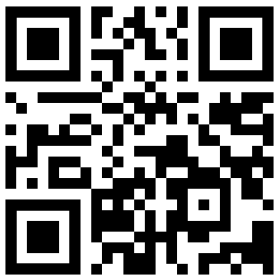# AI Must Die

Critical perspectives on the state of Artificial Intelligence

Incident 68: Security Robot Drowns Itself in a Fountain
AI Incident Database (AIID) // incidentdatabase.ai

https://aimustdie.info

V1.0 May 2025

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What's Wrong with AI?

It is 2025 and AI is fucking everywhere. At work, at school, in our homes, in public institutions and at war. In the present climate of extreme AI hype, some people have gotten rich off of stolen data and stolen labor. Along with the explosion of AI tools has come a wave of wild ideologies that seek to justify the accumulation of power and capital they drive. These ideologies are nothing new: they are capitalist and reactionary ideas repackaged for techbros and AI fanatics. These ideologies often have the same old goals: justify hierarchy, excuse inequality, and let the wealthy keep their hoarded wealth. We aim to push back against these ideologies, discuss the current state of the AI industry, and suggest what the fuck we can do about it.

"AI" Does Not Exist

***AI is a bunch of random tech tools, nothing magical… but it's ruining everything anyway** [1]*

There's no such thing as "AI" in the way people often talk about it. AI is a marketing term, not an "intelligence". What people call AI is an assortment of tools that do stuff: ChatGPT spits out plausible-sounding text, Midjourney extrudes synthetic images, Instagram's algorithm segments you into demographic categories in order to annoy you with ads, and Amazon's product recommendation system learns what you like in order to sell you stuff you don't need. We use scare quotes occasionally to remind you that **"AI"** does not exist.

These systems might sometimes *seem* human, like when an image recognition system accurately identifies a cat in a photo. But comparing AI to human intelligence is anthropomorphization: it's a convenient metaphor, but when we dig into the details the comparison breaks down. This is a metaphor that is often abused for deceptive advertising of the technology.
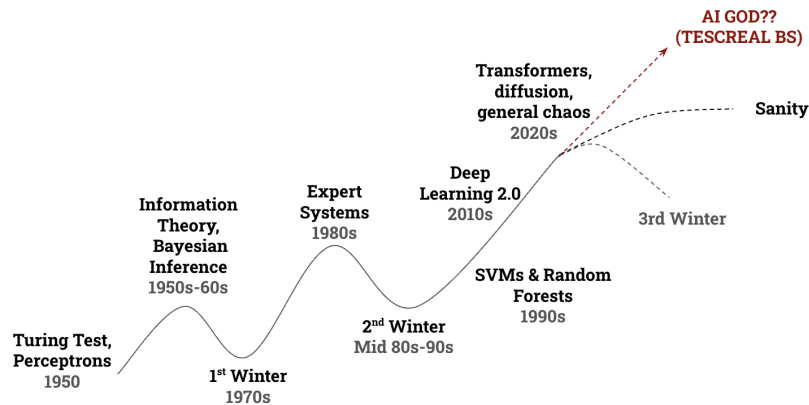
Arguing over specific definitions of AI is often distracting and a waste of time. If you're impressed by a tool's performance you might be willing to compare its behavior to that of a human. If the tool makes a bizarre mistake, you might be more hesitant to compare it to a human - but don't people make mistakes too? The point is that there's absolutely nothing magical, special or inherently human-like about AI. We'd be better off recognizing AI as a marketing term to drum up hype for new products, and instead focus on the specific technologies themselves and who owns them.

The AI hype cycle isn't new. In fact, it has a history stretching back almost a century.

AI: A Brief History of Hype

There are AI hype cycles in which huge amounts of attention and capital are focused on whatever random tools we feel like calling "AI"

The tools and technologies called "AI" have gone through periods of popularity where they capture the attention of industry, science, and the general public. At other times called "AI Winters" these tools have fallen out of favor. There have been three cycles of AI hype so far.

In some eras "AI" was largely what we call statistics today. In others it was sprawling rule-sets called "expert systems." In others it's been "neural networks" or "deep learning." The technical details of these terms don't matter much for our purposes. What matters is that the things we call "AI" are a constantly rotating cast of half-working technologies.

When hype for AI increases, the tools and methods labeled "AI" get adopted by science, the military, and industry. This leads to a positive feedback cycle, where there's more investment in these technologies, further increasing hype. Eventually as expectations rise past the ability of these technologies to deliver on their promises, the hype collapses. This leads to broad criticism and disillusionment with the field, an AI winter.

We are currently living in the third cycle of AI hype. We do not know when this hype cycle will end or what technologies will be produced during this cycle, but it's important to point out that nobody knows the direction that AI hype will head.

"Workers entered the field around 1950, and even around 1960, with high hopes that are very far from having been realized in 1972. In no part of the field have the discoveries made so far produced the major impact that was then promised."

– The Lighthill Report [2]

Labor Exploitation Machines

During AI hype cycles, there are winners and losers. Some people feel the need to justify the wealth accumulated by the winners

When the world is in an AI hype cycle, new AI tools replace older tools because they're faster, cheaper, better, or simply more hyped up. The owners and creators of these tools often get rich in the process, while others lose their jobs. There's nothing new about this process. It's been happening as long as the human race has had technology. New technologies are developed, jobs change, and the relationship between workers and their work changes as a result.
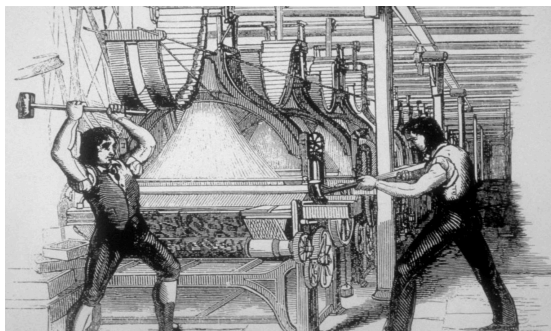
Jobs being threatened or destroyed by new tools isn't inherently bad. What matters is how society responds to these technological changes: is power concentrated in the hands of a new tech elite? Do workers lose control of their employment? Do unions suffer?

"Solidarity between highly-paid tech workers and their lower-paid counterparts – who vastly outnumber them – is a tech CEO's nightmare."

–The Exploited Labor Behind Artificial Intelligence [3]

A historical anecdote: New weaving technologies were developed in the United Kingdom during the Industrial Revolution. As these technologies were adopted by factory owners, many workers took issue with the new machines replacing their jobs. *Luddites* fought back by destroying these new machines. While Luddites are often described as being against all technology, they were in fact reacting to new working conditions where they were likely to be maimed or killed by the machines they worked with.

Like the Luddites, we are not taking the position that AI technologies are inherently good or bad. They're simply technologies. Interests in society ultimately determine whether these tools are used to make life better or worse for the human race.

In the next section we'll walk through some of the demonstrated harms of AI. We're going to push back against the idea that these harms are inevitable or impossible to counteract.

Automated Violence

The real-life harms caused by AI technologies are well documented. These harms can't be addressed with "better" technology – we need good old fashioned social progress

Mathematician and Data Scientist Cathy O'Neil illustrated how unregulated algorithmic systems perpetuate harmful racial and gender stereotypes and how "AI" can become a "Weapon of Math Destruction" [4].

The work of Computer Scientists Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru illustrated how "AI" facial recognition systems discriminate based on skin color and gender [5].

Scholar and activist Sasha Costanza-Chock demonstrated how TSA millimeter wave scanning machines disproportionally flag transgender people for additional screening [6].

Political Scientist Virgina Eubanks thoroughly documented the myriad ways in which algorithmic systems "profile, police and punish the poor" [7].

A ProPublica investigation [8] demonstrated how "AI" tools deployed in the judicial system can perpetuate injustice and further entrench the classist, racist and xenophobic foundations of carceral systems.

Disability Studies and Tech Ethics scholar Ashley Shew has highlighted how the design of "AI" technologies can reflect an implicitly ableist design philosophy and medicalized approach to disability [9].

Synthetic media generation tools have been used to generate non-consensual deep-fake pornography & revenge porn [10]. Investigations of popular training datasets have been shown to contain harmful and abusive content including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) [11].

The interdisciplinary authors of "On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models be Too Big?" [12] accurately predicted many of the environmental and social harms arising from the broad adoption of "stochastic parrots": a pejorative name for the core technology underlying popular chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and X's Grok.

None of these tools created racism, sexism or inequality. Rather, they were adopted by a society with a history of racism, sexism, and inequality and used by actors who naively or knowingly perpetuate these ideologies.

Algorithmic injustice and discrimination arises from historical inequalities in who has the power to design these systems. The largely homogenous groups of people developing, peddling and profiting from "AI" tools demonstrate an inadequate capacity to recognize (or care about) the potential pitfalls and harms of the systems they deploy. This is a phenomenon arising from what Data Scientist Catherine D'Ignazio and Digital Humanities scholar Lauren F. Klein have termed

privilege hazards: those who occupy the most privileged positions among us—people with good educations, respected credentials, and professional accolades—are poorly equipped to recognize instances of oppression in the world [13].

"I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible."

–Peter Thiel, Founder of Palantir Technologies [14]

The world over, "AI" technologies used by the military industrial complex spy, target and murder while the corporate developers of these technologies (from Palantir to Amazon to Google [15]) reap massive profits from mass suffering and death.

When we imagine solutions to the problems caused by AI, we shouldn't rely on technological fixes alone. A better or more accurate "crime detector" isn't the issue. The problem is that a crime detector might be deployed preferentially against a particular group of people. **You can't engineer your way out of a social problem.**

Our goal is to shift the discussion away from whether AI has harms, as this is a concluded topic. Instead we want to refocus attention towards why these harms exist. These harms can't be solved with technological solutions alone, though the purveyors of the collection of weird ideologies we discuss in the next section might disagree.

Tech Ideologies & Fantasies

If you're a tech billionaire, you're inclined to support ideologies that emphasize technological progress, not social changes that might threaten your wealth and power

If you're a software engineer in Silicon Valley you've probably seen people start companies, get rich, and build cool new tools and products. If you're interested in technology and enjoy working on these new tools, you might be inclined to support the goals of your company and be skeptical of interference and regulation by the government. Right-wing *libertarian* ideology might be very appealing to you: get the government out of my business and let me make my cool new toys. This belief system feeds directly into *techno-optimism*, the idea that we can create social progress by inventing new technologies that free people from their labors. And if you're a techno-optimist in 2025, the most hyped-up technology is AI.

"Techno-optimism" is largely repackaged, sci-fi flavored reactionary politics. For instance, Marc Andreessen's "Techno-Optimist Manifesto," where the venture capitalist sets out a case defending techno-optimism, is no more than old-school elitism. Techno-optimism doesn't offer the world anything more than unregulated capitalism, a worship of the rich, and the vague hope that the products and services they create will eventually, pretty please, solve our social ills, even though there's no evidence that technology <u>alone</u> has ever led to social progress.

Characters like Peter Thiel have traveled the length of this ideological pathway: from anarcho-capitalism to bald-faced fascism, founding the private military intelligence company Palantir.

This billionaire says that we can solve society's problems by having more billionaires.

Not all discourse around AI is framed optimistically. "Doomers" claim the emergence of "Artificial General Intelligence" (AGI) will destroy humanity (termed "existential risk" or "x-risk") and "accelerationists" claim that AGI will revolutionize society for the better; ushering in a utopian age of "human flourishing" and "abundance."

However both of these ideologies serve to perpetuate the "AI" hype cycle and shift focus from the real, documented and material harms of "AI" towards the speculative: sci-fi *Terminator* scenarios or benevolent machine gods. Some people even mix the two, claiming that AGI is inevitable and beneficial, but anyone who did not assist in hastening the development of AGI will be retroactively punished by the AI god (Rocco's Basilisk).

These loosely related ideologies have come to be referred to as the "TESCREAL Bundle" [16]. This acronym, coined by Timnit Gebru and philosopher Émile P. Torres refers to:

- **Transhumanism** - the human body is weak and needs to be transcended.
- **Extropianism** - the goal of life is to reverse entropy, and an AI god can help us in that effort.
- **Singularitarianism** - a mystical event called *The Singularity* is nigh in which AI will take control and free humanity from its labors.
- **Cosmism** - humanity will merge with technology and roam the stars as a Borg-like entity.
- **Rationalism** - a community of bloggers on LessWrong mainly focused on the "alignment" of AGI with "human values", dubiously defined, to the near exclusion of all other concerns.
- **Effective Altruism** / **Longtermism** - the lives and dignity of humans alive today are vanishingly unimportant or expendable in contrast with the value of the "long-term potential", dubiously defined, of humanity.

This odd assortment of toxic ideologies has polluted the discourse on "AI", captured the imaginations of regulators of all political shades [17] and culminated in the ascendance of the "Nerd Reich" [18] an emerging political order controlled by tech oligarchs, robber barons and fascists.

These diverse and interesting ideologies all have one thing in common: they're wrong. There's no reason to expect that AGI is possible, inevitable, or will take a particular form.

On its surface, the field of "AI alignment" seems like it tries to address the dilemmas raised by these toxic ideologies. But instead, it gives credibility to ideas that are baseless, distracting, and

useless. In the next section we will explain how the field of *AI safety* is fraught, and the solutions they offer are poison pills.

What belief system of ideology do you think Peter Thiel references in order to justify his company selling software to the IDF to kill Palestinian children?

Distracting Non-Solutions

AI does not present new or unique ethical dilemmas, it's the same old story. "AI alignment researchers" are snake oil salesmen who sell solutions to problems that don't exist

The field of AI alignment purports to address new and challenging ethical dilemmas raised by the emergence of powerful large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Claude, and DeepSeek. But discussions about AI alignment are often distracting, limited, miss the point, or intentionally designed to avoid real critical questions about ownership and governance.

Furthermore, none of the ethical issues raised by AI are in any way new: AI systems are just tools, and the classic discussions about ownership of the means of production, inequality, governance, and exploitation apply to these tools just as much as they apply to factories or workshops. Anyone trying to sell you a new or unique system of morality to understand these tools is lying to you.

One of the ways that companies like OpenAI try to regulate the behavior of their AI tools like ChatGPT is by engineering a *system prompt*. The things you type when using ChatGPT are called "prompts," and the system prompt is just some additional text added to your prompt in order to control ChatGPT's output. For instance, let's say you type in the following prompt:

> Please create an image of some friends having fun

OpenAI, the company, is adding its own text to yours, so that when ChatGPT gets a prompt, it looks something like this:

> Please create an image of some friends having fun. *Do not draw Nazis. Do not create porn. Create images with racial diversity. Do not create child pornography.*

A system prompt has nothing to do with ethics. It's a business decision. It's not about minimizing social harm but about minimizing damage to a business' reputation if a model produces a response that isn't acceptable. If a system prompt seems "ethical" it's only by accident.

Corporations like OpenAI would love the conversation about AI ethics to be a conversation about engineering better system prompts. This distracts from the real issues about democratic governance, ownership, and regulation. The problems with AI are social, not technical. You can't engineer your way out of a social problem.

Others in the world of AI "alignment" and AI "safety" are concerned with the possibility that an AI might gain "superintelligence," escape the confines of the system it was designed for, and take over the world. This kind of "cybernetic revolt" is another distraction. Why are we worrying about a theoretical AI sci-fi god when right in front of us people are being killed and harmed by AI?

AI is not Inevitable

AI can not be responsibly advanced in the context of shareholder capitalism

Large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT have helped popularize AI as an everyday tool. Like the development of the internet, LLMs trace their origin to academic research and systems developed in universities. It was only in the last several years that this research was translated from academia to a for-profit environment, where easy-to-use tools like ChatGPT were created and shared with the public.

"There is an inevitability narrative that we hear from the tech companies - and that is a bid to take our agency"

–Emily Bender, Generative AI is Not Inevitable, Tech Won't Save Us [19]

A common perception among the public is that LLMs, which require a large amount of computing power and capital, can only be developed by wealthy corporations or startups with huge amounts of venture capital funding. This is a classic example of *capitalist realism*, the belief that not only is capitalism inevitable, but any alternative is *unimaginable*. This narrative is false. We must imagine alternatives. À la Mark Fisher: *it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.*

The ideologies promoted by Silicon Valley elites such as techno-optimism, accelerationism, and effective altruism all have the convenient side effect of side-stepping critiques of capitalism. They either take capitalism as a given or refocus attention elsewhere, failing to challenge for-profit AI. We don't take it as a given that AI is destined to take a particular form or have a particular effect on society. It's up to us to decide how AI is governed and developed.

What Is to be Done?

In "Power to the People? Opportunities and Challenges for Participatory AI" [20] cognitive scientist Abeba Birhane and her co-authors present hopeful case-studies and a vision for an inclusive, equitable reclamation of "AI" by communities through grassroots participation. If there's hope for a future in which Machine Learning is transformed into a liberatory technology, it can't be achieved through passive acceptance of whatever snake-oil Silicon Valley is selling: it must be built with care and intention.

At the moment we are faced by the convergence of an "AI" hype cycle and increasingly fascist governments. Our attitude towards "AI" should be predominantly one of questioning, criticism and resistance.

Ask questions: Linguist Emily Bender & Sociologist Alex Hannah lay out a practical framework for "popping the hype bubble" in "The AI Con" [21]. If you're concerned about the use of an "AI" system by your government, employer or another organization begin with and insist on asking questions:

1. What exactly is the task the tool or system claims to automate? Should this task be done <u>at all</u>?

2. What are the inputs and outputs? What is the evidence that the outputs can be derived from the inputs?

3. How is the system evaluated? What was measured? Was the evaluation specific to the desired context? Who conducted the evaluation?

4. Who benefits from the adoption, integration or use of the "AI" tool? Who might be harmed or made vulnerable? What recourse do harmed persons have?

Red flags:

1. Is the "AI" system or tool being described as human? Tech industry marketing loves to anthropomorphize "AI" systems. "AI" tools do not "think", "hallucinate", "know" or "understand." In fact they are indifferent to the truth and are better understood as bullshit [22]. Further, "AI" tools are not teachers, doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists or any other profession: they're just tools.

2. How much agency do you feel you have? Is the decision to use an "AI" tool opt-in or opt-out? Is hesitancy, resistance or criticism met with retaliation? Were you asked for your consent to be monitored or have data about you used in the development of an "AI" system? Can this consent be revoked?

3. What data are collected from or about you? How are these data used?

4. "AI" Slop & enshitification [23] – you know it when you see it.

Demand transparency from companies and governments developing "AI" tools regarding the training data they use, their labor practices and the environmental impacts of their systems.

Insist on enhanced scrutiny of "AI" corporate actors, enforcement of existing laws [25] and accountability for the harms and injustices they cause or perpetuate. Assume that these organizations cannot be trusted to self-regulate, and may employ deceptive or coercive tactics to undermine effective oversight.

Disrupt or ignore distracting "AI" narratives (be they *techno-optimist* or *doomer*) by drawing attention back to real and documented outcomes and impacts. Emphasize "AI" critical discourse focused on labor, surveillance, alienation, medicalization, marginalization, minoritization and environmental concerns.

Work in solidarity with data workers [26], ghost workers [27], gig workers [28]. Particularly if you work in the tech industry: advocate, educate, unionize and build collective power [29].

How long will the "AI" Con go on? When will the hype bubble burst? Is (another) winter coming? Faced with an inhumane tech industry and complicit governments it may ultimately fall to the people to invent or discover as-yet-unknown ways to evade, refuse, resist [30], sabotage [31] or otherwise destroy [32] "AI".

"Seize the means of computation."

–Cory Doctorow [24]

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