The Optimistic Case for AI

Much has been written — including in this newsletter — about the potential risks of AI. But throughout history, there's a long tradition of new technologies stoking fear. Former US President Benjamin Harrison was so afraid of electricity that he refused to touch the light switches when they were installed in the White House! So is today's AI panic truly warranted? Or just another temporary delusion. In today's newsletter, we take a look at both sides.

Below the fold:

- [8 Inventions That Once Freaked People Out Way More Than AI](#) by Carlyn Beccia

- [Why Do We Always See New Technology as a Threat?](#) by Enrique Dans, Professor of Innovation at IE Business School

- [Instead of Asking AI Companies to 'Slow Down' We Should Encourage Them to Move Even Faster](#) by Hunter Walk, Partner at Homebrew Ventures

- [Ethical Evolution in the Age of AI: Why Fear and Complacency Are Not Options](#) by Louis Byrd

Almost overnight, AI has ascended into the mainstream, dominating the tech conversation and forcing entire industries (venture capital, media, consumer tech, etc.) to quickly adapt for fear of being left behind.

But as quickly as AI entered the public consciousness, so too did the reactions *against* it. In the April 4th edition of this newsletter, we covered the open letter endorsed by tech leaders like Elon Musk and Steve Wozniak calling for a moratorium on the training of models more powerful than GPT4. It argued that AI poses existential risks to information ecosystems, world economies, and even society itself.

Are Musk and Wozniak right to sound the alarm? Or have they, as critics claim, fallen into an age-old trap of tech panic?

From the printing press to electricity to the telephone, history shows us countless examples of society's aversion to and fear of new technologies — not unlike what we see today.

To go deeper on humanity's historical tech skepticism, read:

- [**8 Inventions That Once Freaked People Out Way More Than AI**](#) by Carlyn Beccia

So what's the source of our collective techno-anxiety? As Professor of Innovation at IE Business School Enrique Dans writes, it comes down to our primal fear of the unknown:

- [**Why Do We Always See New Technology as a Threat?**](#) by Enrique Dans

While much of the world's past unease surrounding new technologies hasn't exactly aged well, something about AI feels different. The potential scale of its impact is too far beyond anything we've seen before.

Maybe that's why much of the conversation about AI is so *binary*.

Opponents say it will be the cause of all the world's future problems.

Proponents say it will be the solution to them.

Obviously, the answer is more nuanced.

As investor and Homebrew partner Hunter Walk writes in response to Musk and Wozniak's open letter, there's an optimistic path toward responsible, measured advancement of new AI tech. One that balances the real risks against the potential rewards:

- [**Instead of Asking AI Companies to 'Slow Down' We Should Encourage Them to Move Even Faster**](#) by Hunter Walk

And as engineer Louis Byrd writes, AI is merely a reflection of ourselves. In order to mitigate its risks, the burden is on us to first treat the ills of society that AI might well magnify:

*"As we embark upon a new era of civilization, empowered by the progress of emerging technologies, it is imperative that we reflect upon the state of our society and recognize, with genuine candor, that we must not only strive to improve technology but also radically transform ourselves for the better. Our destiny lies within our own hands."*

- [**Ethical Evolution in the Age of AI: Why Fear and Complacency Are Not Options**](#) by Louis Byrd