

The importance of people in space

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Space is often referred to as the final frontier and has been a large source of curiosity among humanity for centuries. We have sent many missions into space, some manned and some robotic, that have ended in great success, or terrible tragedy. In 1986 the space shuttle, the Challenger was launched in front of millions of people.

About a minute after being launched, it exploded ending the lives of the seven crew members inside. This catastrophe had a huge impact on the mindset of the United States and the debate about whether or not we should continue the space program escalated. However, not long after the Challenger, the Voyager 2 passed Uranus and sent back some of the first high-quality pictures of this jovian planet. This newfound research helped justify people's belief about space exploration being worth the risk. Exploring space gives us new information about the Earth that benefits us and our safety.

The satellites in our solar system help us in everyday activities, such as watching television or using telephones. Satellites also allow us to monitor the weather and climate changes in our atmosphere so that scientists will be able to predict when a natural disaster might occur. Satellites that observe the Earth are able to monitor ocean and wind currents as well as forest fires, oil spills, and air pollution. Information like this can help to organize emergency responders and environmental cleanups. If we did not have satellites, communication would be a lot more difficult and we would not be as prepared for natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes.

Many people believe that manned space exploration is too dangerous and too costly to continue. It is true that sending robots into space costs less, but perspective is important and robots can only do what they are told to do. Dr. Ian A. Crawford, a professor of planetary sciences at Birkbeck College in London states that “ We may be able to make robots smarter, but they’ll never get to the point where they can make on the spot decisions in the field, where they can recognize things for being important even if you don’t expect them or anticipate them.

You can’t necessarily program a robot to recognize things out of the blue.” Astronauts are able to make on the spot judgments of their surroundings and react to unexpected events. They are also able to think innovatively and provide technical maintenance to machinery. These factors result in higher quality information compared to unmanned space exploration. Unmanned machines are able to collect the basic data, but in the end, it is more effective to have an actual human judging whether or not it is safe for us to live on a different planet. Although we know a great deal about our planet, the atmosphere around it, our moon and our sun, we still do not know enough about the other planets in our solar system.

The human race is rapidly depleting the finite resources we have on Earth and eventually, there will be none left to sustain our large population. Where can we go after that? There are ideas regarding other planets with similarities to Earth, but we cannot obtain definite answers because no one has ever been there before. We need to know more about what is out there for future generations. One resource states, “ It is only a matter of time before something happens to our planet that is so devastating that it

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changes the course of life as we know it... Space exploration and colonization of the Moon and Mars are an insurance policy for humanity and all of our achievements.” It is important for us to contribute to the search for a new place to colonize the human race that has enough resources and an atmosphere similar to Earth so that we could survive.

Mars is a major focus of the space program especially since a robotic mission sent back evidence of water. According to more of these robotic missions, we have learned that Mars has similar characteristics and history to Earth. However, there are extreme differences that still need to be researched. Sending humans to Mars would allow us to be able to build upon the knowledge we have already collected. A manned mission to Mars would give us the best judgment as to whether or not humans could live there.

Throughout their manned exploration of space, NASA has created a large amount of technology that is used to benefit people’s everyday lives. There are many examples of NASA “ spinoff” technology in the fields of health and medicine, transportation, and public safety. The ventricular assist device created by NASA’s Dr. Michael DeBakey, Dr. George Noon, and MicroMed Technology Inc.

pumps blood through the body and is a lifesaving heart pump used for patients waiting to have a heart transplant. NASA worked with Intelligent Optical Systems to develop sensors that were sensitive to moisture and pH to warn that the aircraft had “ potentially dangerous corrosive conditions” before any major damage had been done. Also, techniques NASA used to measure the brain activity in their pilots are being used with children that

have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder to help improve their attention spans. NASA has also inspired many people to be innovative and create their own technology. Dr.

Howard Ross, NASA's Acting Deputy Associate Administrator for Science in the Office of Biological and Physical Research says, "What we do in space is much more than just science. We really do inspire people and change lives, and create new technology that goes far beyond the boundaries of just pure science." One of NASA's engineers, Adam Kissiah developed the cochlear implant, which is a device that restored hearing to thousands of people. If NASA had not kept pushing with manned exploration, we might not have some of the lifesaving or incredible technology that is important for everyday life. Space has been a human curiosity for a long time. We know a lot more than we did centuries ago, but it is still not enough to stop.

Robotic missions into space are not enough to find another planet for human survival. In order for us to be able to safely relocate when our Earth is ultimately no longer substantial, we need to send people out to experience space.