ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PLANETARY PROTECTION FOR FUTURE SPACE EXPLORATION—STARTING WITH THE BASICS

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As COSPAR scientists deliberate what types of frameworks and policy approaches may be applicable to future activities by various sectors in space exploration, it also needs to consider the challenging question of what ethical values and foundations should be used in dealing with life, objects and activities in outer space. A 2010 COSPAR Workshop Report on Ethical Considerations for Planetary Protection in Space Exploration recommended that it is appropriate to maintain the existing PP policy aimed at scientific concerns even as we begin to explore various practical approaches to future contamination avoidance policies. It is also appropriate to examine in parallel the ethical considerations applicable to potential indigenous extraterrestrial life, non-living extraterrestrial features and environments, and planned uses and activities involving diverse life from Earth. Since numerous sectors have begun to propose activities raising varied ethical concerns (e.g., protection and management on the moon, strip mining, space synthetic biology, space code of conduct, and commercial space transport), it is timely to initiate serious international discussions about the appropriate ethical foundations and questions applicable to future space exploration. Plans are underway for convening interdisciplinary work groups to explore and deliberate on the values (e.g., intrinsic and instrumental) and ethical foundations that are appropriate for use in deliberations involving potential indigenous extraterrestrial life and the different classes of target objects and environments in our solar system. More than ever, information on bioethics, environmental ethics and geoethics will provide helpful guidance and foundational approaches of relevance to future policy deliberations that seek to go beyond science protection per se.