

# Overshooting Technology's Limits: Elon Musk's Visions of Conquering the Universe. "10,000 Square Miles of Solar Panels could Power the Entire U.S."

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Global Research, November 30, 2023

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

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*The accomplishments of human technology are genuinely astounding. However, anthropogenic ingenuity's limits – and potential harms – are abundantly evident. These dangerous realities do not daunt Elon Musk and NASA, who promise to use technology to solve worldly ills of energy and pollution (by burning energy, and polluting). Musk, a prominent priest of this new science fiction age, recently [asserted](#) that 10,000 square miles of solar panels could power the entire US. This far-sighted vision's [scientific realities](#) and potential harms evaporate in the near-mystical assumptions implicit in such claims. Perhaps Elon will one day require absolution for his visions-become-nightmares.*

## Icarus and the Sun

In truly Icarian fashion, the higher mankind has climbed toward the technological sun, the more arrogant and reckless the race has become.

Almost every scientific advance has carried hidden and profound costs unpredicted by the prophets of science. Consider that the EPA has only this year determined what exposures of "forever chemical" PFAS are acceptable: the stuff has tainted millions of Americans' drinking water since its introduction in the 1940s. There are thousands of PFAS: how could the *Teflon* frying pan be anything but good?

This example extends to technological "marvels" such as lobotomies, transgender surgeries (and synthetic hormones) for minors, thalidomide, Agent Orange, DDT, PCBs, phthalates,

BPA, neonicotinoids, [glyphosate](#), hydrofluorocarbons, and a dizzying myriad of other manmade contributions to the environment that ultimately delivered evils to compliment the promised good. Medicines saved lives but increased overpopulation; cars and refrigerators are essential gadgets that damage the environment. Over and over, man's vision outstrips reality; repeatedly, the promised gifts of technology obscure the Trojan horse results after the supposed gift is unleashed within the city gates.

## Musk Is Genius

Mr. Musk is undoubtedly brilliant, and his accomplishments are superhuman. But he has also proved his capacity for error, especially in his space exploration ventures: his rockets keep exploding, spewing pollution and space debris widely. But Elon is hardly alone in his guru promises: Steven Hawking famously [claimed](#) humanity had a mere 1000 years to escape the surly bonds of earth and populate a new world or perish. A few months later, he reduced his escape timeline to a single century: Which Hawking is correct?

If it is true humanity is destroying Earth with technology and must use technology to flee its masochistic destruction, is humankind simply a chubby virus that flits from planet to planet, destroying the universe? Which science fiction character *is* America in this scenario – the savior of Earth in *Armageddon*, or the Death Star of *Star Wars*?

Elon Musk is more sober than many prophets of techno-rescue, allowing his 100×100-mile solar panel array suffers from a battery problem. But he is still intoxicated by his vain imaginings: where is the power grid to deliver this energy?

What of the profound problems of intermittency?

How much pollution and energy would be generated while Musk and Co are paid stellar sums to manufacture 10,000 square miles of solar panels, and where and how will those toxic panels be “renewed” when their useful life inevitably expires? Perhaps the entire pile of solar panel refuse can be jettisoned into space, to drift around with the growing pile of Musk-launched flotsam and jetsom.

Hawking's vision of interplanetary rescue is alive and well in Musk and NASA, which are now partners in flying a BIPOC American to the moon. The potential conflict of interest appears large: Musk and SpaceX are to [supply NASA](#) with its future spacecraft for its Artemis missions; Tesla manufactures residential and commercial solar panels. That profit motive might taint the visionary's vision, but does not hinder the rose-colored receptiveness of fellow profiteers or the technologically faithful.

## Exploding Rockets

Image: SpaceX Starship SN9 prototype (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)



Musk's SpaceX rocketships keep exploding shortly following blast-off, but he has more readied for launch. The environmental cost of detonating rockets in the Earth's atmosphere to populate space takes stock of the damage it wreaks much the same as Kim Jong Un's military missile launches.

It is indisputable that these space missions (and the manufacture of rockets and fuels) spew massive quantities of toxins and greenhouse gases in their profit-driven execution.

Any logical risk-benefit analysis of the environmental costs of space exploration is simply side-stepped by NASA, much like the monumental externalized pollution costs of solar panel manufacture and disposal: the "see no evil, hear no evil" of the biggest polluters of all. Instead, NASA amplifies the Hawking-Musk promise of [stellar deliverance](#):

Setting Humanity on a Sustainable Course to the Moon The Artemis program builds on a half-century of experience and preparation to establish a robust human-robotic presence on and around the Moon. ....America will lead the monumental shift that frees humanity from our innate bonds to Earth. This is the decade in which the Artemis Generation will teach us how to live on other worlds. ... Under the Artemis program, humanity will explore regions of the Moon never visited before, uniting people around the unknown, the never seen, and the once impossible. We will return to the Moon robotically beginning next year, send astronauts to the surface within four years, and build a longterm presence on the Moon by the end of the decade. ... The sooner we get to the Moon, the sooner we get American astronauts to Mars.

NASA [gushes](#) of its grand visions and sticks the trigger word "sustainable" as a title on its predictions without ever explaining what on earth is sustainable about landing a person "of color" on the sterile moon, or how the massive amounts of rocket fuel are being minimized with Musk catalytic converters on his Starship rocket's 33 booster engines (they aren't).

The ships' "flight termination system" explodes the rockets in midflight if they veer off course. In his most recent launch, that technology effectively blew up the rocket in mid-flight so it would not plummet to earth and do harm. It failed on the previous launch. But where is all this pollution being *sequestered*? SpaceX has lost a series of prototypes that have "collapsed, exploded, or crashed and then exploded," but claims that "success comes from what we learn ... And this flight will help us improve Starship's reliability as SpaceX seeks to make life multiplanetary."

As bizarre science strives to make men into women and transhumans immortal, the proposal of infecting the universe with human folly and toxic consumption in the name of "what we learn" demonstrates how little we ultimately have learned. Elon Musk may have

saved free speech by purchasing X, but he will not save humanity by selling America 100×100 square miles of solar panels or ten spaceships for colored human explorers. George Lucas told a great story, but he and his air-conditioned audiences could still differentiate between reality and science fiction.

## Space Religiosity 2023

The techno-colonization of foreign worlds will prove an elusive Holy Grail, but Elon Musk will enlarge his empire by billions in the trying. His fortunes may exceed those of fellow fantasy-visionary Bill Gates. Most Americans, though, are strangers in an ever-stranger land, being lorded over by space-fantasy prosperity prophets for profit. Tithing is economically and environmentally compulsory in the Musk megachurch of the Space Cadet age. A small step for Elon; a giant step background for mankind.

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Attorney-farmer John Klar hosts the [Small Farm Republic Substack](#) and podcast from his Vermont farm. His recent book is [Small Farm Republic: Why Conservatives Must Embrace Local Agriculture, Reject Climate Alarmism, and Lead an Environmental Revival](#).

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