

*THE WEB'S GREATEST MINDS EXPLAIN HOW WE CAN FIX THE INTERNET*  
*BY WIRED*

This article looks at some of the failings of the internet as we currently know it, and how we might go about fixing it, from the viewpoint of six visionaries of the web. Below I discuss the proposals of Tim Berners-Lee and Jaron Lanier, plus a short comparative reflection on the two.

Tim Berners-Lee invented the world wide web. But, the open, decentralised utopia he imagined never really materialized. Now, faced with the realities of web monopolies and Big Data, we are forced to take a more active approach to preserve what remains of Berners-Lee's vision. His project, *Solid* offers one solution: to decouple applications from the data they produce. *Solid* is a type of data-storage architecture that would give users control over their own data, including access to all of the data they generate. In addition to empowering users, *Solid* could help level the playing field for small developers, allowing them to scale their projects without needing to spend so many resources building back-ends for data storage. And, data decentralisation would provide added security benefits. It's a worthy proposal, but Berners-Lee stresses there is no one big fix for everything that's wrong with the web. Part of the problem are wider trends informing a culture of post-truth and alternative facts. In order to fix the internet, we must also combat these vehemently anti-science and anti-intellectual worldviews.

Jaron Lanier is considered the founder of virtual reality. For him the key problem with the internet is the business model. Or rather, newer, more manipulative forms of advertising driven by mass collection of personal data. A key feature of this model is to provide us with the illusion of control, of choice, while actually controlling us by manipulating our attention and how we perceive choice. For Lanier, this is an unsustainable system of behaviour-modification akin to "evil". He blames its emergence partly on Tim Berners-Lee's original design for the web (with one-way links), and ideologies that prioritizes free software. Instead, Lanier argues, we should adopt a new business plan, perhaps one that offers fewer free services, but can operate using what he considers less unethical forms of monetization.

Personally, I see Lanier's point, but am not sure that replacing the current system with kindler, gentler forms of techno-capitalism would fix anything in the larger sense. Both viewpoints are pragmatic, but I find Berners-Lee's proposal does more to restore user agency while being mindful of access concerns (which are also a part of agency). Both solutions involve some level of legislation, but *Solid* seems to provide the potential to move us forward in more transformative ways. By contrast, Lanier's suggestion feels very much like trying to stuff the toothpaste back in the tube, while ignoring what was originally subversive about the internet.