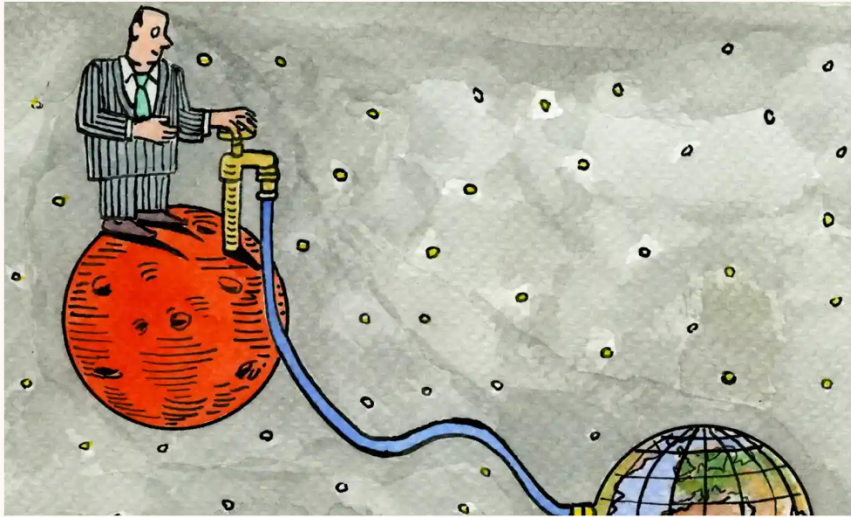


- Analyse how the writer of this piece structures and develops his argument.

There may be flowing water on Mars. But is there intelligent life on Earth?

While we marvel at Nasa's discoveries, we destroy our irreplaceable natural resources – so we can buy pre-peeled bananas and smartphones for dogs.



📷 'Think of what would change if we valued terrestrial water as much as we value the possibility of water on Mars.' Photograph: Andrzej Krauze

Evidence for flowing water on Mars: this opens up the possibility of life, of wonders we cannot begin to imagine. Its discovery is an astonishing achievement. Meanwhile, Martian scientists continue their search for intelligent life on Earth.

We may be captivated by the thought of organisms on another planet, but we seem to have lost interest in our own. The Oxford Junior Dictionary has been excising the waymarks of the living world. Adders, blackberries, bluebells, conkers, holly, magpies, minnows, otters, primroses, thrushes, weasels and wrens are now surplus to requirements.

Think of what would change if we valued terrestrial water as much as we value the possibility of water on Mars. Only 3% of the water on this planet is fresh; and of that, two-thirds is frozen. Yet we lay waste to the accessible portion. Sixty per cent of the water used in farming is needlessly piddled away by careless irrigation. Rivers, lakes and aquifers are sucked dry, while what remains is often so contaminated that it threatens the lives of those who drink it. In the UK, domestic demand is such that the upper reaches of many rivers disappear during the summer. Yet still we install clunky old toilets and showers that gush like waterfalls.

As for salty water, of the kind that so enthralls us when apparently detected on Mars, on Earth we express our appreciation with a frenzy of destruction. A new report suggests fish numbers have halved since 1970. Pacific bluefin tuna, which once

roamed the seas in untold millions, have been reduced to an estimated 40,000, yet still they are pursued. Coral reefs are under such pressure that most could be gone by 2050. Trawlers are now working at depths of 2,000 metres. We can only guess at what they could be destroying.

Let the market decide: this is the way in which governments seek to resolve planetary destruction. Leave it to the conscience of consumers, while that conscience is muted and confused by advertising and corporate lies. In a near-vacuum of information, we are each left to decide what we should take from other species and other people, what we should allocate to ourselves or leave to succeeding generations. Surely there are some resources and some places – such as the Arctic and the deep sea – whose exploitation should simply stop?

All this drilling and digging and trawling and dumping and poisoning – what is it for, anyway? Does it enrich human experience, or stifle it? A couple of weeks ago I launched invited suggestions from readers. They have flooded in. Here are just a few of the products my correspondents have found. All of them, as far as I can tell, are real:

An egg tray for your fridge that syncs with your phone to let you know how many eggs are left. A gadget for scrambling them – inside the shell. Wigs for babies, to allow “baby girls with little or no hair at all the opportunity to have a beautifully realistic hair style”. The iPotty, which permits toddlers to keep playing on their iPads while toilet training. A £2,000 spider-proof shed. A snow sauna, on sale in the United Arab Emirates, in which you can create a winter wonderland with the flick of a switch. A refrigerated watermelon case on wheels: indispensable for picnics – or perhaps not, as it weighs more than the melon. Anal bleaching cream, for... to be honest, I don’t want to know. An “automatic watch rotator” that saves you the bother of winding your luxury wrist-candy. A smartphone for dogs, with which they can take pictures of themselves. Pre-peeled bananas, in polystyrene trays covered in clingfilm; Just peel back the packaging.

Every year, clever new ways of wasting stuff are devised, and every year we become more inured to the pointless consumption of the world’s precious resources. With each subtle intensification, the baseline of normality shifts. It should not be surprising to discover that the richer a country becomes, the less its people care about their impacts on the living planet.

- *Adapted from an article by journalist and campaigner George Monbiot (2016)*