

Opinion | Thomas L. Friedman: We Just Set Off the Second Big Bang

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Video

Thomas L. Friedman: We Just Set Off the Second Big Bang

The columnist on why humanity is entering its most dangerous era yet.

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According to the columnist Thomas L. Friedman, humanity has set off a second Big Bang — and we are not ready for it. In this video, he explains why the rise of artificial intelligence and other “godlike” powers will require us to build healthy interdependencies to survive what comes next.

Below is an edited transcript of this video. We recommend watching it in its original form for the full effect. You can do so using the video player above.

Thomas L. Friedman: Any journalist who has been working for almost half a century is sure that he or she was here for the big one. World War I, World War II, Vietnam. The rise of the internet. The fall of the Berlin Wall. The opening to China.

But this one — this one really is the big one. We’re here for something I call the second Big Bang.

|Clip of Raj from “The Big Bang Theory”: What?

The first Big Bang was set off by our creator 13.8 billion years ago. And the second Big Bang was just set off by us. It starts with the A.I. revolution, but it doesn’t end there at all.

|Clip of Sam Altman: I think A.I. will probably lead to the end of the world.

So I believe the only way forward is we as a species now are going to have to learn to detribalize, depolarize and detoxify ourselves at a speed, scope and scale we have never, ever had to even contemplate. And I know how hard that sounds, but I’m here to tell you: If we don’t do that, we are in for a world of hurt.

Here’s why we need to pay attention to this second Big Bang: We have made ourselves godlike as a species in seven different ways.

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We've created an artificial brain greater than the creator endowed us with. We have disconnected intelligence from human biology — that is a godlike act. We've created a planetary nervous system where we've connected virtually everybody on the planet, and we can now hear one another whisper. We're not quite as omniscient as the creator, but we're getting there.

Third, we've changed the climate. We are the first species to actually drive itself into a basically man-made climate era.

|Clip of Greta Thunberg: *It's just the beginning of a rapidly escalating existential crisis.*

No species has ever done that before. That is a godlike act. Fourth, we've created our own new galaxy. It's called cyberspace, where we're all connected and no one's in charge. Fifth, we split the atom.

|Archival clip: *The uranium atom was split, releasing its catastrophic force.*

We can now destroy the planet just as much as God did in the age of Noah, with a flood. That is godlike.

Six: We've created deep learning, where we can now apprehend mysteries of the universe that previously were only the purview of the creator.

And lastly, coming to a theater near you, we don't know exactly when — five years, 10 years, maybe 15 years. But we'll get there: Quantum computing, fusion energy and A.I.

The conversion of those three things will allow us to create anything from the molecular level up. That will be our Genesis moment. Just one problem: We now have the power to part the Red Sea, but without the Ten Commandments. Without the rules, norms and institutions to govern our now godlike powers.

|Clip of Yoshua Bengio: *I have a vision of advanced A.I. in the future, governed safely.*

We're about to experience the greatest phase change in human history, and we are not ready.

|Clip of Jensen Huang: *And this is the part that people don't see: A.I. is literally everywhere.*

A.I. is unlike any other technology. It's like a vapor. It's going into everything. This will drive so many new issues and challenges.

Let's imagine I go to my orthopedist one day and he says, "Tom, I'm sorry to tell you, you need a new hip replacement." I say, "Doc, I want the best." He says, "Today, the best hip replacement is made by shanghai.hipreplacement.ai.china. You're going to love it. It's going to be optimizing 24/7, adjusting all these kinds of things in your body and feeding all the data back. It's going to be wonderful." "But Doc, Doc, wait a minute — feeding the data back? Where does the data go?" "Oh, that will be back at shanghai.hipreplacement.china or whatever."

Am I going to put that hip replacement in? Are you going to put that hip replacement in? What happens when A.I. is in everything? Your Chinese-made car. Your Chinese-made watch. Your Chinese-made toaster. Your Chinese-made glasses.

And for the Chinese, what happens when A.I.'s in everything they import from us? You know what's going to happen? All we're going to sell to China are soybeans, and all China is going to sell to us is our soy sauce.

Because nobody is going to trust anybody else's A.I. unless we've agreed on the ethical guardrails. So this is a huge problem coming down the road at us. We are going to have to sit down and agree with China — the other A.I. superpower — on some norms, standards and guardrails.

|Clip of Donald Trump: *During this visit, we will also discuss pressing issues concerning superintelligence.*

And it's going to be very difficult. In fact, any time I bring this up, people say to me, "Friedman, that is so naïve. The U.S. and China — they'll never do that." And I'm here to tell you: Once we're around that corner, we're each going to have to contemplate things we never imagined before.

|Clip of Trump: *President Xi and I have forged a friendship. A truly great friendship built on mutual respect.*

However you think geopolitics is organized today — what's the date today?

Producer off-camera: Oct. 7.

Friedman: Oct. 7, 2026. I'm here to tell you: On Oct. 7, 2027, it's going to be different. And on Oct. 7, 2028 — oh my God, I can't even imagine what it's going to be like.

Now, you could say, "Hey, Friedman, we've been able to get by episodically for a long time now, only collaborating part of the time — and not at the kind of depth I'm talking about." But A.I. is different. This can — we cannot kick it down the road. So we have become fused by fate. Moses ain't coming down with the two tablets.

|Clip of Moses in "The Ten Commandments": *There is no freedom without the law.*

We are going to have to develop those norms, those ethics, those standards, and globalize them. Because we now live in a world where more people can do unto you farther, faster, deeper, cheaper than ever before. And you can do unto others farther, faster, deeper, cheaper than ever before. And now add A.I. agents and robots to the mix.

We are going to rise together by building healthy interdependencies. Or we're going to fall together. But baby, whatever we're doing, we're doing it together.

We can learn that early; we can learn that late. We can learn that before the massive global crisis or we can learn it after. But learn it, we will.

This video was produced by Havovi Cooper. It was edited by Mehron Abdi. Fact-checking by Julie Beer. Cinematography by Nathan Shinholt. Original music by Pat McCusker and Gautam Srikishan. Archival research by Tara Jayaram. The postproduction manager is Mike Puretz. Audience strategy by Kristina Samulewski. The executive producer of Opinion Video is Erica Berenstein. The director of Opinion Video is Jonah M. Kessel. The director of audio engineering is Isaac Jones. The deputy director of Opinion Shows is Alison Bruzek. The director of Opinion Shows is Annie-Rose Strasser. The head of Times Opinion is Kathleen Kingsbury.

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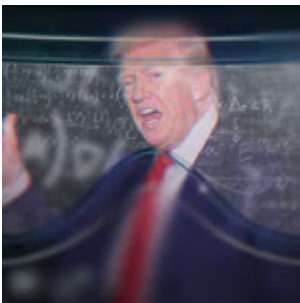
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Thomas L. Friedman is the foreign affairs Opinion columnist. He joined the paper in 1981 and has won three Pulitzer Prizes. He is the author of seven books, including "From Beirut to Jerusalem," which won the National Book Award. [@tomfriedman](#) • [Facebook](#)

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