first satellite (Sputnik), the first human in space (Yuri Gagarin), and the Apollo 11 moon landing. These achievements were driven by national ambition and rivalry, demonstrating how competition can inspire extraordinary breakthroughs in science, engineering, and exploration. As a result of the open nature of the negative in this resolution, debaters have the freedom to argue not only that competition should be prioritized instead of cooperation, but also to present a wide range of alternative stances—such as that we should value domestic cooperation instead or even that we should not engage in space at all.

Resolutional Definitions

Just as our values guide our choices, the definitions we use in a debate shape how the discussion unfolds. A strong definition aligns with the resolution and ensures a fair, logical evaluation of the arguments presented. It is not just a technicality; defining terms accurately is essential for guiding the debate toward a meaningful discussion of the resolution's true implications.

Debaters are expected to use definitions that are fair to both the affirmative and negative, but sometimes it is necessary to engage in a definitional debate. Definitional debates are not always as simple as citing a more credible source. Instead, one must demonstrate that their

[1] United Nations Fourth Committee, "Outer Space Must Be a Place for Peace and Cooperation, Not an Arms Race, Speakers Affirm, as Fourth Committee Takes Up Space Matters," *United Nations General Assembly* (2023), accessed February 21, 2025, para. 1, https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaspd788.doc.htm.
[2] United Nations Legal Subcommittee, "Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies," *United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs* (1967), para. 2, accessed February 22, 2025, https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/ourwork/spacelaw/treaties/introouterspacetreaty.html.

definition best fits the context of the resolution itself. A definition can be shown to be flawed for the resolution by providing counterexamples—scenarios that should clearly fall under the resolution but are excluded by the definition, or situations that clearly should not be part of the resolution but are allowed by the definition.

Here are some definitions of key terms along with a discussion of the scope allowed by some of these terms:

> **Exploration** - "the activity of traveling to and around a place, especially one where you have never been or few people have been before, in order to find out more about it" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).
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> **Utilization** - "the act of using something in an effective way" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).
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> **Outer Space** - "the universe beyond the Earth's atmosphere" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).
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> While Cambridge University Press and Assessment provides a general definition for "outer space," it fails to account for what the "universe beyond the Earth's atmosphere" actually is. Astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell for *Physics Today* (2020) notes that Earth's atmosphere has five recognizable layers: troposphere, stratosphere, mesosphere, thermosphere, and exosphere.[3] The troposphere is the layer closest to the Earth's core, where the air is most dense. As each layer graduates to the next, increasing in distance from the Earth's core and gravitational pull, the air becomes less dense. Due to differences in composition, each layer of the Earth's atmosphere allows for only certain types of technology to be operated. For example, airplanes require denser air for aerodynamic lift. Therefore, airplanes are typically restricted to the troposphere and stratosphere, which would only allow for travel up to 50 kilometers above sea level.[4]
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> For many legal reasons, there is no agreed-upon definition of "outer space."[5] However, many agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) recognize 100 kilometers above sea level, known as the Kármán Line in the thermosphere, to be the beginning of "outer space."[6]
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> **International Cooperation** - "A collaborative relationship between entities to work toward shared objectives through a mutually agreed division of labour" (United Nations, n.d.).

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[3] McDowell, J., " Where does outer space begin?" *Physics Today*, (October 1, 2020), 73 (10): 70–71, https://doi.org/10.1063/PT.3.4599, accessed April 7, 2025.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] European Space Policy Institute, "Delimitation of Outer Space," ESPI Briefs: No. 11, *European Space Policy Institute*, (March 2017), https://www.espi.or.at/briefs/delimitation-of-outer-space/, accessed April 7, 2025.
[6] *Ibid.*

International - "involving more than one country" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Cooperation - "the process of working with another company, organization, or country in order to achieve something" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Prioritized - "to decide which of a group of things are the most important so that you can deal with them first" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Resolutional Analysis

Related Concepts

1. Interplanetary missions

   Is it ethical to send humans to other planets given the uncertainty, risks, and lack of knowledge about long-term consequences?

2. Extraterrestrial colonization

   To what extent does the pursuit of extraterrestrial colonization reinforce historical patterns of geopolitical inequality—exporting the logic of colonialism beyond Earth?

3. Space mining

   Does the pursuit of space mining risk repeating Earth's extractive habits in a new frontier, or can humanity develop a new ethic of resource use beyond our planet?

4. Environmental concerns

   Should governments prioritize sustainability and eco-consciousness in their explorations of space, or does the vast potential of the cosmos and the promise of progress justify accelerating development—even if it means relaxing certain standards?

5. Extraterrestrial property rights

   Can any nation or entity claim ownership over parts of outer space, or does space belong to no one—or everyone?

6. Militarization

   Is international cooperation a realistic deterrent to the weaponization of space, or is national militarization an inevitable extension of geopolitical competition?

Potential Actors

This resolution does not include an explicit actor. This omission is intentional—it allows debaters to analyze the principle of prioritizing international cooperation as a normative standard, regardless of which entity is doing the exploration or utilization. Focusing too narrowly on a single actor risks losing sight of the broader philosophical implications and values at stake.

Although defining an actor is not necessary, it is still helpful to envision the different entities involved in the exploration and utilization of outer space:

Government Space Agencies

National governments and their space agencies play a pivotal role in space exploration. Agencies such as NASA (United States), Roscosmos (Russia), CNSA (China), and ESA (European Space Agency) determine space policies, fund missions, and establish national priorities. Governments must decide whether to pursue unilateral efforts, cooperate internationally, or partner with private entities based on national security interests, economic benefits, and scientific goals.

Private Space Corporations

Private companies such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, and Boeing have revolutionized space exploration by developing reusable rockets, space tourism, and lunar colonization plans. These companies often collaborate with governments but also operate independently. As profit-driven bodies, companies should consider whether cooperation or competition best ensures economic benefit.

International Organizations

Organizations such as the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and treaties such as the Outer Space Treaty and the Artemis Accords establish legal frameworks for international cooperation in space.

Potential Areas of Clash

Globalism vs Nationalism

Should space be governed by international agreements, or should nations retain full control over their space initiatives?

Bureaucracy vs Innovation

Does prioritizing international collaboration accelerate or slow down technological advancements?

Transparency vs Security

Does international cooperation reduce the risk of conflict, or does it expose nations to security vulnerabilities? For example, does sharing information, technology, and intentions with international partners promote openness and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings? Or does this transparency expose sensitive data and increase the risk of technological exploitation or loss of strategic advantage?

Peaceful Exploration vs Militarization

Does international cooperation prevent the weaponization of space and promote peaceful scientific exploration? Or is it more important for countries to promote national security through the weaponization of space?

Developing Nations vs Wealthy Nations

Does cooperation offer developing nations a seat at the table, access to resources, and participation in space exploration they could not otherwise afford, leveling the playing field? Or does international cooperation reflect the interests of wealthier nations, restricting the autonomy of emerging space powers and reinforcing dependency under the guise of equality?

Environmental Protection vs. Economic Growth

Does international cooperation ensure that the environmental resources of space are protected, or does it hamper economic growth and opportunity?

Ethical Frameworks

This topic falls into the branch of philosophy called ethics, specifically normative ethics—the exploration of what ought to be. Normative ethics therefore begins with the assumption that morality exists and then asks the question, "By what standard should morality be judged?" There are three basic schools of thought when it comes to answering this second question:

- **Consequentialism** (the morality of a choice should be judged based on its consequences),
- **Deontology** (the morality of a choice should be judged based on its adherence to a moral code), and
- **Natural Law** (the morality of a choice should be judged based on the intrinsic values that are part of human nature).

By understanding and utilizing one of these frameworks, debaters can draw upon a rich stream of philosophical thought that provides a standard for justifying both their value and their position in the round. These frameworks are explored below with specific examples for both the affirmative and negative positions.

Potential Affirmative Values

1. **Sustainability** is "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[7]

    a. *Consequentialist view*: Sustainability is best served when a given action leads to practices that protect non renewable resources, recycle renewable resources, and prevent further harm to ecological processes. Cooperation prioritizes protection over negligent innovation. This results in the most efficient use of natural resources. Non-cooperation results in the mismanagement of natural resources for the greatest benefit of one.

    b. *Deontological view*: Countries and agencies have a duty to protect the environment for the longevity of their society. Cooperation requires two or more entities to work together toward the same end, grounded in a shared commitment to their fundamental duties. Therefore, cooperation necessarily provides guaranteed protection of an entity's duty to protect the environment. In contrast, non-cooperation lacks this obligation to sustainably explore and utilize the environment in outer space.

    c. *Natural Law view*: Outer space has intrinsic value as a natural environment. Due to this, the moral choice for the exploration and utilization of outer space is the choice that best protects its environmental value. Cooperation balances the interests of many, which results in the protection of uncompromisable standards. Every country and agency requires the sustainable use of the environment for its preservation. Non-cooperation puts this universal interest at stake for the sake of a single entity's desires.

2. **Equality** is "the right of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment" (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

    a. *Consequentialist view*: Since cooperation seeks to reconcile the interests of many over the gain of a few, it results in the most equal treatment of people.

    b. *Deontological view*: Every person has a duty to treat others as they would want to be treated. A non-cooperative state in the use and exploration of outer space necessarily fuels selfish ambition, even at the expense of others' interests. Cooperation is the only way to fulfill our duty to equality in the use and exploration of outer space.

    c. *Natural Law view*: All humans are equal; no society deserves more access to the natural resources of outer space than another. Therefore, the exploration and use of outer space should be an effort that is supported by and benefits all, not just a single country or agency.

[7] United Nations, "Sustainability," *United Nations*, (n.d.), https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability, accessed April 9, 2025.

3. **Innovation**

    a. *Consequentialist view*: Cooperation combines the innovative efforts of two or more entities. This creates a space for, and may even require, information sharing. When technological advancements are open source, gatekeeping is decreased and the distribution of knowledge increases.

    b. *Deontological view*: Nations and agencies have a duty to support the welfare of their communities. The welfare of any given community is best supported by improvements in how that community functions. Innovation provides novel technologies that support the development of biological, economical, and social improvements. Cooperation allows innovation to be spread widely and freely to numerous communities. Non-cooperation seeks to limit innovation to the borders of a single entity. This suffocates innovation and, thereby, our inherent duty to support the welfare of society.

    c. *Natural law view*: Every community has inherent value and is deserving of improved societal conditions as any other community. The beneficial byproducts of innovation should therefore be spread as widely as possible to provide the greatest benefit to the most people. Cooperation's necessary condition of sharing and distributing knowledge and resources fairly best supports innovation and the improvement of society.

Potential Negative Values

1. **Sovereignty**

    a. *Consequentialist view:* Undermining sovereignty leads to diminished strategic advantage, reduced agility in policy, and weaker global positioning.

    b. *Deontological view:* Nations have a moral duty to uphold self-governance. Subordinating national will to international consensus violates their right to act independently.

    c. *Natural Law view:* Political communities are naturally oriented toward self preservation and control of their destinies. Cooperation that undermines this violates the natural order of governance.

2. **National Security**

    a. *Consequentialism view:* Successful cooperation requires sharing information with other entities that ultimately can be weaponized. This may result in security breaches and loss of technological advantage.

    b. *Deontological view:* A nation has a categorical duty to protect its citizens. Sharing sensitive technologies undermines this duty by risking exposure to adversaries.

c. *Natural law view:* Security and self-defense are fundamental aspects of the natural law that governs the organization of political communities. Maintaining technological superiority is part of a nation's natural right to protect its people. Cooperation that undermines that superiority disrupts the natural protective instincts of sovereign entities and is therefore contrary to natural justice.

3. **Innovation**

   a. *Consequentialist view:* Throughout history, competition has been a driving force behind scientific and technological breakthroughs. The Cold War space race led to rapid advancements, including the moon landing, satellite technology, and human spaceflight. By prioritizing international cooperation, innovation may slow due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, conflicting national interests, and a lack of competitive motivation.

   b. *Deontological view:* We have a duty to pursue the advancement of knowledge. Restrictive cooperation compromises that moral imperative by stifling creativity and experimentation.

   c. *Natural Law view:* Humans are naturally inventive beings. Competition unleashes this tendency, while cooperation may restrain it with artificial means.

Summary

This debate centers on whether international cooperation should be prioritized in the exploration and utilization of outer space. On one hand, cooperation may lead to shared knowledge, peaceful progress, sustainable resource use, and equitable access for all nations. On the other hand, prioritizing cooperation could restrict national sovereignty, hinder innovation, and compromise security by entangling space endeavors in bureaucracy and conflicting interest. Debaters must decide which value should guide us in navigating between the benefits and downsides of cooperation versus independence in space exploration.

Resources

General Articles

Space Exploration and U.S. Competitiveness | Council on Foreign Relations

Public–private partnerships in fostering outer space innovations - PMC

Chapter 5. Crowding and Competition in Space - Global Risks Report 2022 | World Economic Forum

Private Firms Are the Key to Space Exploration | National Review

If Humanity Is to Succeed in Space, Our Ethics Must Evolve

A Shared Frontier? Collaboration and Competition in the Space Domain

Aff Articles

The Case for Managed International Cooperation in Space Exploration

International Cooperation and Development

International Space Treaty

Finders Keepers: Who Has Say Over Private Property in Space

Environmental Impacts of Increasing Numbers of Artificial Space Objects

Debris from Blue Origin and SpaceX rockets found in Bahamas and Europe

Who Owns the Moon?: Capitalism in Outer Space

The Challenge of Collaboration

ISS International Cooperative Agreement

Neg Articles

Conflict and Controversy in the Space Domain: Legalities, Lethalities, and Celestial Secur

Why Outer Space Matters for National and International Security

The Roles of Competition on Innovation Efficiency and Firm Performance

Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma

Can international cooperation in space survive geopolitical competition on Earth? - Atlantic Council

The new 'space race': what are China's ambitions and why is the US so concerned?

Green, greener, greenest: Can competition increase sustainable behavior? - ScienceDirect

Fostering Sustainable Behavior Through Group Competition

Gary Westfahl -- "The Case Against Space"

Why We Need a Space Force