

Scholars explain the ideology that says technology is the answer to every problem

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Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen penned [a 5,000-word manifesto](#) in 2023 that gave a full-throated call for unrestricted technological progress to boost markets, broaden energy production, improve education and strengthen liberal democracy.

The billionaire, who [made his fortune by co-founding Netscape](#)—a 1990s-era company that made a pioneering web browser—espouses a concept known as "[techno-optimism](#)." In summing it up, Andreessen writes, "We believe that there is no material problem—whether created by nature or by technology—that cannot be solved with more technology."

The [term techno-optimism isn't new](#); it began to appear after World War II. Nor is it in a state of decline, as Andreessen and other techno-optimists such as [Elon Musk](#) would have you believe. And yet Andreessen's essay made a big splash.

As [scholars who study technology and society](#), we [have observed](#) that techno-optimism easily attaches itself to the public's desire for a better future. The questions of how that future will be built, what that future will look like and who will benefit from those changes are harder to answer.

Why techno-optimism matters

Techno-optimism is a blunt tool. It suggests that [technological progress](#) can solve every problem known to humans—a belief also known as [techno-solutionism](#).

Its adherents object to commonsense guardrails or precautions, such as cities limiting the number of new Uber drivers to ease [traffic congestion](#)

or protect cab drivers' livelihoods. They dismiss such regulations or restrictions as the concerns of Luddites—people who resist disruptive innovations.

In our view, some champions of techno-optimism, such as [Bill Gates](#), rely on the cover of philanthropy to promote their techno-optimist causes. [Others have argued](#) that their philanthropic initiatives are essentially a public relations effort to burnish their reputations as they continue to control how technology is being used to address the world's problems.

The stakes of embracing techno-optimism are high—and not just in terms of the role that technology plays in society. There are also [political, environmental and economic](#) ramifications for holding these views. As an ideological position, it puts the interests of certain people—often those already wielding immense power and resources—over those of everyone else. Its cheerleaders can be willfully blind to the fact that most of society's problems, like technology, are made by humans.

Many scholars are keenly aware of the techno-optimism of social media that [pervaded the 2010s](#). Back then, these technologies were breathlessly covered in the media—and promoted by investors and inventors—as an opportunity to connect the disconnected and bring information to anyone who might need it.

Yet, while offering superficial solutions to loneliness and other [social problems](#), social media has failed to address their root structural causes. Those may include the erosion of [public spaces](#), the [decline of journalism](#) and [enduring digital divides](#).

Tech alone can't fix everything

Both of us have extensively researched economic development initiatives that seek to promote high-tech entrepreneurship in low-income communities in [Ghana](#) and the [United States](#). State-run programs and public-private partnerships have sought to narrow digital divides and increase access to economic opportunity.

Many of these programs embrace a techno-optimistic mindset by investing in shiny, tech-heavy fixes without addressing the inequality that led to digital divides in the first place. Techno-optimism, in other words, pervades governments and nongovernmental organizations, just as it has influenced the thinking of billionaires like Andreessen.

Solving intractable problems such as persistent poverty requires a combination of solutions that sometimes, yes, includes technology. But they're complex. To us, insisting that there's a technological fix for every problem in the world seems not just optimistic, but also rather convenient if you happen to be among the richest people on Earth and in a position to profit from the technology industry.

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