**TEXTE D’OPINION**

En réagissant aux arguments exprimés dans cet éditorial, le candidat rédigera lui-même dans la langue choisie un texte d’opinion d’une longueur de 500 à 600 mots.

**Why Elon Musk’s SpaceX launch is utterly depressing**

[*Nathan Robinson*](https://www.theguardian.com/profile/nathan-robinson)

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There is, perhaps, no better way to appreciate the tragedy of 21st-century global inequality than by watching a billionaire spend $90m launching a $100,000 car into the far reaches of the solar system.

Musk said he wanted to participate in a space race because “races are exciting” and that while strapping his car to a rocket may be “silly and fun … silly and fun things are important”. Thus, anyone who mentions the colossal waste the project involves, or the various social uses to which these resources could be put, can be dismissed as a killjoy.

But one doesn’t have to hate fun to question the justification for pursuing a costly new space race at exactly this moment. If we examine the situation honestly, and get past our natural (and accurate) feeling that rockets are really cool, it becomes hard to defend a project like this.

A mission to Mars does indeed sound exciting, but it’s important to have our priorities straight. First, perhaps we could make it so that [a child no longer dies of malaria every two minutes](https://africacheck.org/reports/does-an-african-child-die-from-malaria-every-30-seconds/). Or we could try to address the level of poverty in Alabama that has become so extreme the UN investigator [did not believe it could still occur in a first-world country](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/alabama-black-belt-un-poverty-expert-extreme-developed-country-sewage-crisis-roy-moore-philip-alston-a8105886.html). Perhaps once violence, poverty and disease are solved, then we can head for the stars.

Many might think that what [Elon Musk](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/elon-musk) chooses to do with his billions is Elon Musk’s business alone. If he wanted to spend all his money on medicine for children, that would be nice, but if he’d like to spend it making big explosions and sending his convertible on a million-mile space voyage, that’s his prerogative.

But Musk is only rich enough to afford these indulgent pet projects because we have allowed gross social inequalities to arise in the first place. If wealth were actually distributed fairly in this country, nobody would be in a position to fund his own private space program.

Yet even on the theory that there’s no moral problem with frittering away hundreds of millions of dollars, and inequality is fine, there’s another reason we are permitted to be concerned about what Musk does. A great deal of his fortune is not actually his own: it’s ours.

Musk’s empire is fueled by billions of dollars in government subsidies. The Los Angeles Times [revealed in 2015](http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-hy-musk-subsidies-20150531-story.html) that Musk’s companies benefitted from “grants, tax breaks, factory construction, discounted loans and environmental credits”, plus the tax credits and rebates that are granted to consumers for buying his products.

The average household income of a Tesla purchaser is in the hundreds of thousands, yet the federal government pays people $7,500 to buy them through tax credits, and many states offer [their own cash handouts](https://www.tesla.com/support/incentives). Because we’re all giving Elon Musk money, what he chooses to do with that money is very much our business.

Elon Musk is right: silly and fun things are important. But some of them are an indefensible waste of resources. While there are still humanitarian crises such as that in Syria, nobody can justify vast spending on rocketry experiments. That point was made plain in 1970 by the poet Gil Scott-Heron, on his record [Whitey On the Moon](https://genius.com/Gil-scott-heron-whitey-on-the-moon-annotated), which criticized the US for spending millions to send men on a pointless moon adventure while the country’s inner cities languished:

*I can’t pay no doctor bills*

*But whitey’s on the moon*

*Ten years from now I’ll be payin’ still*

*While whitey’s on the moon.*

Whitey may not have gone back to the moon recently. But his sports car is now in space.