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# Space Tourism: A Historical and Existential Perspective

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**Abstract:** The growth of space tourism over recent decades has led to calls to formalise its ethical positioning and sustainability credentials in the eyes of society. With tourism ethics frameworks typically developing according to human-centred viewpoints, how might we develop ethical reference points for future space tourism when technological innovation progresses to the extent where we are exploring the unknown? To explore the unknown, we have conducted a colonial reflection on the behaviour and attitudes of Captain James Cook and the crew of HMS Endeavour when they visited Australia in 1770. From a methodological perspective, we have drawn on extracts from the voyage journals, examining the information that they provide through the lens of existentialism. Through this examination we explore some of the challenges that future space tourists might face being authentic to themselves when exploring the unknown. This includes the challenges in avoiding ‘bad faith’ in our dealings with other life-forms and the abdication of our own personal responsibility to act in a manner which is ethical.

**Keywords:** ethics; existentialism; space tourism; colonialism; Captain Cook



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## 1. Introduction

“I who had ambition not only to go further than anyone had done before, but as far as it was possible for man to go”, Captain James Cook, journal entry, 30 January 1774 in [1].

“The average Briton worked, lived, and died within walking distance of where they were born. For these men (and it was predominantly men) that act of travelling to the other side of the world was akin to a modern person travelling to Mars” [2].

Over the last seventy years, space travel to suborbital, orbital, and lunar destinations has become an increasingly realistic option for humanity [3]. The burgeoning space tourism industry, headlined by organisations including SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, and Blue Origin, collectively cater for a USD 20 billion market with the potential to eventually compete with long-haul conventional aviation sectors, according to UBS [4]. Zang and Wang [5] have defined commercial space tourism as “a segment of commercial space travel for the purposes of leisure and recreation, with the weightlessness experience and celestial observation constituting the determining characteristics [of the space tourism experience]”. With tourism space experiences now possible, at least as far as the International Space Station [6], discussions are turning to tourism’s role in space’s ethical and sustainable management [5,7–10].

While the number of studies that have sought to explore aspects of sustainability and ethics in space tourism have increased in recent years, the industry and societal-centredness of research still needs to be addressed. In the middle of the twentieth century, questions were raised over the merits of interstellar travel as a means of population control, given the costs involved in space exploration [11]. Today, debates exist over the merits of space

travel and, in particular, travel for recreational purposes during a climate crisis [10], and the concern for individual autonomy as one exposes one's self to the medical risks of space travel [12], as well as the merits of living in space for any other reason than societal self-preservation [13]. Such discussions are part of broader debates over the question of whether "space tourism would ultimately help ensure that all people equally benefit from space activities" [5]? Jeff Bezos recently argued that space tourism enterprises can be justified based on their potential to solve society's problems on Earth, providing an opportunity to shift society's heavy industries and resource extraction off-world [14]. Such arguments can be justified if one clings to the narrow idea that Earth represents "the only good planet in the solar system" (Bezos in [14]). However, if one looks past narrow Earth-based framings of ethics and morality and instead embraces broader cosmological framings, one is forced to consider the possibility that the sky that we see is only part of a total universal order [15]. Our capitalist-driven expansion into the heavens could conceivably lead to consequences for species and environments beyond our current understanding. How could we respond and frame ethical decisions to the situations that we experience if they were? Might we be inclined to pursue what existentialists describe as 'bad faith', yielding to the pressures of human society for advancement and security at the expense of our essence and authenticity?

With these questions in mind, the objective of the present paper is to consider what lessons can be learnt from leading historical colonial forays into the 'terra incognita' for future journeys into the 'stella incognita' [16]. With reference to the literature on existentialism, with its concern for the relationship between one's authentic self and the societal pressures under which one functions, we discuss some of the choices made by Captain James Cook when visiting the east coast of Australia in 1770. Such voyages are relevant analogies for the study of those leading the push for commercial space travel in that voyages of exploration in eighteenth century exploration were underpinned by the concern for commercial gain and/or securing national interests, which had to be juxtaposed with an individual explorer's spirit of adventure and discovery [17]. Today, the so-called space barons—Elon Musk, Richard Branson, and Jeff Bezos—are motivated by the commercial opportunities afforded through space exploration and the opportunity that will be afforded to those who can be the first to conquer the final frontier of space [18]. In drawing a comparison between eighteenth century colonialism and space tourism, we are arguing that whilst the existing literature has emphasised its posthuman elements and the limits of anthropocentrism in space [19], where human beings are involved, we must also look to understand how they will engage with the unknown. Specifically, how their essence will interact with their existence will be examined further in the next section with respect to existentialism.

## 2. Literature Review

Existentialism originated in the writings of Soren Kierkegaard and other philosophers who sought to examine the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in human nature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries [20]. Writing from both theist (e.g., Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, and Gabriel Marcel) and atheist (e.g., Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Martin Heidegger) perspectives, existentialism represented a re-evaluation of the nature of self and how individual human agents should relate to the world around them (Cox, 2012 [21]). Often situated as humankind's response to the teleological and scientific rationalist discourses that were characteristic of the Enlightenment, existentialism was not an effort to "deny the importance of the natural sciences [or in the case of Christian existentialists the existence of God] but holds that they are not sufficient for us to understand ourselves" [20]. Many studies have considered how existential frameworks can create new understandings of travellers' sense of self, e.g., [22–24]. In 1979, Cohen first defined existential traditions in tourism as a "form of tourism in which a tourist travels in search of a personal or spiritual centre located beyond their immediate place of residence" [25]. Since then, tourism scholars have explored the application of existential authenticity and related notions of existential anxiety and alienation in studying traveller behaviour, e.g., [26–29].

The core critique of all existentialists is that normative theory and rationalist perspectives determine human nature, thus constraining an individual's essence to be "mere standard bearers of their class function" [30]. Hence, existentialism is rooted in individual free will, authenticity, and responsibility, in opposition to pre-existing ethical theories or moral authorities [31], but may also "operate as profoundly 'moral' individuals within society" [32]. For Kierkegaard, freedom was realised by acting outside of normative conventions, being free of what he referred to as the crowd mentality [33], and further arguing that we are unable to know how to act ethically unless we have knowledge of ourselves in moving towards awareness and responsibility [34]. A critical aspect of realising responsibility for Kierkegaard was the notion that we are duty-bound to be responsible for others, a type of selfless love for the other, which is the basis for responsible citizenship in building or creating a "community of ethically oriented selves" [22]. Such a perspective stands in stark contrast to conglomerates (the nation-state or corporation), which throughout history have often been led by objective disinterestedness and where their legitimacy is based on the systems and rules that they create as organisational reference points in inducing self-absolution [35].

For some commentators, the corporations driving the space tourism race are analogous to the colonial powers in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries who sought to draw on the wealth of the New World and the Pacific to support their economic and political objectives [36]. Although the concept of 'colonialism' is temporally and situationally embedded, the future development of human space flight is moving society to a situation where our human and posthuman identity is up for revision [19]. Throughout much of the world's colonial history, indigenous populations were often seen as 'less than human' [37]. From an existentialist perspective, the actions of colonial powers have been signalled out for their tendency to dehumanise indigenous populations through acts of violence [38]. This reality prompted Frantz Fanon to reflect on what constitutes humanity and the limitations of the European colonial experiment:

This Europe, which never stopped talking of man, which never stopped proclaiming its sole concern was man, we now know the price of suffering humanity has paid for every one of its spiritual victories [39].

Existentialists began to grapple with colonialism, as well as other "painful 'isms'—classism, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism" in the period after the First World War when it was observed that humankind is not made up of people who are innately submissive or inferior [40]. Instead, we are born into a situation where our historical circumstances dictate our lives [41]. For writers such as Fanon, the question was how best an indigenous person can rebuild their sense of self—by violence if necessary [38]. In this paper, however, the focus is on how individuals may distinguish themselves from the institution that they represent, distinguishing essence from existence [42]. Existentialism calls for clarity on how one can develop a personal sense of essence (the basis of one's 'authentic' self) if born into a rational world where our existence is 'pre-ordained'. For Sartre, existence proceeds essence; our innate freedoms permit us to be individually purposeful and our values to be subjective and relative to our specific situation (Sartre, 2007 [41]). Not realising one's essence leads to the perpetuation of external forces from society. In colonial times, as we shall see below, this led to the inability of many Europeans to recognise the unique creation of an indigenous society, preferring instead to focus on the narrow link between agriculture, land ownership, and race, arguing that the supposed mastery of nature by Europeans through agriculture has allowed humankind to transcend the natural world [43]. Later, in the case of Australia, it would lead to the genocide of the Aboriginal inhabitants in Tasmania in the early decades of European occupation; the abduction of Aboriginal children through the period now known as the stolen generations; the broader dislocation of Aboriginal peoples through land acquisition and associated problems today over issues of land management; and the impact of European diseases including syphilis, tuberculosis and measles on at-risk native peoples [44–47]. These impacts have been placed retrospectively on the actions of Cook and other European colonial explorers [48–50].

Today, commercial space tourism has been heralded as the next step in the development of the global tourism industry [51]. While tourism scholars have long raised questions over its sustainability and ethics [10,13,52–55], private industries continue to sing its praises. But for how long? The fact that Captain Cook went from adulatory descriptions in the writings of Sir Joseph Carruthers in the middle of the twentieth century [56] to being more recently described as “a sinister bogeyman and a monster, the doorman who ushered in later colonisation with all its extreme violence, dispossession and ills” [49] should give the tourism industry pause for thought. The space tourism industry has been told to engage responsibly with the plurality of worlds in the observable universe [54,57,58]. The need to manage our immediate celestial environment has led scholars to explore aspects of space law, corporate accountability in space, and the application of common principles to the celestial realm, e.g., [7,59–61]. Such research is essential for addressing contestation over near-Earth resources in the short to medium term. In the long term, however, space tourism enterprises such as Elon Musk’s SpaceX have larger objectives, including sending astronauts to Mars by 2029 and eventually colonising the planet [62]. And beyond that, what of the longer term and the unknown? Cohen [63] observed that one of the paradoxes of space tourism would be the deflowering of the pristinity of other worlds as a result of resource extraction being seen as central in facilitating humankind’s celestial expansion. Such activities might be necessary to support the operationalisation of space tourism, e.g., the setting up of fuel extraction and storage facilities on the planet Mars. But what of situations where the establishment of such facilities requires the annexation of land from extra-terrestrial beings? How might a space tourist juxtapose their own authentic desire to do right by other life forms with their capitalist desire for access to and occupation of worlds beyond Earth?

### 3. Research Design

This study utilised selective extracts from the journals of Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks to explore aspects of the first European contact with Australia’s eastern seaboard in 1770 [64,65]. These recollections have been juxtaposed against surviving recollections from indigenous populations [66] and together have been discussed in an existentialism context through reference to a model proposed by West [67]. This model, which was based on a review of other ethical decision models in a business setting, was premised on the assumption that human beings need to be made aware of how their own decisions relate to issues of personal responsibility and their own individual freedom. For West [67], a “morally right decision can [not] be objectively discovered or determined through the application of an ethical theory (such as consequentialism)”. Rather, the focus is on the person’s awareness of their responsibility and personal freedom to act in a way that one sees as appropriate given the situation with which one is confronted. The stages in the model are as follows:

- Concept 1: acknowledge and identify my freedom to act.
- Concept 2: accept my responsibility.
- Concept 3: consider my prior choices, projects, and goals.
- Concept 4: consider the pressures and expectations of others.
- Concept 5: consider the practical constraints of the situation.
- Concept 6: proceed with the choice that reflects my own awareness of freedom and my personal responsibility and is most consistent with the goals and objects that I freely choose [67].

In the section that follows, we first equate the reader with the specifics of James Cook and the Endeavour expedition, before discussing their experiences in Australia through reference to each of the concepts in the West [67]. In doing so, we have been careful to hold a critical perspective of the expedition, discussing it both in relation to the experiences of explorers at the time as well as making links to evolving societal discourse over the ensuing centuries. In relation to each of the existentialism concepts, we also discuss the potential relevance for our understanding of space tourism.

#### 4. Results

Lieutenant (later Captain) James Cook made landfall on Australia's east coast on 19 April 1770 in HMS Endeavour as part of the first of his great voyages of exploration (see Ref. [68] for a biography of Cook's early life and his voyages of discovery). Following in the footsteps of earlier Dutch explorers such as Willem Janszoon, Dirk Hartog, Abel Tasman, and William Dampier in the seventeenth century [69,70], Cook's orders were a mixture of scientific discovery (specifically, the Transit of Venus in Tahiti in 1769), the search for the legendary Southern Continent [71], and the charting of the islands of New Zealand and the mapping/claiming of other strategic lands [17,72] that the Admiralty argued would "redound greatly to the Honour of this Nation as a Maritime Power" [73]. From a purely navigational perspective, many people regard Cook as one of the finest navigators of his or any generation. Working with what today would be rudimentary navigational equipment [74], he charted the entire coastline of New Zealand and Eastern Australia throughout three great voyages. He circumnavigated the south polar regions, charting south of the Antarctic Circle and, at one point, was only 80 miles from the Antarctic coast [1]. Other achievements included the European 'discovery' of Hawaii and work towards proving that scurvy on ships could be eradicated through the liberal provision of fresh fruit and vegetables to crews [75].

When the Endeavour made landfall on the East Coast at Munda Bubul (now Point Hicks), which is in the state of Victoria, it began a journey that would culminate on the 22 August 1770 with the claiming of the east coast of the continent at Possession Island in the Torres Strait [72]. This section of the paper focuses primarily on a small portion of this period from 28 April to 7 May, in which Cook spent time in Botany Bay (just south of Port Jackson/Sydney Harbour). Whilst in Australia, Cook came into contact for the first time with the Australian Aboriginals and was forced to address one of the core principles of existentialism, namely, that "making an 'authentic' decision . . . involves acknowledging that I have a choice"—"Acknowledge and Identify my Freedom to Act" in [1]. The nature of that choice is illustrated most clearly in Sartre's notion of existentialism and abandonment, precisely, the suggestion that if God does not exist, "man is consequently abandoned, for he cannot find anything to rely on" [42]. Such, in turn, has implications for the framing of human values. "If values are vague and if they are too broad in scope to apply to the specific and concrete cases under consideration, we have no choice but to rely on our instincts" [42]. Cook and the Endeavour represented the first Europeans to visit Australia's east coast. Even their Tahitian guide, Tupia, could not converse with local Aboriginals as he had in New Zealand and the other islands—they were, from their perspective, in a genuinely unknown world [76].

When we examine how such an interaction with the unknown may have affected Cook, we are reminded of the existentialist distinction between existence and essence and the challenges in avoiding what we would characterise as 'bad faith' in dealings with indigenous populations in the eighteenth century. As a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy in the eighteenth century, Cook was part of a rigorous hierarchy of rules and obligations [77]. He was an instrument of the state, conscious of the need to be part of a colonial power, seeking to exert their authority in a competitive arena against other nations, including France, Portugal, and Spain [72]. When travelling to Australia, Cook was therefore part of an apparatus of the government that exercised authority over his actions, as evidenced in his instructions from the Admiralty calling for land to be annexed in the name of the King [1]. For Cook, his career as a naval officer constituted his existence, but what of his essence? His admiralty instructions called for courteous interactions with Australia's indigenous peoples, albeit with racist undertones. But what is interesting, however, is that by Aboriginal traditions, even this Cook was unable to achieve:

[Cook] should have asked him—one of these boss for Sydney—Aboriginal people. People were up there, Aboriginal people. He should have come up and: 'hello', you know, 'hello'. Now, asking him for his place, to come through, because [it's]



Aboriginal land. Because Captain Cook didn't give him a fair go—to tell him 'good day', or 'hello', you know. Hobbles Danaiyarri in [78].

The fact that Cook did not seek permission, even acknowledging in his journal that the actions of the local people were “resolved to oppose our landing” [65], demonstrates something of his essence. Throughout the journals, we see that Cook and many of his contemporaries and forbears were not averse to racial stereotyping [79]. Throughout the Pacific, the ‘Polynesians’ of Hawaii, Tahiti, Tonga and Aotearoa, and New Zealand, were, for instance, seen by the colonialists as racially superior to indigenous Australians who were seen as brutish, “allegedly the most inferior of all human races or species, uncivilisable and doomed to imminent distinction” [79]. William Dampier famously expressed such sentiments in 1699 regarding his engagement with Aboriginal peoples in western Australia, where he famously described them as “the miserabilist people in the world” [70]. Cook was undoubtedly aware of such sentiments. However, Cook also showed a willingness to reassess previous perspectives when presented with empirical evidence to the contrary [79]. When later reflecting on his time in Australia, Cook critiqued Dampier's argument, noting the following:

From what I have said of the Natives of New-Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality, they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of Condition [65].

Human beings will face questions like their colonial predecessors when travelling into space. Does our engagement with other beings or environments force a re-evaluation of our self-worth and the contemporary and historical perspectives of our forebears? Also, can we continue to assume that humankind is the pre-eminent being in the universe and thus that our moral position can reduce other entities to being inferior to ourselves? This second question represents an open debate in the discussion of space ethics, with Schwartz and Milligan [80] observing that any attempt to rationalise the moral status of extra-terrestrial life involves “considerations relating to not only astrobiology and normative ethics, but also chemistry and biology in the sciences, and philosophy, bioethics, environmental ethics, philosophy of science, and the philosophy of language”. For a space tourist who is motivated by a mixture of authentic desires for risk-taking, spiritual fulfilment, or curiosity for the unknown [80], how should one respond to a situation where one's authenticity, which sees extra-terrestrial lifeforms as partners in the fulfilment of one's goals, comes into direct opposition with the capitalist desires of the industry that one is a part of, one where other interests must be subjected at the expense of the economic success of the operation.

If this were to occur in space tourism, travellers would be required to wrestle with important philosophical questions, including whether our human laws are “no more than a special borderline case of absolute, universal laws, that is, laws that rule the immensity of the universe” [81]. Ethics is based on a fundamental terrestrial consideration—the worthiness of human life. However, as Reiman [82] has argued, it is illogical to suggest that human reference points for what is good will apply throughout the universe. Just as early colonialists lacked the knowledge of Australia's environment to affect the effective utilisation of the natural environment, “the amount of knowledge we possess of space is undoubtedly limited, but growing, so a great many philosophical and environmental ethics tests applied on Earth have not yet had a chance to be tested extra-terrestrially” [83].

When the Endeavour visited Botany Bay, Cook was responsible for the actions of his crew and, by implication, the Admiralty and the Crown. In existentialism, the call to “accept my responsibility” [67] refers to acknowledging that personal responsibility exists. No longer can decision-making structures, committees, codes, or policies, including in the case of Cook and his admiralty instructions, obviate our responsibilities [67]. Situational ethics argues that one should recognise the role that circumstances play in determining

a particular ethical dilemma [84]. Throughout Cook's time in the south Pacific, he was variously confronted by adulation by the Tahitians, outright hostility by the Māori in New Zealand, and indifference/passive resistance by the Australian Aboriginals. In each circumstance, Cook was required to temper what constituted responsible behaviour for the specifics of the situation. To illustrate this fact, we now refer to a situation on Sunday, 29 April 1770, when a small crew from the Endeavour made the first contact with the local Aboriginal peoples. Cook described the details of the event in his journal as follows:

... As we approached the shore, they all [including women and children] made off, except two men who seemed resolved to oppose our landing. As soon as I saw this, I ordered the boats to lay upon their oars in order to speak to them, but this was of little purpose, for neither us nor Tupia could understand one word they said. We then threw them some nails, beads ... which they took up and seem'd not ill pleased in so much that I thought that they beckon'd us to come ashore; but in this, we were mistaken, for as soon as we put the boat in they again came to oppose us upon which I fired a musket between the two, which had no other effect than to make them retire back where bundles of their darts lay, and one of them took up a stone and threw it at us which caused my firing a second musquet load with a small shot, and altho some of the shott struck the man yet it had no other effect than to make him lay hold of a shield or target to defend himself. Immediately after this we landed, which we had no sooner done than they throw'd two darts at us, this obliged me to fire a third shot after which they both made off, but in not such a haste but what we might have taken one, but Mr Banks being of the opinion that the darts were poisoned, made me cautious how I advanced into the woods [65].

Such a description at face value gives one the impression of an enlightened individual, one anxious to avoid armed conflict and hopefully "consider my prior choices, projects and goals" [67] and apply it to new situations. At the same time, however, every story has two sides. As far back as 1865, efforts have been made to document the testimony of Aboriginal perspectives of Cook's landing (see [85]). Recent widespread attempts to document interactions with Aboriginals, such as *Pacific in the Wake of Captain Cook*, describe shallow efforts at civility on the part of the Europeans being underpinned by broader attempts at assimilation and the supplanting of indigenous languages, landscapes, and cultures by peoples determined at outright piracy [66]. For example, while Banks described his time in Botany Bay in terms derogatory to Aboriginal peoples—"Myself in the woods botanising as usual, now quite void of fear as our neighbours have turned out such rank cowards" [64]—other perspectives give a different story, one where the responsibility and power to avoid conflict lay not with the European visitors but with the restraint of local peoples [66]. Such variability in the accounts of the early interactions between the European visitors and the local people is reminiscent of themes around existentialism and colonialism, where the colonist derives his or her power from a fabrication of their colonial subject—"the racialized individual is less by the gaze than by cultural imposition" [86].

Schwartz [87] has argued that society's relative ignorance of space, much like Banks and Cook's ignorance of the environment and society of pre-colonial Australia, makes it difficult to determine what is or is not innately valuable. While Schwartz (2016) goes on to state that presently, we should be "open to the possibility that a pluralist account of value may best suit the ethics of space" (p. 93), at the same time, commercial interests have tended to focus exclusively on human centred perspectives, specifically, the argument that through a global commons perspective, humankind can collectively benefit from the opportunities that space presents and avoid a repeat of colonialist power plays [88]. Tourists motivated by opportunities for adventure [89] and space tourism enterprises underpinned by neoliberal market-driven interests [90,91] are particularly representative of such self-focussed mindsets. However, what Cook and the Endeavour's time in Australia illustrates is that it is only through a comprehensive "consideration of the pressures and expectations of others" [67] that ethical outcomes can be achieved. To be existentially 'authentic', leaders

such as Cook must be able to critically assess the extent to which his commanders and benefactors, including the British Admiralty and the Royal Society, were compelling him to behave in a particular way. There should also be a critical reflection as to whether one should open up oneself to influences outside of the established hierarchical constructs. In the case of Cook, this might have included reflection on the influences of Aboriginals and other indigenous peoples.

Throughout his three voyages to the Pacific from 1769 to 1777, Cook relied on groups such as the Admiralty and the Royal Society for his livelihood and career advancement. For a sailor whose early career was on coal ships in the north of England, to attain not only his commission in the Royal Navy but subsequently to advance to the rank of post captain is a testament to the regard with which he was held by the naval establishment [92]. What is interesting, however, for the present discussion is that throughout his commands, after being awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society in 1776 and being fettered as one of the finest sailors of his age and with the realistic expectation that he would be promoted to Flag Rank on his return to England after his third voyage, Cook came to embody the worst of British colonial expansion. Whether it was the increasingly violent punishments inflicted on his crews, the burning of native villages, or the attempted arrest of indigenous royalty [68], gone were the days when Cook was known for his comparative empathy on his early voyages [93].

If and when space tourism pioneers reach their goal of landing on the Moon, Mars, and beyond, they will also be travelling to an environment increasingly characterised by the geo-political goals of different nations for the militarisation and commercialisation of space [88]. Pressures and expectations will come from a space tourism industry preoccupied with ensuring the economics of space tourism [5] in an age when regulatory and budgetary challenges in state-based space agencies have increasingly shifted exploration to private industries [94]. In addition, achieving a position in space is still recognised as emblematic “of countries’ superiority and global competitiveness” [95]. Space tourism businesses strive to be the first to open space to more market segments. What has been pleasing to see to date is that while private individuals privately bankroll some space tourists, the public aspiration of companies such as Blue Origin to send the first all-women crew into low Earth orbit is premised on a desire to choose “women who are making a difference in the world and who are impactful and have a message to send” [96]. If these unnamed travellers are successful in this regard, we hope to see evidence of ‘good faith’ being applied to space exploration based on the congruence of personal and organisational values.

The question that this ultimately leads us to is what should we expect from future explorers investigating the vastness of space? Green [51] has argued that there should be an “overarching ‘prime directive’ or set of directives for the exploration of space . . . [and] determining what this rule or set of rules might consist of should be a process that involves all of humanity in some way or another” (p. 175). Such principles, which have permeated popular culture through the Star Trek science fiction series, have been questioned based on the ethical questions that they pose. As Stemwedel has argued, “a universe with another culture is a different kind of project than treating a culture only as an object of study” [97]. When we encounter another culture or environment, we must consider whether we should adopt a paternalistic attitude, essentially playing God and engaging in their futures according to our accepted viewpoint [97]. Alternatively, we can leave other civilisations alone, trusting them to make their own path in the universe—the core directive of the Star Fleet mantra [97]. When Star Trek was first envisioned in the late 1960s, the United States was in the midst of the Vietnam War, which was often criticised for its colonial underpinnings [98]. This criticism prompted many of the scenarios from the series, where often the actions of a small group of Star Fleet personnel, acting on the basis of their own authentic or inauthentic selves, lead to long-term consequences for whole civilisations [99]. While the focus of space exploration in Star Trek was thus to avoid the mistakes of Earth’s colonial past [99], the focus of the present paper is, in contrast, to



consider what lessons can be learnt from past colonial forays into the 'terra incognita' for the benefit of future journeys into the 'stella incognita' [15].

Humankind is by its nature made up of explorers and we would never wish to suggest that as a society, we should never reach beyond the confines of Earth. In doing so, capitalist and governmental interests will be guided by the law, which has been codified over the last half a century or so through a range of regulative conditions being set down by the United Nations and others, e.g., the 1967 *Outer Space Treaty* [97]. However, if sixteenth to eighteenth centuries laws existed today, they would be considered anachronistic at best and at worst, degrading and racist. A notable example of this was the 1493 doctrine of the Catholic Church called the 'Doctrine of Discovery' [98,99], which stated that Christian nations could legally annex control of indigenous territories in the name of God [100]. It was only in 2023 that the Catholic Church formally repudiated the doctrine, but for many people the damage was already done, with the 'Doctrine of Discovery' permeating other aspects of society including an 1823 ruling of the United States Supreme Court that sought to limit the grounds upon which indigenous populations in the United States could lay claim to land [101,102]. Although the 'Doctrine of Discovery' has not been the focus of tourism scholarship to date (a topic that is certainly worthy of future research), many of the principles that it espoused continue to manifest themselves in indigenous land debates [98] and from a tourism perspective, remind us that 'Western' culture is often inaccurately perceived as superior to indigenous perspectives [103,104].

When tourists make the decision to travel into space, as Dennis Tito was the first to do in 2001 and increasing numbers of companies now facilitate at suborbital levels [3], it is therefore beholden to entrepreneurs and passengers alike to consider whether they will act in good or bad faith. Good faith demands that choices be made and actions be taken in reflection of the individual's own will [32]. Using the example of a tour guide who must abide by certain restrictions on her behaviour, Fennell and Malloy [32] argue that the guide may, in good faith, read and assess the validity of rules and then determine the degree to which they resonate with their personal principles and then choose to follow them if they can be true to themselves as well as be an agent to the organisation that they work for. As such, "Rules, systems and obligations can be accepted, followed—even created by existentialists—the key is that they are carried out in good faith" [32]. In bad faith, individuals act inauthentically by succumbing to the pressures of society, leading to the adoption of false values that ultimately deny individual freedom. Using the same tour guide example, if the rules do not coincide with their principles, one may follow them in bad faith because they do not wish to lose their job, or they wish to be conformist because everyone else is following them (see also [24]). As Ref. [67] has argued, we do not always have to reject aspects of the "law, professional codes, institutional and global codes of ethics and trends in society" to be 'authentic'. At the same time, however, our lives should not automatically "amount to following the prescriptions of another" (p. 20). Pioneering space tourism interests should look to embrace evolving sustainability narratives [105]. However, we should also note that, to date, there is only a rudimentary level of knowledge about the motivations of space tourists [106]. Future space tourists should also remember the link between existentialist concepts of good and bad faith and sin, specifically when considering behaviours such as pride, greed, anger, and lust, which are prevalent in society [107]. Throughout the voyages, Cook and his crews sought to cheapen native women through the exchange of iron for sexual favours and through their tendency to place trinkets near indigenous peoples as a sign of welcome before stealing items from indigenous peoples. Over the ensuing 250+ years, the appropriation of Aboriginal possessions, including a small number of the spears taken by the Endeavour crew, has been the subject of intense debate [108]. The decision of the Endeavour crew to take the artefacts was narrowly justified by the participants based on the voyage's mission around science and discovery. However, it was also evidence of bad faith, specifically, an illustration of the link between bad faith and sin and how pride, greed, and bigotry translate into an inability to see one's actions objectively for what they are—in this case, theft [107].

Whether it was the theft of Aboriginal spears or the decision of Cook to shoot a local man near what is now the Kurnell Peninsula in Botany Bay (just south of Port Jackson/Sydney Harbour), many would argue that Cook and his contemporaries should have been more considerate of the needs and values of local Aboriginal peoples. At the same time, however, we must also “consider the practical constraints of the situation” [67]. For all of Cook’s mistakes, we must remember that he was responsible for one side of an exchange between two vastly different cultures. Lenček and Bosker [109] describe beaches in the colonial period as follows:

They were anxiety-ridden strips of no-man’s-land where, according to the journals of Columbus, Cortes, Cook, and Bougainville, Europeans first set eyes on others who, though like them, were utterly alien. Here, duels to the death were waged between races and cultures.

The freedom espoused by existentialists argues that we must always avoid nihilism or an abdication of indifference, where anything goes on the beachfronts of first contact [33]. Cook needed to learn about many aspects of the environment and society that he encountered, including Aboriginal people’s knowledge of medicinal, agricultural, land management, and celestial practices [110]. However, while existential authenticity—“a state of being in which one is true to one’s values” [111]—may not manifest itself in the immediate, it is significant that he learned from his actions.

When discussing the steps in existentialism, it has been suggested that one “proceed with the choice that reflects my own awareness of freedom, my responsibility and is most consistent with the goals and objects that I freely choose” [67]. When this occurs, the literature would suggest that the existentialist will reject universal normative values in favour of the subjectivist [112]. When Cook, later in Australia on the northeast coast near Cooktown, chose to honour the wishes of a local Aboriginal man from Guugu Yimithirr Country to not fight over the ownership of twelve female turtles killed during the breeding season [110], there was evidence of a willingness to adapt one’s authentic position to respect new knowledge traditions. Such willingness for new thinking has immediate relevance for questions of space ethics, which has been criticised not “[as having] malevolent intent, but of simply not thinking about what we are doing” [113].

## 5. Conclusions

Humankind has always been fascinated by the possibilities of space and with understanding our limits to access its opportunities. However, while the advance of space tourism enterprises has helped propel human space flight to an even more sophisticated stage of readiness, working alongside state-based space agencies, the question must be asked, “Should we go?” [52]. The pioneers that have characterised the space tourism industry—Musk, Bezos, Branson, etc.—see space as the last frontier and an opportunity for capitalist growth and expansion. A human-centred approach to space ethics is based on our historically human-centred focus on the universe. However, the virtually limitless potential of space for tourism means that we must also ask questions about how we should engage with the unknown or where aspects of our space experience are beyond our ethical and cognitive understanding. What should a space tourist do when their own authentic self—one’s values, beliefs, and ambitions—clashes with the needs of the capitalist or nationalistic vehicle that has facilitated our travel opportunity? With reference to the literature on existentialism and the colonial forays of Captain Cook, we have shown that travellers must consider the relationship between their existence as a member of a space tourism enterprise and their own individual essence. Will they act in good faith and allow their actions to be dictated by their own sense of purpose? Or will they allow themselves to be dictated by bad faith, avoiding responsibility, and adhering to established societal conventions to justify their actions?

Existentialism has been useful in critiquing some of the decision-making processes of individuals. Further research is required to explore the applicability of the West’s [67] model in contemporary interactions with the unknown. Also, while there are parallels

between the experiences of Captain Cook and the crew of the Endeavour in Australia and the Aboriginal inhabitants, the principal limitation of the present study is that we are dealing with the interactions between two human cultures. Cook and his crew, while they had never been to Australia, knew of the Australian Aboriginals from the accounts of earlier Dutch explorers. The same cannot be said of future human exploration of the universe, where new planets, solar systems, and galaxies will require human explorers to possibly encounter life forms beyond our comprehension. While much of this area will be beyond our ability to ever access, future research should explore ways of quantifying the motivations of space tourists who are interested in distant space exploration. In addition, scenarios should be developed to explore the relationship between space tourists' sense of essence and existence.

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