

POINT OF VIEW: FINDING EVIDENCE OF WATER ON MARS

Scientific expansion, spiritual perspectives

BY TOM RICKENBACH

So there's evidence of liquid water on Mars. With many pressing problems on our own planet, why on Earth should American taxpayers have invested their hard-earned money on discovering that tidbit of knowledge?

History tells us that expanding the frontier of knowledge provides massive economic benefit in its wake, in unanticipated ways. In 1492, Christopher Columbus established a pipeline to the Americas that transformed the European economy, providing an injection of capital that led to the modern nation state and the rise of capitalism. His was a government-funded operation.

Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity from the early 20th century in large part set off a scientific revolution that forms the basis for the information age we live in. He made that discovery while a college professor



NASA TNS

A new study makes the case that dark narrow streaks emanating from the walls of Garni crater on Mars were formed by briny water flowing.

supported by the Swiss government.

NASA's space program in the 1960s provided the intellectual spark for a generation of scientists and engineers who brought us computer and communication technology. NASA was established by the federal government to beat the Soviet Union at their own game.

The discovery of liquid water on Mars dramatically raises the possibility that life took hold on worlds other than

our own – since on Earth, wherever there is liquid water, there is life. Water on Mars would make it possible for a private company to profit from establishing a sustainable colony on that planet – in our lifetimes – by providing free-of-charge the resources to sustain the colonists and to manufacture the fuel for the journey back home.

It is true that we have big problems that need our immediate attention right here on Earth. But without investment in expanding the frontiers of our knowledge, we will most certainly lose our ability to sustain our success as a nation. Without long-term innovation, we will eventually abdicate our capacity to solve our most pressing problems at home.

The most important benefit of a scientific discovery like this one may be more immediate and less tangible. Expanding the limits of our knowledge gives us a profoundly spiritual perspective on who we are and what our place is in the universe. Finding evidence of liquid water on Mars paves the way for us to actually be able to answer the question, "Is anything alive out there?"

That perspective is, in my opinion, priceless.

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