

Big Tech Oligarchs Have a Terrible Plan for Humanity

Bernie Sanders

A handful of multibillionaires hope to dictate our future.

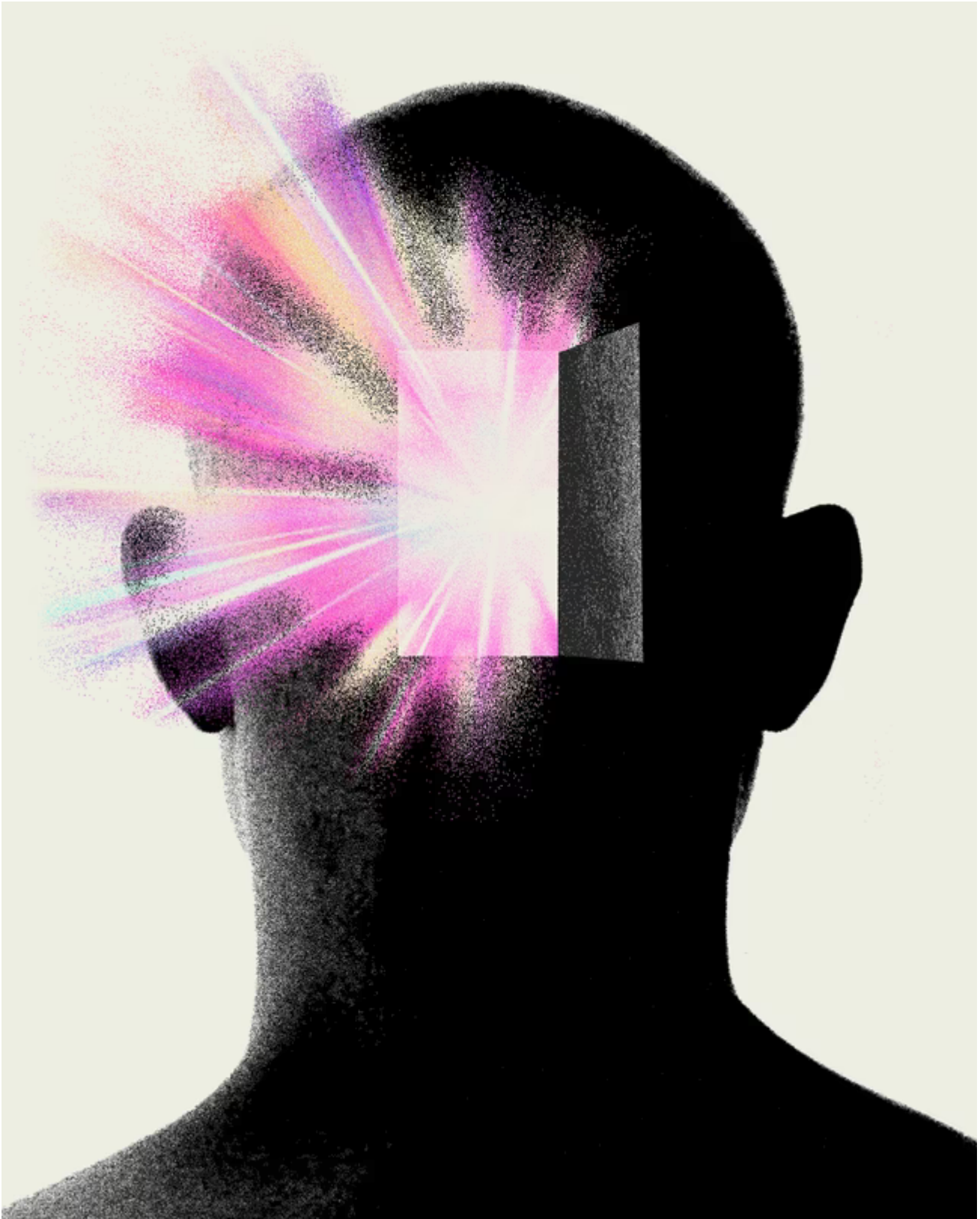


Illustration by Adam Maida / The Atlantic

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Should human beings remain in control of planet Earth? Or should we be replaced as the dominant species? As absurd as these questions may sound, and as obvious as the answers may seem, the Big Tech oligarchs funding the artificial-intelligence revolution have responded in ways that should alarm all of us.

In Silicon Valley, some of the wealthiest people on Earth believe that they have the power to create a superior species. Sam Altman, the head of OpenAI, [wrote](#) in 2017 that AI would allow humans to become “the first species ever to design our own descendants.” What this means for humans, however, remains unclear. According to Altman, we will either jump-start digital intelligence “and then fade into an evolutionary tree branch, or we can figure out what a successful merge looks like.” In other words, humans have a choice: face extinction or merge with machines. “I believe the merge has already started,” Altman added, and is “probably our best-case scenario.”

Similarly, Dario Amodei, the head of Anthropic, has opened up [the possibility](#) of rights for AI models. “We don’t know if the models are conscious,” he [explained](#), and added, “But we’re open to the idea that it could be.”

Earlier this month, Elon Musk, the head of SpaceXAI and the richest man on Earth, [posted](#) on X, “Propagating super intelligence to the stars is a great success condition for a biological bootloader,” likening humans to the programming that launches a computer’s operating system. Put simply, Musk is saying that humans are merely a step toward digital superintelligence. Peter Thiel, the billionaire co-founder of Palantir and a major AI investor, was asked last year if he would prefer that the human race endure. His [response](#)? “Uh ... Well, I don’t know. I would—I would ... There’s so many questions implicit in this,” he stammered, before reluctantly conceding that humans should survive.

[Read: AI companies’ new plan to keep themselves from destroying everything](#)

These views are rooted in a once-fringe Silicon Valley ideology called “[transhumanism](#).” Transhumanists believe that technology will allow us to transcend humanity either by creating a new species or by combining ourselves with machines. Why go beyond humans? Because these new “posthumans” will be smarter than us. They will be infallible. They will go to the stars and conquer the universe. They will live forever.

If these were the fantasies of teenage boys obsessed with science fiction, we could laugh them off. They are not. These are the foundational beliefs of the most powerful people in the world, who are mobilizing trillions of dollars to turn them into reality.

And these investments are already paying off. For tens of thousands of years, humans had a monopoly on language. Only we could use sentences. No longer. For thousands of years, humans were the only ones capable of solving complex problems in fields such as mathematics. No longer. Until recently, we could reliably tell when a human, as opposed to a computer, was talking to us through a screen. No longer.

Machines *are*, in fact, already beginning to replace us. And the vision Big Tech oligarchs have for the future gets only more frightening. Musk is building Neuralink to implant chips in people’s brains in order to

achieve a “symbiosis with artificial intelligence.” Thiel has decamped to Argentina, where President Javier Milei has called for the establishment of “non-human corporations” operated by AI agents, for which “human shareholders may participate, but are not required.” An Anthropic co-founder, Christopher Olah, has been trying to convince religious leaders, including the pope, that AI could be conscious.

This is absurd. This is irresponsible. And almost no one outside Silicon Valley wants this future. There is a reason why 91 percent of Americans think we need guardrails on AI, why 74 percent do not trust the leaders of AI companies, and why 73 percent are concerned AI could threaten human survival.

[Read: AI is running laps around our political system](#)

In May, Pope Leo XIV [released](#) his first encyclical, *Magnificent Humanity*, in which he warned against an “anti-human vision” whereby “the human person risks being reduced to data, a cog in a machine or a commodity.” The pope was clear: “Humanity—in all its grandeur and woundedness—must never be replaced or surpassed.”

In response, Thiel called the pope “a Chinese Communist agent.” But the pope was right. Thiel and his fellow Big Tech oligarchs could not be more wrong.

Humanity must not allow a handful of multibillionaires to recklessly attempt to replace us. We must place an immediate pause on advanced-AI development and ban artificial superintelligence—an artificial mind smarter than any human, capable of operating independently beyond our control—until a new federal body is able to ensure the technology’s safety. That’s why I have introduced [legislation](#) with Representative Greg Casar to do just that. AI is an existential threat to humanity. It must be treated as such.

The future of humanity cannot be left in the hands of a few Big Tech oligarchs who are obsessed with money and power. The American people and people throughout the world must determine that future. Human beings, not machines, must come first.