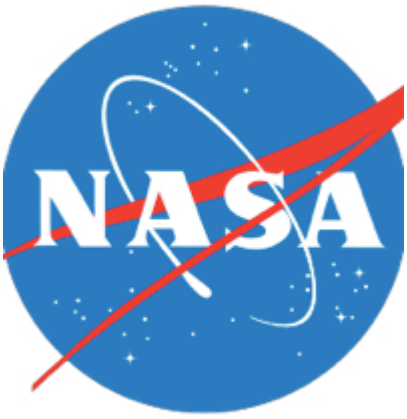
Written by **Bruce Walker** on August 2, 2011

Is NASA Still Needed?



Since that time, the space endeavor has devolved into just another federal program. The United States faces no threat from any nation on Earth that can outflank it in space. Though NASA conducts certain research projects, there is little reason to believe that philanthropies and private corporations could not accomplish this research just as easily. In fact, one of the major breakthroughs in cosmology was accomplished at Bell Laboratories almost 50 years ago when scientists there discovered microwaves. Background radiation consistently showed that the basic temperature of outer space was four degrees Kelvin, or four degrees above absolute zero.

Science and innovation have prospered without government intrusion. And there are still untapped riches on the planet waiting to be utilized by innovative private companies. For instance, on the Earth's ocean floors are vast deposits of mineral nodules that could produce enormous profits for innovative corporations, at the same time reducing the price of those minerals and so generating a genuine economic boom.

Outer space also offers several potential benefits not available on this planet. For instance, it is easier to produce ball bearings and conduct various precise industrial processes in a weightless environment. The vacuum of space also creates the potential for extremely fine types of manufacturing. Dramatic differences in temperature on the two surfaces of an object in outer space — the side facing the sun blazing hot and the dark side frigid — offer possibilities for manufacturing simply absent on Earth.

Asteroids contain an abundance of different minerals in relatively pure form, which potentially could be mined. Huge space sails collecting solar energy and transmitting it by microwave to receivers on Earth have the potential, on paper, of providing a superabundance of “clean” energy. But are such possibilities worth pursuing? Could the technology be developed to make such endeavors both possible and economical? The right people to decide such questions and to pursue the possibilities are those entrepreneurs, adventurers, and creators in the same mold as Samuel Morse — who discovered how to transmit signals electronically across continents — or Alexander Graham Bell — who provided real-time long-distance oral communication, or Thomas Edison — who discovered how to permanently record sound and images —or others seeking fame and fortune and, in the process, reinventing the world.