

[Technology: the limitless resource](#) [1]

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Environmentalists say we must change our behaviour to save the planet and pass on something to our children. They often pick symbolic targets designed to raise our awareness, even where they make an insignificant impact on the problem. The behaviour they favour is less materialistic, in that we are supposed to moderate our wants and live simpler, slower lives. Although many environmentalists ally with the Left against 'materialistic capitalism,' their prescription is profoundly conservative, disdaining the pace and complexity of the modern world.

In fact it is technology rather than behavioural change which will bring more certain results because there are, or can be, technological solutions to modern problems. With CO₂, for example, a variety of sequestration methods can isolate it from the atmosphere. It can be captured and compressed for use in enhanced oil recovery. This has been very successful at the Salah Project in Algeria. The compressed CO₂, transmitted through pipelines, is injected deep below the Earth's surface in saline formations or in depleted gas or oil fields. This prevents it polluting the atmosphere.

Since some 85% of the world's energy is wasted, there is considerable scope for technological means of conserving it. Engineering advances have made cars far more fuel-efficient than they were even a decade ago. Much energy will be saved with the gradual switch to electric cars, and driverless ones promise further efficiency gains. These changes will help curb the emission of pollutants such as sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide. Technology gives us choices as to how our electricity is produced, with shale gas having less than half the pollution of coal, and pollution-free photovoltaic electricity on a steeply falling price curve.

Environmentalists tell us to produce less, but it will be more effective to produce more cleanly, with huge advances made in air scrubbers and pollution extractors already making production far cleaner than it was. Cleaner production costs more, but as we become wealthier we become more able to afford the worthwhile gains it brings. The behavioural changes proposed are not without cost. Living more simply often means living with fewer choices. Walking or cycling to work might seem more virtuous, but it uses time that might have been better spent.

What technology offers, in effect, is a morning after pill, a way of achieving all that we wish to achieve without having to pick up the consequences; the party without the hangover. It is unlikely that humans across the globe will change their behaviour sufficiently to make measurable differences fast enough, but it is highly likely that creative imagination will make technological advances that solve our problems in other ways.

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