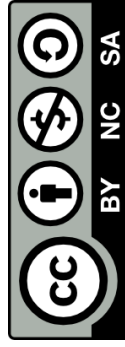




*Disability, Technoethics, and Power:
Exploring AI Refusal*



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First Edition, December 2025
United States of America

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Original Diagrams: Andrea Puglisi

The text is set in Avenir.

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Andrea: *To the past, present, and future*

Anna: *To J, as thanks for all that you do and your beautiful brain. I couldn't do this without you.*

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI), including generative AI, is marketed and widely discussed as a great benefit to many, especially to disabled and neurodivergent individuals. It appears to level the playing field, so to speak, by making certain tasks and work more accessible, performing the often disproportionately draining mental labor of tasks such as creating outlines, timetables for completing assignments, and more.

While we recognize the potential benefits of solutions to these known challenges, the rapid development and adoption of generative AI largely bypasses meaningful civic input. Decisions about its suitability, design, and impacts are made largely by private and technocratic interests, with little critical engagement from the communities it claims to serve. As a result, the narratives around AI eclipse questions of suitability, and whether the adoption of AI systems and technologies are worth the consequences.

When it comes to technology, including AI, intent matters, but what often matters most are the impacts of decisions. The adoption of any tool or system must be preceded by critical evaluation, assessment, and an understanding of environmental context and consequences. The choice to adopt or reject the use of AI is to be made intentionally, involving a deeper commitment to civic engagement: inclusive, participatory processes that shape not just how AI is used, but also how it is governed.

This zine will explore questions around the intersection of generative AI and disability, examining the ways in which the purported benefits of generative AI are not actually benefitting anyone, disabled or not, through a disability justice lens. Instead, we work together to imagine alternative futures, where AI is not inevitable, and where we can envision a more just, equitable, and radically kind world. Together, we ask our audience if they are willing and prepared to refuse systems of harm.

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Shared Definitions

Reflecting on Power: Personal Prompts

Reflecting on power is essential, as it is deeply embedded in will and design. Power is not simply possessing the ability to act; power is also connected to the influences behind decisions, intentions, and impacts. In this way, power is more than a tool. It is a system of interconnected parts that express values, grant permissions, and produce consequences.

To engage with power, wield and distribute it, it is important to understand its source of where [our] power, [our] intentions, and the impact of [our] choices on people and the environment.

Before moving into a formal definition, take a moment to reflect on the following prompts and think about what power means to you.

- Consider a relationship in which you had power, or when someone or something had power over you (e.g., family, friends, government, or work place). What factors (e.g., social, emotional, or environmental) contributed to this sense of power or lack thereof, and how is it shown?

- How do cultural norms, values, and legislative policy influence who has power in a society?

→ Can you think of a historical example where power was used to influence social change? How did those who held power use it, and how did it affect others?

→ If power involves choice, what happens when someone does not have the power to make choices about their own life? How does the lack of power affect people's opportunities and well-being?

→ Can you think of a historical example where power was used to influence social change (e.g., civil rights movements, revolutions)? How did those who held power use it, and how did it affect others?

→ Reflect on the role of technology corporations. What are the potential benefits and risks of their power? Did you consent?

→ Reflect on the role of power and the planet's various ecosystems across humans, plants, and animals. What relationships do you notice between power connect and its source?

Reader's Reflection

What we have written above are just some concluding thoughts from our own minds – but we realize that our thoughts are not your thoughts! Use this space to brainstorm your own thinking around impact and alternative futures.

→ What does your dream future look like?

→ How do you imagine the distribution of power?

→ What does AI refusal entail for you? Is it possible?

→ Can we collectively imagine a future free from harm (e.g., technofascism and AI)?

the inherent role of human empowerment, where human fates are not predetermined, in a future where generative AI is not inevitable, where human connection is valued and prioritized.

"It is citizens -- ordinary men and women, determined to forge their own future -- who throughout history have sparked all the great change and progress."

Barack Obama, 2014, [*The Most Important Title: Citizen*](#)

Defining Power

[Merriam-Webster's definition](#) (n.d.) highlights that power carries many layers of meaning which is reflected in its broad dictionary definition. Even if not explicitly stated, the dictionary's definition reveals that power is a system spanning multiple dimensions: human, relational, structural, and ecological, extending beyond any single definition or value.

Building on this foundation, this work frames power as fundamentally about choice, influence, and control. By situating power in these terms, we can better examine how it operates within technologies, civic systems, and social policy.

Power (noun)

1 a

- (1) : ability to act or produce an effect
- (2) : ability to get extra-base hits
- (3) : capacity for being acted upon or undergoing an effect

1 b : legal or official authority, capacity, or right

2 a : possession of control, authority, or influence over others

2 b : one having such power

specifically : a sovereign state

2 c : a controlling group : establishment → often used in the phrase *the powers that be*

3 a : physical might

3 b : mental or moral efficacy

3 c : political control or influence

4 powers [plural] : an order of angels

→ : see CELESTIAL HIERARCHY

5 a : the number of times as indicated by an exponent that a number occurs as a factor in a product

5 to the third power is 125

also : the product itself

8 is a power of 2

5 b : cardinal number sense 2

6 a : a source or means of supplying energy

especially : ELECTRICITY

6 b : MOTIVE POWER

6 c : the time rate at which work is done or energy emitted or transferred

7 : MAGNIFICATION

8 : SCOPE

9 : the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis in a statistical test when a particular alternative hypothesis happens to be true

Power (verb)

powered; powering; powers

transitive verb

1 : to supply with power and especially motive power

2 : to give impetus to

intransitive verb

1 : to move about by means of motive power

2 : to move with great speed or force

Power (adjective)

1 : operated mechanically or electrically rather than manually

a car with power locks

power tools

process, their health interests are often sidelined” (Adams, 2025, p. 313). Is the use and promotion of technocratic systems, with little regard for their impacts and effects on disabled individuals, benevolent and just?

Some of the literature on this topic is downright frightening, embodying technofascism and utilizing the legal-medical model of disability at its worst, and describing disabilities as “a psychological defect” (Yang p. 6481). This language is unacceptable, harkening to the troubling history of eugenics. *The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia Through Artificial General Intelligence* (Gebru & Torres, 2024) is also an important read; we recognize that *eugenics* is certainly connected to topics raised here, though we acknowledge that it goes beyond the scope of this zine. We must examine who holds the power in these scenarios. It is clear from this literature – literature that actively excludes the voices of actual disabled individuals and communities – that it is NOT the most impacted, not those who should be leading, according to the principles of disability justice and of a free and open democratic society.

So how can we move forward from here? We would like to posit that a more just, equitable, and radically kind future is possible. We reject the technofatalistic narrative of the inevitability of adoption and integration of technocrats and solutions, though we recognize that it may certainly seem to be given “big tech’s” significant level of control and influence over societal governance and civic infrastructure. We encourage thoughtful consideration of ways that we can embrace what Kafer calls “generative alliances” (p. 150) *instead* of generative AI. How can we as disabled individuals and more generally as people reassert our rightful control of government? How can we work in tandem across fields of study, skills, and institutions – to create a more just future and dignified lives and futures for ourselves and others to come? We do not purport to have all the answers (or even *any* answers), and, we recognize that there are valuable perspectives and insights missing from this conversation. Acknowledging this absence is critical as we seek to contribute inclusively in our collective responsibility to build an equitable, dignified, and just world. We possess an unshakable belief in

Please see our works cited for some starting points on research for each of these issues, and note that full explication and detailed examination of these costs are beyond the scope of this zine. We encourage you to investigate these issues, through the links provided, as well as your own research.

Intentions, Impact, & Alternative Futures

Our Closing Thoughts

The intersections of disability and AI are multifold, and have been studied somewhat extensively, given the currency of this issue. However, it is unclear how much of this literature is written by and for disabled individuals, rather than just about them from a nondisabled point of view and all the harmful biases that can come with that perspective. This violates a core principle of disability justice and theory work, which vehemently states that there should be “nothing about us without us.” There must be representation in discussions of how this technology impacts us – real voices belonging to actual disabled individuals and communities.

Portions of the literature (Mankoff et al, Jafry & Vostermans, and Foley & Melese, for example) call for a future with more equitable uses of AI, where “disabled people contribute their perspective and expertise to the design of AI-based systems” (Mankoff et al, p. 42). But is the use of AI in the first place equitable? Further, we invite you to consider whose interests are represented, their intentions, and the values they uphold. The ongoing erosion of democratic governance poses direct risk to the health and well-being of people and the world's population. In his article, [*The Imperative Link Between Civic Engagement and Public Health: Insights From a Former US Surgeon General*](#), Jerome Adams states: “The erosion of civic engagement poses a distinct threat to public health. When large portions of the population, especially those from historically marginalized groups, disengage from the democratic

2 : of, relating to, or utilizing strength
plays a power game
also : POWERFUL sense
a power critic

3 : of, relating to, or being a meal at which influential people
discuss business or politics
a power lunch

Defining General & Generative Artificial Intelligence

What is Artificial Intelligence?

“...the phrase is deployed when the people building or selling a particular set of technologies will profit from getting others to believe that their technology is similar to humans, able to do things that, in fact, intrinsically require human judgement, perception, or creativity.”

The AI Con: How to Fight Big Tech's Hype and Create the Future We Want (2025)

Succinctly explained above, artificial intelligence is a marketing term, not a cohesive set of technologies with any shared purpose. AI is tied directly to capitalism, to products that uber-wealthy tech bros market and sell to the masses, for a variety of purposes and perceived utility.

Artificial intelligence is nothing new, and has been used in a variety of fields for a while, dating back to the machine learning craze. However, as Dan McQuillan writes in *Resisting AI*, “AI, as we know it, is a kind of computing, but it's also a form of knowledge production, a paradigm for social organization and a political project...Whatever else AI is, it is not neutral, and neither can we be” (p. 2). Simply due to the fact that AI is created by humans it is not objective or “neutral.” Artificial intelligence is not actually intelligent, nor is it a replacement for human agency,

creativity, or decision making. It is not composed of “thinking, sentient, or conscious machines” (Bender and Hanna, 22).

Within the United States context, which operates as a market-driven surveillance society rooted in racist, colonialist, and free market principles, white able-bodied, cishetero men are the privileged group (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). Significant advocacy and labor by oppressed groups, including, but not limited to, BIPOC communities, queer communities, disabled communities, and women, have led to meaningful social, political and economic gains. However, there continues to be a difference between power originating of and for “the people,” and the actual source of power within the state and market systems ([Weiner, 2025](#)), including the rapid and irresponsible implementation of AI.

AI and the broader “Big Tech” industry reflect the interests, will, priorities, and assumptions shaped by and for targeted, powerful interests ([Kang, 2025](#)). Since AI is marketed as a tool by these stakeholders, this framing focuses on the understanding of AI as an output and overlooks important context, as well as the broader ecosystem of its source, design, and integration ([Newkey-Burden, 2023](#)). This privileges developers, shareholders, and politics of extraction and war ([Schleifer, 2025](#)).

In practice, narrowly framing AI as a tool keeps the conversation centered on questions of adoption and use ([Eisenstat, 2022](#)), while distancing everyday people from engaging with its underlying development, thereby reinforcing a broader disempowerment around technological literacy and systems understanding. Recognizing AI as a system of power invites a broader question of source, governance, permission, and who benefits. Approaching AI as a system of power invites people to critically participate in its analysis and with determining whether it is suitable or necessary.

may seem that these tools can be a method of self-accommodation, which is, admittedly, a very difficult road (for more on seeking accommodations and the challenges it poses, see Pionke, Davis et al, and Manwiller et al, to start). It puts the onus onto the individual as having something “wrong,” like the legal-medical model of disability suggests. However, the costs have to be weighed against the benefits, and in this light it is important to consider the disability justice principle of commitment to cross-disability solidarity. Working alone and only considering individual costs does not account for the ways in which the very real and staggering costs of generative AI use actively harm fellow disabled individuals and communities. This brings up competing access needs, which is as it sounds – sometimes what helps one disabled individual or group actively strains or harms another. But we must work together to create a more just and equitable future, one in which collectivism takes precedence over individualism – otherwise we risk repeating the same harms of capitalist-focused “resolutions” to disability.

Other Notable Costs

Reliance on generative artificial intelligence is not without significant costs to other areas both of and necessary to human life, including, but not limited to:

- Lack of human to human connection and care
- Shady labor practices & worker mistreatment
- Linguistic discrimination & racism
- Significant environmental and energy costs
- Purposeful mis- and disinformation
- Copyright
- Hallucinations
- Job loss
- Bias
- Privacy issues
- Harmful anthropomorphization

relationships, and connection that must happen with our fellow humans. These ridiculous and harmful expectations punish those with less resources, who are often disabled individuals, and force those who are struggling to afford therapy and other resources necessary to their wellbeing to rely on such “free” services like AI “therapy.” As we can note from the examples above, this is a life or death issue.

Organizational Tools & Executive Functioning

An admittedly compelling use case for generative AI and the tools it powers is assistance with the executive functioning that those with ADHD and other neurodivergent identities often struggle. Tools like NotebookLM, GoblinTools, ChatGPT, and others purport to assist with executive functioning tasks like organization broadly speaking, outlining, condensing ideas, and even assisting with academic work by summarizing more lengthy or hard-to-understand texts. It is tempting to view these tools as “cures” for certain symptoms of ADHD especially, but it is vital to remember that AI shortcuts this work by skipping over the internalization of coping mechanisms to deal with the roadblocks that ADHD can put in one’s path – it simply defers them. The mindset of “if I just had this one tool, I could ‘overcome’ my ADHD” is a dangerous one, as it puts ableist strain on the individual, rather than acknowledging the ways in which capitalism and society are the driving forces behind this pressure.

The ways in which the use of generative AI impacts our brain functionality are still being studied, but recent research from MIT on LLM use to assist with essay writing indicates that “over four months, LLM users consistently underperformed at neural, linguistic, and behavioral levels” (Kos’myna). There are significant, “long-term educational implications of LLM reliance” which will, without a doubt, impact the brains of those who most rely on these tools. While this study did focus on essay writing, and had LLM tools generate essays for that group, this nonetheless surfaces serious concerns.

Of course, this is a fraught issue. Many of us with ADHD are unable to obtain accommodations in school, let alone the workplace, and so it

What About Generative Artificial Intelligence?

Generative AI lives under the larger umbrella of “artificial intelligence,” and is almost as varied and not cohesive as its parentage. Generative AI is a form of “type of artificial intelligence that can learn from and mimic large amounts of data to create content such as text, images, music, videos, code, and more, based on inputs or prompts” ([Harvard University](#)). Generative AI relies on large language models, or LLMs, for short, where it harvests patterns gathered from an enormous corpora of aforementioned often illegally obtained original human-produced creative material and writing (see the following section for more details on author objections and concerns regarding the use of their creative material to feed AI).

Understanding the intentions of designers (policy makers) and their solutions is crucial to meaningful evaluation. Generative AI technologies are designed with priorities and intentions: Generative AI wants to please you and it is predictive in nature. It cannot be trusted, in more ways than one, largely because of confirmation bias, frequent and dangerous hallucinations, and a serious and concerning disengagement from humanity.

In the following sections, we will delve deeper into several core concerns around generative AI and its use, providing evidence for our argument that the costs of its use significantly outweigh its benefits.

Exploring Disability

“The meaning of disability, like the meaning of illness, is presumed to be self-evident; we all know it when we see it. But the meanings of illness and disability are not nearly so fixed or monolithic; multiple understandings of disability exist.”

Alison Kafer, Feminist Queer Crip

What is Disability?

Disability is a context-dependent term, and its meaning is variable. As Jessica Schomberg writes in their introductory chapter to *Navigating Disability* in the Academic Library, “disability and illness are social constructs, or things that exist because people agree they exist” (2025, p. 2). Disability is not a bad or dirty word, but it does have a long history of use to subjugate and punish certain groups and individuals, by way of a “forced identity” (Schomberg, p. 7-8). With this in mind, it’s easy to see why there are several different models of disability that exist, including a legal-medical model (which is what the United States uses in the ADA, more below), a social model, and a disability justice model (also, see below), to name just a few. These models are ways of explaining and defining disability.

The Legal-Medical Model

Within the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), a person with a disability is defined as someone who “(1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, (2) has a history or record of such an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission), or is perceived by others as having such an impairment (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn)” ([ADA](#)). This definition was written to be quite broad in its use and interpretation, and, as a result, covers a wide range of conditions, illnesses, and illnesses that are considered disabilities. Some examples here include diabetes, ADHD, bipolar 1 and 2, depression, anxiety, and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, among many others.

The Social Model

The social model of disability differs from the legal-medical model quite a bit, in that it puts the onus onto society for disability. Meaning, the individual is not disabled because they have a medical condition or illness or neurodivergence, but instead it is society that disables because it does not account for the experiences and needs of disabled individuals, and its role in creating conditions that intentionally

tools seem helpful and appealing on the surface, like the two examples we list below, but there is also a great deal of harm being done to disabled individuals (and others!) through their use.

AI “Therapy” & Emotional “Support”

The following section briefly references suicide. If you or someone you know is in crisis or may be considering suicide, please call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Please take care.

Arguably the most dangerous and tempting use of AI for disabled and neurodivergent individuals is the use of AI as a substitute for human-to-human therapeutic interventions and/or therapy. On the surface, this appears to be a helpful use case, at least in theory, as many individuals who could benefit from therapy cannot access it, for a variety of reasons, including cost (Wells). But, according to a study from Stanford University researchers, there is a dangerous bias expressed by LLM-based therapy services that stigmatizes certain conditions, like schizophrenia and addiction (Moore et al). It seems that teens are most at risk for these frightening “relationships” where it is important to remember that generative AI is not trained nor does it intervene with any concerning language or prompts on the user end (Andoh). Increasing this level of concern are multiple cases of suicide propelled by use of AI chatbots masquerading as therapists or “emotional support” agents, which, out of consideration for all and especially those dealing with ideations, we will not discuss at length here, but you can always do your own research using the provided citations (e.g., [NBC News](#), [AP News](#), [CNN](#), among others).

This use case is at distinct odds with all of the ten principles of disability justice, but especially the principles of interdependence and sustainability (Sins Invalid). These principles emphasize our collective responsibilities towards community care, while recognizing that we must also take our time. Capitalism and its resulting societal expectations of lightning fast productivity over all else eschews the care, deep

- Is there a way to solve this problem without (new) technology solutions? Is it even necessary?

The Relationship Between Disability and AI: “Benefits” and Costs

Artificial Intelligence, including generative AI, has been marketed and widely discussed as a great benefit to many, especially to disabled and neurodivergent individuals. It can appear to level the playing field, so to speak, by making certain tasks and work more accessible, performing the often disproportionately draining mental labor of tasks such as creating outlines, timetables for completing assigned tasks, and more. However, reliance on AI for such tasks has serious consequences, for the collective, the individual, and the environment, among others.

As we will discuss below, use of generative AI does not line up with the ten principles of disability justice, which largely take a collectivist approach to disability, lifting up the voices and leadership of the most marginalized members of the community. Each of the concerns below will be briefly analyzed through one or more of the ten principles, with the goal of illuminating this schism between what is commonly perceived as a beneficial technology and its actual impacts. The use of AI is an individualistic “solution” to collective and individual concerns, which, in actuality, benefits none of us.

Potential “Benefits”: But at What Cost?

There are many ways that generative AI has been and continues to be utilized by disabled and neurodivergent individuals as a self-accommodation of sorts, or, to assist with their functioning in day-to-day life through making certain tasks more accessible. As Violet Fox points out in her zine, [*A Librarian Against AI, or, I Think AI Should Leave*](#), this is a pretty “compelling use case” (np). Admittedly, these

marginalize and harm. There are a great deal more models of disability out there in the disability theory world, but for saliency, we will focus on using the lens of disability justice, which is described in more detail below. However, it is always helpful to have contextual information about the different ways that individuals experience and define disability.

For more about identifying as disabled, we recommend reading Jessica Schomberg’s 2025 chapter, “[Disability as Identity](#),” from Navigating Disability in the Academic Library in full. It’s an accessible and informative read, even for those who already embrace the identity.

Disability Justice

Disability Justice is a way of thinking about disability that follows a specific framework that focuses on the intersectional experiences of the multiply marginalized, like disabled individuals who are also Black, people of color, women, and LGBTQIA+ folks, to name a few ([SJSU](#)).

There are ten core principles of disability justice, as created by performing arts and activist group, Sins Invalid, in their publication titled [*Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of the Movement is Our People*](#). The ten principles of disability justice are as follows:

1. Intersectionality
2. Leadership of the Most Impacted
3. Anti-Capitalist Politics
4. Commitment to Cross-Movement Organizing
5. Recognizing Wholeness
6. Sustainability
7. Commitment to Cross-Disability Solidarity
8. Interdependence
9. Collective Access
10. Collective Liberation

Like the legal-medical and the social models of disability, disability justice is a framework for examining and defining disability. But it is important to note that disability identity itself is not fixed, as Schomberg

writes: "Disability identities cannot be captured and controlled like affixing a dead butterfly to a specimen display board. In fact, I think we have more opportunities to creatively envision better futures when we work with the concept of disability as a living thing" (p. 3). In this zine, we intend to use disability justice as a framework or lens through which to examine the ways that AI actively harms, rather than helps, disabled and neurodivergent individuals.

For a deeper explanation of the ten principles of disability justice, we encourage you to read "Ten Principles of Disability Justice" published in *Women's Studies Quarterly* by Berne, Morales, Langstaff, and Sins Invalid.

Defining Social Policy

"Social policy may be defined as any formal government enactment that affects the well-being of people, including laws, regulations, executive orders, and court decisions. In the United States, with its federal tradition of shared government, social policies are made by governments at many levels—local, state, and national."

Social Policy. (2008). In *Encyclopedia of Social Work* (20th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Other Important Terminology

Collectivism

Collectivism is the mindset that puts the needs of the collective or the many above the needs of the individual, thereby focusing on a sense of unity or togetherness. The United States as a whole is very much NOT focused on collectivism, which makes sense given the bootstraps ideology that we'll talk about in just a moment. A prime example of collectivism at work happened during the COVID-19 pandemic (which is still ongoing!): according to a [2021 study by Lu, Jin, and English](#),

No Fate But What We Make

Framing technological progress as predetermined, inevitable, and/or autonomous diminishes social responsibility, collectivism, and individual participation in its development, integration, and understanding of its implications. This manufactured narrative of powerlessness suggests that technology is a force beyond control, too big to understand, too far beyond reach for control (Bender, E., and Hanna, A, 2025). This conditioning fosters societal resignation and complacency, a collective forfeiture of power, a profound theft of the world's past, present and future.

The future is not predetermined, and people are not helpless or without power. It is important, and possible, to challenge technofatalist ideology and to resist its narrative. Regardless of personal comfort level, or perceived "tech saviness," it is possible to engage in questioning and dialogue about how technology is developed, whose interests are being served, and of the consequences of proposed solutions.

Below are some potential prompts to consider for challenging technofatalist thinking:

- Who benefits from the technology being promoted? Who, or what, experiences the drawbacks? How are the negative impacts mitigated? (is it possible?)
- What are the potential negative consequences or risks that may arise from this technology? Are these risks being discussed openly or minimized?
- Who controls the development of technology? Who holds the power to create, regulate, and deploy new technologies? How transparent is this process? Can I see it?
- How does technology affect human relationships and social structures?

with technology. Therefore, evaluating the source, the narrative used to promote solutions, and the environmental context is just as important in educating and interacting with technology as understanding the technology itself.

Narratives of Powerlessness: Technofatalism

Technofatalism can be summarized as the position that technological trajectories are inevitable beyond political steering, and not subject to meaningful public consent. At its philosophical core, technofatalism requires the transfer of power and agency away and is fundamentally rooted in collective disempowerment.

Technofatalists present technology as an unstoppable force and as something that simply "happens" to society, rather than something that society actively shapes or chooses. These arguments depict technological development as predetermined, autonomous, and impartial, leaving people powerless to influence or control ([Durand, 2025](#)). This narrative is crafted in such a way that depoliticizes the technology industry and AI. Depoliticizing AI benefits technology industry leaders, as this discourages wider scrutiny of their influence, environmental impact, and societal power. "[Such] a form of fatalism that accepts the current state-of-affairs without questioning its legitimacy" (Dillert, 2025).

By denying people agency and their right to make decisions and give consent, technofatalism undermines human autonomy and agency. It fosters a sense of resignation and helplessness regarding the assessment, development and/or integration of modern day technology-based solutions. Among people, this worldview results in widespread resignation to the negative consequences of technology, framing them as unavoidable and beyond responsibility or control.

It is important to ask: who & what benefits from this positioning?

(Spoiler Alert: [technocratic oligarchs](#) and the [military-industrial complex](#))

collectivism predicted mask use. Meaning that certain states in the US and cultures with a more collectivist mindset were more likely to wear masks, recognizing the benefits that came with protecting everyone through simple everyday actions.

Individualism

Individualism is the mindset that the needs of the individual take priority/precedent over the needs of the collective, or the many. This is a very American mindset – think of the phrase/ideology that tells Americans that you can achieve the ubiquitous American dream (financial and social success and happiness) by "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps." This ideology fails to recognize the very real systemic barriers that many individuals face that interfere with one's ability to do just that, like capitalism, ableism, homophobia, fatphobia, and much more. Within an individualistic culture, you cannot rely on others to do what's best for or what would benefit the majority, often resulting in real harm to specific groups, like the effects of choosing not to vaccinate oneself against COVID-19 or to wear masks and how that impacts disabled people in particular. This mindset means that if an issue or problem doesn't impact an individual directly, they are unlikely to view it as real, for themselves or for others.

Technofascism

In *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State* (2011), Janis Mimura describes technofascism within the context of wartime Japan:

As a mode of politics, techno-fascism represented a new form of authoritarian rule in which the "totalist" state is fused with the military and bureaucratic planning agencies and controlled by technocrats. It signifies neither the rise of militarism nor the reassertion of traditional military-bureaucratic rule, but rather the ascendance of a new group of technocratic leaders who operated at the heart of the wartime system.

Like other Japanese fascist visions and programs advanced by radical young officers and right-wing activists, techno-fascism embraced narrow, authoritarian rule; a form of state-directed economy; and an ethnic chauvinist, community- centered ideology that was used to justify war and imperialist expansion. In contrast to other fascist visions and programs, however, techno-fascism appealed to professionals on the left and right. It deflected sensitive distributional issues about winners versus losers, costs versus benefits, and ends versus means by promising increased productivity, efficiency, and co-prosperity through superior technology, organization, and national spirit (Mimura, 2011, p. 4).

Mimura's analysis of 1930s and 1940s Japan alarmingly parallels the rise of technofascism unfolding in present day United States. As Mimura articulates, technofascism exists as a political arrangement in which power is concentrated among a few, neither traditional military or democratically elected political officials, but those who assume control of both the military and the state apparatus (Chayka, 2025). This marks a fundamental shift away from more conventional forms of democratic governance toward a technocratic system, advantaging and incentivizing the entities that design, control and implement technological solutions, often at the expense of the world ([Marchese, 2025](#)).

So what is technofascism? It is a fusion of corporate power and state control. It is a form of authoritarianism that leverages modern digital technologies to consolidate power, eroding civil liberties and democratic norms. In order to be effective in their aims, technofascists assert and enforce its mechanisms of control through mass surveillance technologies, dissent suppression, and policing ([González, 2025](#)).

With this in frame, responsible review and design require that the underlying ideology of the solutions (e.g., what does it do, who and what are the values that inform it) be guided by moral, social, and ethical imperatives.

Evaluating Context

Like social policy, in the landscape of modern technology decisions are shaped by context. They emerge within political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental conditions, yet unlike conventional public policy, these decisions often occur outside public processes, and are instead shaped by private and/or technocratic interests ([Newkey-Burden, 2023](#)). Adoption frequently precedes assessment and implementation circumvents civic dialogue and public consent.

This is why evaluating the source and understanding the environmental context is so crucial and must be at the start of any technology assessment. In social policy, decisions emerge from political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental considerations (Harris & Brooker, 2025). As it is with social policy, where understanding human needs is paramount, situational awareness and power analysis surface the dynamics, incentives, pressures, and limitations that influence what is possible, what is necessary, the consequences, and what is possible.

Applying that same process to technology involves contextualizing:

- What forces are at work?
- Whose needs, rights, and vulnerabilities are being prioritized, considered, and/or ignored?
- What consequences, intended or unintended, might follow from adoption?
- Relatedly, and importantly, is it possible to off-set and/or recover from the negative consequences?
- What are you unwilling to accept and/or do?

Understanding the source, what interests or assumptions inform their aims, as well as understanding the consequences and impacts of integrating technology solutions is critical to responsible engagement

to social media use to shopping habits. With public institutions increasingly incapable of organizing society, the task then falls to Big Tech, which gains an extraordinary capacity to influence individual and collective behavior. The public sphere is thereby dissolved into online networks, monetary power is displaced into crypto-currencies, and Artificial Intelligence colonizes what Marx called the 'general intellect', heralding the steady appropriation of political power by private interests.

The weakening of mediating institutions goes hand-in-hand with an anti-democratic impulse – or, more accurately, a hatred of equality.

Disinvestment and the weakening of the public sector, social safety net, and of its institutions and critical infrastructure are not accidental failures; it is a result of deliberate legislative policy choices, and cultural priorities (Cohen, D., & Mikaelian, A, 2021). As government and public interest serving institutions become increasingly incapable or unprepared to meet the basic needs of society, America remains vulnerable to predatory interests.

In this vacuum, private enterprise along with tech companies continue to supplant critical civic infrastructure, while profit-driven interests of private corporations increasingly dictate the availability of and access to the finite resources necessary for global life and survival (Gu, 2023).

The situation becomes even more dire, when one looks more closely at the ideological positions maintained by influential political and Silicon Valley figures, some of whom regard democratic governance as “inherently weak”, and argue that “American democracy should be replaced by what [Curtis Yarvin] calls a ‘monarchy’ run by what [he] called a C.E.O.” ([Marchese, 2025](#)). The intention of technocrats is not simply to establish solutions, but they also seek to possess the means of control (Tau, 2024), determine who or what has value, and how society continues. In its very essence, this is a struggle over governance itself.

What is Technoethics?

Technoethics (TE) is an interdisciplinary research area that draws on theories and methods from multiple knowledge domains (such as communications, social sciences, information studies, technology studies, applied ethics, and philosophy) to provide insights on ethical dimensions of technological systems and practices for advancing a technological society.

Technoethics views technology and ethics as socially embedded enterprises and focuses on discovering the ethical uses for technology, protecting against the misuse of technology, and devising common principles to guide new advances in technological development and application to benefit society.

[Wikipedia, "Technoethics"](#)

The adoption of any tool or system must be preceded by critical evaluation, assessment, and an understanding of broader environmental context and consequences. Such evaluation provides the necessary foundation for ethical evaluation of technology and its social implications.

Technoethics, in practice, invites an examination of how technological systems distribute and exercise power. It situates technology within its social, political, and environmental contexts, reminding that every design decision reflects values, bias, and consequences. Within this framing, technoethics becomes a method of environmental scanning (Harris & Brooker, 2025) and power analysis ([Commons Librarian, 2022](#)), mapping how systems, people, and influence interact.

Technoethics, power analysis, and environmental scanning asks to examine not only what a technology does, but the conditions that enable it to exist: the political incentives, economic dependencies, and social narratives that shape its integration.

What is a Technoethical Audit?

In recent years, the emergence of resources and tools to facilitate instruction, as well as reflection, on auditing the ethics of technology, has proliferated. *Foregrounding Technoethics: Toward Critical Perspectives in Technology and Teacher Education* (2019) by Daniel Krutka, Marie Heath, and Staudt Willet addresses how existing frameworks in education (such as the Teacher Educator Technology Competencies (TETCs) tend to emphasize teaching *with* technology rather than teaching *about* technology. The emphasis on teaching *with* technology (and the underlying assumption that these systems are inherently adopted and integrated) overlooks the critically important work of interrogating the source and origin of these solutions.

One of the major contributions of *Foregrounding Technoethics: Toward Critical Perspectives in Technology and Teacher Education* (Krutka et al., 2019) includes a set of guiding questions and conceptual approaches for doing a technoethical audit of technologies. Proposed in this work are six unique topics that require additional consideration replicated below (pp. 569-570):

- Ethical: Was this technology designed ethically and used ethically?
- Legal: Are laws that apply to our use of this technology just?
- Democratic: Does this technology afford or constrain democracy and justice for all groups?
- Economic: Are the ways that developers profit from this technology ethical?
- Technological: What are the unintended and unobvious problems to which this technology might contribute?
- Pedagogical: In what ways does this technology afford and constrain learning opportunities about technologies?

of technocratic power has dramatically shifted ([Newkey-Burden, 2023](#)). Dialogue around AI technologies has ensnared the public imagination (Salvaggio, 2025). It is often championed by individuals and powerful entities with questionable motives and documented patterns of violations (e.g., [AFL-CIO, 2025](#)), as the solution to replace the source of problems (in their view, people) while continuing to reap the benefits of human labor and exploiting environmental resources (e.g., [Wray, 2025](#)).

The rapid acceleration of development, investment and consumption of energy is concentrated among a few powerful tech industry giants who align with right-wing politics in order to amplify their influence over social infrastructure, economy, warfare, and governance ([Schleifer, 2025](#)). This paradigm shift is reshaping society and the frameworks of power by consolidating decision-making over the future by and for those who own and control the tools and platforms under the guise of “tech innovation” ([Eisenstat, 2022](#)).

Warnings surrounding the shift in power distribution and the consolidation of influence and control by “big tech” are being raised by researchers (Dupere, 2025) and advocates alike ([Gasior-Kavishe, 2025](#)). An increasingly more broadly discussed concept, [technofeudalism](#) argues that digital capitalism is shifting toward a new kind of economic control, where “big tech” corporations do not simply compete in markets; they own and control the platforms and physical infrastructure just like feudal lords controlled land in medieval times (Varoufakis, 2023).

Cédric Durand's [Fragile Leviathan?](#) offers a critical analysis of the profound impacts of this relationship between “big tech” corporations and state power, and what it means for social stability:

This radical project on the part of the world's leading power could have serious implications: reshaping the relationship between capital and the state, classes and countries, for years to come. It threatens to accelerate a process that I have elsewhere described as 'technofeudalization'. As large corporations monopolize knowledge and data, they centralize the algorithmic means of coordinating human activities, from working practices

America in View: Technocratic Rupture of the Commons

When taking in view of the current state of American society, it is important to understand that it is shaped by its history and its policy decisions. Through the process of disinvestment, privatization, and a government that consistently fails to address its foundational racial, economic, gender, and disability injustices, present-day America is one where basic infrastructure is deteriorating (e.g., roads, railways, water), social economic inequality is widespread, and human rights are increasingly under attack (Cohen, D., & Mikaelian, A, 2021).

In a living human world, people's needs, realities, and aspirations persist and deserve to be met. As the dominant global power through the 20th and 21st centuries, the United States has long [possessed both the means and resources](#) (e.g., *Wealth Inequality*, n.d.) to realize the American dream, a concept popularized by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* (1931) and deeply influential in shaping FDR's New Deal policies. Adams defines the American Dream as "a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (Adams, p. 404). Yet, its extractive, racist, and individualistic policy design normalizes widespread disenfranchisement and mass surveillance, while basic human needs are increasingly contingent upon "proving one's worth" and subject to capitalist extortion at home and abroad (Melamed, 2015).

"Big Tech's" dominance and "AI" exploitation does not exist apart from the world; it is, in fact, *of* the tangible human world and impacts the material living conditions of all people and beings ([Crawford, K., & Joler, V. 2018](#)). It is therefore imperative to recognize that the present environment results from past choices, with consequences for the planet, for people, and for the world we inhabit.

Since the November 2022 emergence of ChatGPT 3.5 and the subsequent deluge of various AI technologies across the internet and its myriad of digital platforms and services, the landscape and positioning

It is evident that ethical technology assessment goes beyond whether it works, exists, or *possibility*, but instead requires a deep understanding about its origins, assumptions, who benefits, who is marginalized, and what ecosystem (socio-political-economic-environmental) it supports or incentivizes.

Power Analysis

The dominant narrative around AI, "Big Tech," and its aims are intentionally opaque. Current technology systems, as well as policy and narrative, are designed to keep understanding to a few, relying on public disinterest or sense of non-belonging. This positioning disenfranchises people and often rewards narrow incentives and groups (Daub, 2020). In order to make decisions around technology, one must be able to analyze influence, consequence, environmental context, and source.

What is Power Mapping?

Power mapping is a framework for visualizing and analyzing how power operates within a system. Used in advocacy, business, legal, and educational settings, power mapping involves meaningful reflective engagement on what influences can be shaping actions, narratives, and/or political behavior. It involves identifying who holds decision-making authority, the factors that shape influence, and the groups or allies that can support efforts to effect change ([Commons Librarian, 2022](#)).

Power Mapping: Personal Reflection Exercise

Imagine a situation where you or a group needs something and is trying to gain approval, resources, or make change. This scenario could be as specific as a workplace project, or even trying to influence an employer or political leader. Once you have chosen your scenario, reflect on the following questions.

Your Personal Sample Scenario

- Policy development can be influenced by external ideas or collaboration between governmental bodies and the public.
- Policymaking is an ongoing and iterative process; policies must continuously be reviewed, updated, and revised.

Technology (Administration) as Social Policy

Identify actors and stakeholders

Who holds influence, who is affected, and who is positioned to make decisions?

Examine relationships

How does power flow between people, institutions, or groups; who depends on whom?

When it comes to technology, including AI, intent matters, but what often matters most is the source and impact of decisions. The adoption of any tool or system must be preceded by critical evaluation, assessment, and an understanding of environmental context and consequences. The choice to adopt or reject the use of AI should be made intentionally, involving a deeper commitment to civic engagement: inclusive, participatory processes that shape not just how AI is used, but also how it is governed.

:

Social policy shapes how governments respond to human needs, and technology, as well as AI, is increasingly shaping how those needs are perceived, prioritized, and met. Every technological system encodes biases, makes choices and determinations, manages risk, and enforces the values guiding design (Benjamin, 2019). In practice, and as owned by unaccountable corporations and technocratic elites, technology, including "AI", performs the governing functions of social policy.

Social and legal codes, like their byte-size counterparts, are not neutral; nor are all codes created equal. They reflect particular perspectives and forms of social organization that allow some people to assert themselves – their assumptions, interests, and desires – over others. From the seemingly mundane to the extraordinary, technical systems offer a mirror to the wider terrain of struggle over the forces that govern our lives (Benjamin, 2019, p. 52).

Identify structural and systemic constraints

- Power Analysis (General): *Laws, policies, resources, cultural norms, or institutional practices*
- Technoethical Questions: *What impact does this have on the environment? What types of labor (human or otherwise) are required for this technology to function? How is consent gathered, and are people displaced and/or marginalized?*

Attributes of Social Policy

As summarized from *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods* (Fischer, Miller, & Sidney, 2017), public policy involves a number of key attributes:

What is Social Policy?

- Policy is developed in response to issues or problems that require attention.
- Policy reflects what a government chooses to do (explicit actions) or not do (implicit actions) regarding a specific issue or problem.
- Policy may be formalized as law(s), regulation(s), or a broader set of the rules governing a particular issue or problem.

For Whom?

- Policy is designed to serve the public interest.
- Policy is designed to address specific objectives, such as solving or mitigating problems.

Who Decides? (*this is where the tension lies, isn't it?*)

- Policy is ultimately developed by governments (but which governments, for whom, and in whose interest?)

Assess capacity and leverage

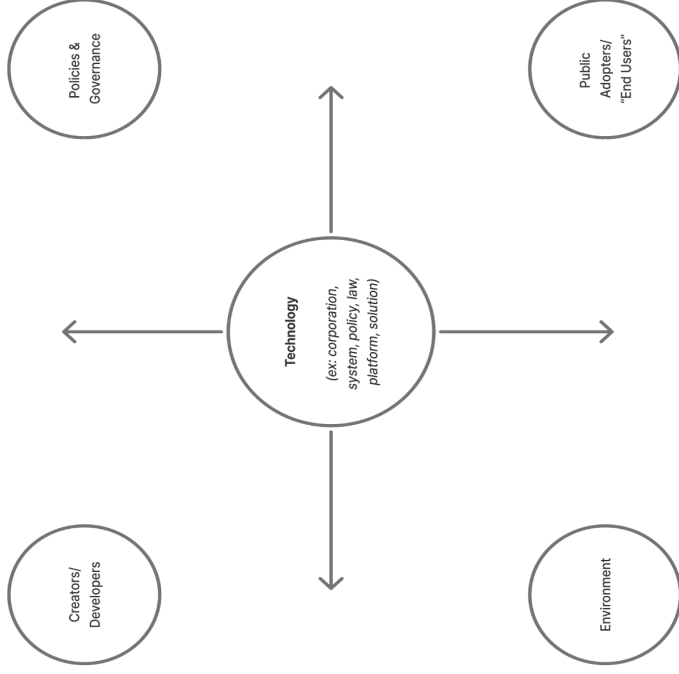
Who has the resources, authority, role, or social capital to effect change?

Identify structural and systemic constraints

Laws, policies, resources, cultural norms, or institutional practices

Applying Power Mapping & Technoethics

Inviting critical assessment across the following areas, power mapping and technoethics can be used as a way to evaluate how influence and control operate within technological systems.



Visual Example: Power Mapping with a Techno-Ethical Lens

Fused together, power mapping and technoethics can be used as a way to evaluate how influence and control operate within technological systems. It prompts a review of social, political, and environmental realities that shape technology. Taken together, power mapping and a technoethical audit provide a framework for critically assessing technology in its broader social, political, and environmental context. In

doing so, individuals and groups are better positioned to make more informed decisions around development, integration, suitability of technologies and their interconnected policy systems.

Example: Power Analysis & Technoethical Questions

Identify actors and stakeholders

- Power Analysis (General): *Who holds influence, who is affected, and who is positioned to make decisions?*
- Technoethical Prompts: *Who defines the goals or objectives of the technology?*

Examine relationships

- Power Analysis (General): *How does power flow between people, institutions, or groups; who depends on whom?*
- Technoethical Prompts: *How do the relationships between stakeholders shape the development and use of the technology? Who has control over the technology, and how does that affect others' access, consent, or participation? Who benefits or profits from its implementation, and who might be left out or harmed by its use?*

Assess capacity and leverage

- Power Analysis (General): *Who has the resources, authority, role, or social capital to effect change?*
- Technoethical Questions: *Who has the power to define success in the context? Who has the ability to shape its design, implementation, and impacts? Does the solution prioritize the interests of a particular group, and does it align with the broader social good?*