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The portrayal of Space (Law) in Media and Movies (3)

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REIMAGINING ICARUS: ASSESSING RISK, VALUE AND UNCERTAINTY IN SPACE THROUGH  
FICTION AND FILM

**Abstract**

Human activity in space has always been recognized as an inherently risky venture, yet one that is worth some risk. Science fiction skillfully utilizes the uncharted and untamed nature of space to creatively discuss actual and potential hazards and uncertainties in space exploration and exploitation. While avoiding risk may be impossible the risk assessment and acceptance standards for specific missions varies depending on the socio-political culture and the value of the activity to society. In practice, risk is addressed through national liability, tort and contract law, licensing regulations, space agency policy, astronaut codes of conduct and international treaty law. These existing social policies, moral and legal architectures provide insight into current interpretations of risk and situational cost/benefit analysis. Through fictional film demonstrations, like *Gravity*, prospective issues are also raised and can serve as a tool to engage and lead progressive discussions on decision-making frameworks.

This paper uses film scenarios to identify and compare issues and implications of risk based on ethically arguable viewpoints, legal systems and cultural interpretations of human risk and value in space. Questions here include: what are socially and morally acceptable risks and duties of astronauts, especially in an extreme situation as portrayed in the movie *Sunshine*? What are the ethically justifiable and scientific rationales behind the arguments for/against precautionary measures raised in *Europa Report*? Should human risks (physical and psychological) be reduced through the use of robotic envoys and androids, as seen in *Moon*? Classic films based on real life, like *The Right Stuff* and *Apollo 13*, identify a traditional astronaut archetype, qualities and acceptable occupational risk. It is interesting to see how this holds with current depictions of commercial astronauts corps in fiction. Through the imaginative lens of fiction and film, we can identify the moral threads and peripheries of acceptable human conduct. The significance of understanding and analyzing these types of issues and perspectives can provide foresight for NewSpace activities and implications moving forward.