Idols of Silicon: The AI Mirage and The Limits of Knowledge

TL;DR: *AI will not produce superintelligence or escape the limits of knowledge. The myth of ASI endures because it functions as theology for the public and ideology for Silicon Valley. An idol built on appropriation, exploitation, and hype.*

1. Introduction – Scaling as Salvation

The story of artificial intelligence today is a story of scale. Larger models, bigger datasets, denser clusters of GPUs. Each new generation of AI systems is heralded as a step closer to "general" or even "super" intelligence. The underlying faith is simple: more capacity means more intelligence, and more intelligence means more knowledge. From there, the leap to utopian visions comes quickly: artificial superintelligence will unlock cures for disease, unravel the mysteries of the cosmos, and perhaps even deliver humanity from its own limitations. It is a story told in theological tones, and one that conveniently sustains the economic ambitions of the corporations building these systems.

This faith rests on a familiar pattern. History shows that occasional leaps in human intelligence – a Newton, an Einstein, a von Neumann – have reshaped entire fields of knowledge. If the brilliance of a single mind can reconfigure our picture of the universe, then surely scaling up intelligence, whether by cultivating more geniuses or building more powerful machines, will carry us further still. What is a solitary Einstein compared to a billion-parameter neural net? If one Euler could revolutionize mathematics, what might a system that combines thousands of them achieve?

Yet the analogy misleads. It mistakes magnitude for transcendence. Adding more intelligence, whether through people or machines, does not change the fundamental structure of knowledge itself. There are limits to what can be known, limits not overcome by mere accumulation. Human genius has already reached points where breakthroughs demand not more raw brainpower, but different frameworks, collective effort, and

AI Industry Rhetoric

The faith in scaling is not confined to futurists or sci-fi writers; it is voiced daily by industry leaders. **Sam Altman** of OpenAI insists that advanced AI will "solve everything," while **Demis Hassabis** of DeepMind describes his project as "solve intelligence, and then use it to solve everything else." **Sundar Pichai** of Google has declared AI "more profound than fire or electricity."

Even the more cautious voices share the same assumption. In his essay *Machines of Loving Grace* (2024), Anthropic CEO **Dario Amodei** presents himself as sober and pragmatic, yet his optimism still rests on the conviction that scaled computation will unlock not just medicine or governance, but meaning itself. This is the scaling faith in its purest form: the belief that more compute is not just improvement, but transcendence.

infrastructural tools. Similarly, AI systems today are not charting new modes of cognition; they are vast engines of statistical pattern recognition, powerful in scope but bound in kind. And beneath the rhetoric of salvation lies a political economy: the appropriation of creative work without consent, the exploitation of invisible labour, and the strategic use of hype to capture regulation and investment. AI is not only framed as a god; it is also marketed as one.

This essay will argue that scale is not a path to superintelligence, but a mirage. We will proceed in three steps. First, by examining the nature of current AI systems: why they are best understood as "stochastic parrots" rather than intelligences in their own right. Second, by considering why scaling cannot bridge the gap from present systems to true artificial general intelligence (AGI), and why, if AGI itself is doubtful, artificial superintelligence (ASI) is even more far-fetched. And third, by showing that even if ASI were achieved, knowledge acquisition would still be bound by epistemological limits already articulated by thinkers such as Kant, Gödel, and Wittgenstein. Along the way, we will also confront the theology and the ideology of ASI: why humanity longs for such gods, and how Silicon Valley profits from selling them.

Taken together, these arguments reframe the question. AI may accelerate the refinement of knowledge, but it does not herald the transcendence of human limits. The cathedral of science will rise higher with AI's help, but its foundations remain the same.

2. Current AI – Stochastic Parrots at Scale

To understand why scaling does not bring us closer to artificial general intelligence, we first need to be clear about what current AI systems are and what they are not.

Large language models (LLMs) like GPT, Claude, and Gemini are not minds. They are statistical engines for symbol manipulation. Their architecture is designed to predict the next token in a sequence, given vast amounts of training data. They build mathematical embeddings (huge high-dimensional vectors that capture statistical relationships among words, phrases, and patterns) and then generate outputs that maximize likelihood.

This is extraordinarily powerful, they are stunning achievements of software architecture. It allows them to produce fluent text, code, and images that appear coherent and even insightful. But what they manipulate are correlations, not concepts. For the machine, "The sun is hot" is not a statement about a star radiating thermonuclear energy; it is simply a statistically likely sequence of symbols that often follows the phrase " The sun is." There is no reference to the world, no intentionality, no understanding.

By contrast, human cognition is not just statistical correlation. It is intentional: our words are *about* things, grounded in experience, embodiment, and context. Human creativity is not recombination alone, but orientation: the act of directing thought toward meaning and possibility. Einstein imagining himself riding alongside a beam of light was not simply remixing prior sentences; it was a conceptual leap that reorganized physics.

LLMs cannot do this. Their "novelty" is derivative. Because they have absorbed oceans of data, their recombinations can look startlingly new, but they remain recombinations nonetheless. They can simulate insight, but they cannot generate the intentional leaps that mark genuine understanding.

Stochastic Parrots Explained

The phrase "stochastic parrots" comes from a 2021 paper by **Emily Bender**, Timnit Gebru, Angelina McMillan-Major, and Margaret Mitchell: *On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots*. The authors argued that large language models are essentially parrots at scale – repeating and recombining what they have ingested without understanding.

"Stochastic" highlights the probabilistic nature of these systems: they predict the next token based on statistical likelihoods learned from data. "Parrots" emphasizes imitation without comprehension. The models can sound fluent, even insightful, but their outputs are recombinations of past patterns, not acts of understanding.

The metaphor stuck because it captures the core truth: scale produces more convincing parrots, not new kinds of minds.

The danger lies in mistaking fluency for comprehension. We read their outputs – grammatically polished, contextually relevant, sometimes even elegant – and we project intelligence into them. But what we encounter is imitation at scale. The model does not know why its answer makes sense, or whether it truly does. It cannot check the world against its statements, nor hold itself accountable to truth.

One recent [borderline fraud] case in point illustrates the point. Since GPT-3, companies have touted "chain-of-thought reasoning" as evidence that language models were beginning to think step by step, much like a human or a scientific team breaking down a complex problem. But the steps produced by these models are not reasoning – they are probabilistic token sequences, stitched together from statistical associations. For those paying close attention, the cracks showed immediately: intermediate "thoughts" would veer into tangents, assert falsehoods, or collapse into nonsense. Even the latest claim that systems like ChatGPT-5 are "thinking for longer to give a better answer" is not

thinking at all. It is simply juggling more pathways of word prediction before settling on an output. The theatre of reasoning masks what remains: stochastic pattern-matching, not cognition.

In contrast, humans are original co mposers, while today's AI systems are virtuoso cover artists. The composer brings something into being that did not exist before, shaped by intention, imagination, feeling and experience. The cover artist, however dazzling their technical skill, reinterprets existing material. They may add flourish, style, or surprising variation, but they do not originate the work. LLMs are cover artists trained on almost the entire recorded canon of human expression, endlessly inventive in recombination, but never originating in the sense that creation requires.

Scaling makes the cover artist faster, more versatile, more convincing. But scale alone does not transform imitation into invention. To conflate the two is to confuse appearance with reality. We do not have general intelligence in machines; we have massive stochastic parrots, astonishing in their mimicry but fundamentally bounded by their design.

This is the first reason why scaling does not imply superintelligence. Larger models yield better parrots, not new minds. And if our present systems are bounded by their architecture, then the leap to AGI, let alone ASI, requires more than piling on parameters. It requires a rethinking of what intelligence itself is.

Searle's Chinese Room

Philosopher **John Searle** offered a famous thought experiment in 1980: the *Chinese Room*. Imagine a person locked in a room with a set of rules for manipulating Chinese characters. By following the rules, the person can produce strings of symbols that fool outsiders into thinking he knows Chinese, but he understands nothing.

This, Searle argued, is what computers do: manipulate symbols syntactically without grasping their meaning. Large language models are the ultimate Chinese Room: staggering in scale, astonishing in fluency, but still manipulating tokens without comprehension.

3. The Myth of Scaling → AGI

If today's AI systems are essentially statistical cover artists, then the next question follows naturally: can scaling alone transform them into true artificial general intelligence (AGI)? The prevailing optimism in industry and media assumes that it can. More data, more parameters, more compute; this is presented not just as improvement, but as a path to a qualitatively different kind of mind.

But this belief confuses quantity with kind. Scaling is not transformation. Adding parameters produces more refined mimicry, but it does not generate new modes of cognition. Just as a parrot with a larger vocabulary is still a parrot, an LLM with trillions of parameters remains a statistical text generator.

AGI, however, requires something categorically different. It implies a system that can flexibly learn, reason, plan, and adapt across domains – not because it has memorized enough past examples, but because it possesses orientation, comprehension, and self-directed goals. In humans, general intelligence arises from embodiment, perception, agency, and the lived pressures of survival. We interpret symbols not as floating tokens, but as tools for navigating the world. Our knowledge is grounded in experience; it is always about something.

Current AI has none of this. Its intelligence is disembodied, ungrounded, and without selfhood. It does not know what it means to act, to decide, to feel, to risk, to be wrong or even to exist. It cannot reflect on its own outputs, except through the lens of statistical reinforcement. The leap from stochastic symbol-shuffling to embodied, self-orienting generality is not a matter of scale, it is a matter of architecture, ontology, and most likely, a still-unknown theory of mind (we are still not even close to understanding the hard problem of consciousness; maybe we never will).

This is why many researchers remain sceptical. Despite dramatic advances in performance, we do not have a roadmap to AGI. Scaling transformers has yielded astonishing systems, but they remain within the paradigm of predictive text (or imagery). There is no evidence that simply adding more compute will flip a switch from mimicry to mind.

And if AGI itself is uncertain, then artificial superintelligence (ASI) – the notion of a machine not just as capable as us but vastly surpassing us – becomes even more speculative. ASI presupposes not just human-

The Myth of Emergence

The present AI boom traces back to a single technical innovation: the transformer architecture, first introduced in Google's 2017 paper *Attention Is All You Need*. At the time, the advance seemed modest. The authors showed that by replacing recurrent layers with attention mechanisms, models could capture long-range dependencies in text more efficiently. The real breakthrough, however, was scalability. Transformers are highly parallelizable, making it possible to train models on unprecedented amounts of data and parameters.

What followed was a cascade. By 2018, researchers had discovered "scaling laws": systematic curves showing that as models grew larger, their performance improved smoothly and predictably. Even more provocative, some abilities seemed to appear suddenly once a certain size was reached – a phenomenon described as "emergent behaviour".

This discovery fuelled a powerful narrative: "if scaling produces new abilities, then perhaps *enough* scaling will produce general intelligence itself". In this view, "attention is all you need" became more than a technical claim – it became a philosophy. Scale, and intelligence will follow.

But emergence is not the same as comprehension. A system that acquires the ability to mimic translation at scale is not thereby conscious of meaning. A model that solves arithmetic by statistical interpolation has not discovered mathematics – in fact we can see for ourselves how poor LLMs are at maths. These emergent behaviours are artifacts of interpolation across massive datasets, not signs of a new form of mind. The leap from statistical regularity to genuine understanding remains as wide as ever.

level generality, but an intelligence unbounded in scope, able to solve problems beyond our reach. Yet if scaling does not lead to AGI, how could it possibly leap to ASI?

At present, the discourse around AGI and ASI risks sliding into science fiction: castles built in the air on the assumption that more of the same will somehow become something different. Without a qualitative shift, there is no reason to think that scaling symbol manipulation will ever yield genuine general intelligence. It is like mistaking an ever-larger library index for an author: scale produces breadth of access, but not the act of creation.

This is why the promise that "AGI is inevitable" rests on shaky ground. Scaling will continue to make our parrots more powerful, more convincing, even more useful. But it does not guarantee that they will ever cross the gap into comprehension. That leap, if it is possible at all, will require something radically different from what we are building today.

4. If AGI is Doubtful, ASI is Mirage

The discourse around artificial intelligence often leaps quickly from AGI to ASI. Once machines are imagined to match human-level generality, it seems only natural to assume they will soon surpass it – just as calculators outstrip us in arithmetic or supercomputers in raw processing. Why stop at parity when acceleration seems built into the trajectory?

But this assumption conceals a gap. If we do not yet know how to build AGI, then projecting to ASI is an exercise in speculation squared. AGI remains undefined in operational terms: is it the ability to transfer learning across domains, to pursue open-ended goals, to exhibit self-awareness? Each of these would require architectural shifts well beyond today's scaling paradigm. To claim that ASI is inevitable when AGI itself is uncertain is folly.

Even granting the possibility, the leap from AGI to ASI is not straightforward. Machines may surpass us in speed and memory, but intelligence is not linear. A mind does not become omniscient by being faster. The sciences show this vividly: breakthroughs often come not from brute force but from conceptual reframing, from asking a question differently. More cycles of computation do not guarantee deeper understanding; they may only yield more elaborate refinements of the same paradigm.

This is where the analogy to scaling human genius becomes useful. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have not lacked for brilliance. Across physics and mathematics, hundreds of minds of extraordinary calibre – individuals who, in earlier eras, might have stood alongside Euler, Newton, Einstein or von Neumann – have been at work simultaneously. They are supported by global collaborations, supercomputers, and experimental infrastructures undreamed of in their era. And yet, the deepest puzzles of physics remain unresolved. Adding more genius does not guarantee resolution; it often multiplies complexity. Adding brilliance does not ensure resolution; it often multiplies

complexity. In theoretical physics today, solutions proliferate that require ever more dimensions to remain self-consistent; elegant, internally coherent, but still unverified. Scale (whether artificial or human) increases possibility, but not necessarily closure.

So what would ASI mean for knowledge acquisition? Optimists imagine a machine capable of instantly unifying physics, unlocking biology, and solving philosophy. But knowledge is not a single ladder waiting to be climbed; it is a landscape shaped by structural limits. Gödel showed that any formal system contains truths that cannot be proven within it. Wittgenstein argued that the limits of language are the limits of our world – more symbols do not give us access to what lies beyond language. Kant insisted that discursive reason is bounded by the conditions of human experience; no scaling of intellect yields access to "things-in-themselves."

ASI, even if it existed, would still "think" in terms of reason, symbol, and formalism. It might accelerate discoveries within the horizon of knowable structures, but it could not pierce the boundary itself. The fantasy of ASI as omniscient knower confuses speed with transcendence, scale with insight, intuition and inspiration. At best, such a system would be a brilliant collaborator within the cathedral of science. At worst, it would be worshipped as a false oracle, a machine mistaken for a source of final truth – a false idol.

In this sense, ASI is a mirage. To chase it as an inevitability is to misread the nature of knowledge itself. The limits that bind human reason do not evaporate with scale; they simply reappear in amplified form.

Bostrom and the Self-Improving AI Hypothesis

The idea that AGI will inevitably lead to ASI owes much of its currency to **Nick Bostrom**'s 2014 book *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*. In that work, Bostrom argued that once machines reach human-level general intelligence, they will quickly become capable of designing better versions of themselves – supposedly through recursive AI driven R&D. Each iteration would accelerate the next, producing an "intelligence explosion." In this view, AGI is not a plateau but a tipping point: the moment machines cross the threshold of generality, runaway self-improvement will propel them into superintelligence and across the singularity.

Bostrom's argument electrified the field. It reframed AI not as a long-term research problem but as an existential risk: if ASI is inevitable, then controlling it becomes the paramount challenge of our century. The book galvanized funding, research labs, and even popular culture. Today's discourse around "alignment" and "AI safety" traces directly to the influence of Bostrom's framing.

The hypothesis remains speculative; it projects a trajectory from AGI to ASI without demonstrating the mechanism by which self-improvement becomes exponential. Nevertheless, its influence persists. When contemporary figures speak as though ASI is inevitable, they are often channelling Bostrom – whether or not they acknowledge it. His vision continues to haunt us and shape the background assumptions of the debate, even as the technical plausibility of his scenario remains contested.

5. Even If ASI Emerges, Epistemic Limits Remain

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that artificial superintelligence becomes possible. Suppose engineers somehow overcome the hurdles to AGI, and from there machines accelerate into forms of cognition far surpassing our own. What then? Would ASI deliver ultimate knowledge? The final truths of nature, existence, and meaning?

The temptation to say "yes" is strong. If intelligence is the engine of discovery, then a greater intelligence should uncover greater truths, until nothing remains hidden. But this rests on a misunderstanding of knowledge itself. Even superintelligence would be bounded by structural limits that no scaling of intellect can transcend.

Kant was the first to make this clear. Human cognition, he argued, operates within the conditions of possible experience: space, time, causality, categories of thought. Knowledge is always filtered through these structures. We never encounter "things-in-themselves," only phenomena as shaped by our cognitive apparatus. No expansion of discursive reason, no matter how brilliant or powerful, can pierce this boundary. An ASI might extend perception, refine models, and accelerate synthesis, but it would still be reasoning within the same basic framework of symbol and inference. It would not suddenly achieve intellectual intuition, the impossible power to generate knowledge of reality as it is in itself.

Perspectives on the Limits of Knowledge

Epistemological (Kant, 1781): *Critique of Pure Reason*

Human cognition is bounded by the conditions of possible experience (space, time, categories). No increase in discursive reasoning can yield "intellectual intuition" or direct access to reality as it is in itself.

Linguistic (Wittgenstein, 1922): *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Concepts define the horizon of what can be expressed. Scaling language models expands fluency but does not transcend the bounds of language itself.

Logical (Gödel, 1931): *On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems*

Any sufficiently rich formal system contains true statements that cannot be proven within the system. Incompleteness is structural, not solvable by more axioms or faster reasoning.

Computational (Church & Turing, 1936; Cook & Levin, 1971)

Alan Turing: *On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem*: some problems are undecidable: no algorithm can solve them.

Stephen Cook: *The Complexity of Theorem-Proving Procedures*: if P ≠ NP, some problems are solvable in principle but intractable in practice. ASI would face the same computational wall.

Wittgenstein took the argument further into language. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world," he wrote. Our concepts define the horizon of what can be expressed. Extending vocabulary, or scaling models with trillions of parameters, does not

abolish this limit. It only rearranges what is already within language's grasp. Beyond the horizon, silence remains.

Gödel's incompleteness theorems provide a similar attack at the heart of mathematics and logic. Any sufficiently rich formal system, he showed, will contain true statements that cannot be proven within the system itself. In other words, incompleteness is structural. It is not solved by more axioms or faster proof search. An ASI could churn through mathematics at incomprehensible speed, but it would still confront Gödel's boundary: truths that remain unprovable, not because they are too hard, but because they lie beyond the system's reach.

Computer science provides another lens on this structural boundary. The famous P vs NP problem asks whether every problem whose solution can be *verified* quickly can also be *solved* quickly. No one knows the answer, but if P ≠ NP (as most experts believe) then there exist problems that no intelligence, no matter how vast, can solve efficiently. Even superintelligence would be bound by the combinatorial explosion of complexity. Similarly, the distinction between decidable and undecidable problems (first proven by Turing) shows that some problems have no algorithmic solution at all. These limits are not matters of ingenuity; they are foundational to the fabric of computation itself.

These four perspectives converge on a common insight: intelligence can expand knowledge within its sphere, but it cannot abolish the structural horizons of knowing. The mirage of ASI as omniscient knower mistakes refinement for transcendence – almost like humanity cannot give up on the idea of a god of some form or other. A machine will not escape incompleteness, or transcend the boundaries of language, undecidability and cognition.

In this light, the dream of ASI as the final key to the universe is not inevitable but incoherent, even inconceivable. Knowledge does not end in completeness, but in horizons. And those horizons remain, however brilliant the mind approaching them.

6. Sociology of Science – How Knowledge Actually Advances

If the epistemological limits show why scale cannot deliver transcendence, the sociology of science shows why scale does not even guarantee breakthroughs. Knowledge today does not advance the way Silicon Valley imagines it.

In the romantic view, science is driven by solitary geniuses, a single mind revolutionizing an entire field. There is some truth to this image: individual insight has mattered, and sometimes a conceptual leap by one person does change everything. But in practice, modern science has long since shifted away from lone discovery toward collective, infrastructural collaboration. Lone wolf scientists today – those who loudly proclaim

How Science Progresses

Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn offered two of the twentieth century's most influential accounts of how science advances. Both challenge the idea that knowledge accumulates smoothly toward completion – but in different ways.

Karl Popper (Falsificationism)

- Science proceeds through conjectures and refutations.
- A good theory is not one that can be confirmed endlessly, but one that risks being proven wrong.
- Progress is continuous but never final: we eliminate false theories, but we never prove truth in the ultimate sense.

Thomas Kuhn (Paradigm Shifts)

- Science is structured by paradigms: shared worldviews, methods, and assumptions.
- Most research is "normal science," puzzle-solving within a paradigm.
- Crises occur when anomalies pile up, leading to revolutionary paradigm shifts that reframe the field entirely.
- Progress is discontinuous, sociological, and often messy.

Popper shows that knowledge has no final resting place; even ASI could only speed up the cycle of conjecture and falsification. Kuhn shows that knowledge is framed by paradigms, and revolutions arise from conceptual reorientation, not sheer scale. Both perspectives cut against the myth that scaling intelligence leads to omniscience. Science is bounded not just by limits of reason, but by its own evolving structures of practice.

revolutionary breakthroughs while denouncing 'Big Science' as a conspiracy – are not celebrated visionaries but almost universally dismissed as cranks. The self-styled heirs to Einstein are more likely to be grifting podcast provocateurs or celebrities dabbling in physics and mathematical axioms than serious contributors to the scientific enterprise. Weinstein's stuck in his Portal; Howard's lost his Way – stick to the day job, guys!

So how does science actually progress? Physics offers the clearest example. At the turn of the twentieth century, relativity and quantum mechanics emerged from the pens of individuals. Today, particle physics requires thousands of researchers, billion-dollar accelerators, and decades of experimental refinement. No one scientist today understands the whole of the Standard Model at a level of deep expertise; they are focused on aspects of it – QED, QCD, Electroweak Theory, The Higgs Mechanism and so on. Our grasp of it is collective, distributed across thousands of theorists, experimentalists, and engineers.

This is not decline but evolution. Science now resembles a cathedral more than a shed: each researcher lays a brick or carves a detail, but the structure only makes sense as the work of thousands over generations. Progress is real, but it is incremental, infrastructural, interdependent.

The myth of scale-as-transcendence misunderstands this shift. Adding more Einsteins does not guarantee a new paradigm. We already have many brilliant minds at work, supported by computational tools far beyond anything earlier scientists could imagine. And yet the deepest puzzles – unifying relativity and quantum mechanics, explaining dark matter, reconciling cosmology with particle physics – remain unsolved. What grows is not necessarily resolution, but complexity.

Theoretical physics, for instance, often produces models that proliferate dimensions to remain self-consistent. Beautiful, intricate, and mathematically fertile, but not decisive.

This pattern suggests that knowledge does not simply accelerate with scale. It plateaus, it branches, it refines. Collective intelligence builds scaffolding, develops instruments, and expands reach, but breakthroughs arise rarely, and not by brute force.

AI will almost certainly reinforce this pattern. As a tool of distributed collaboration, it will accelerate routine research, synthesize literature, and help manage the flood of data (once we have taken it to rehab for its tendency to 'hallucinate'). It may even spark occasional surprises by recombining information in unforeseen ways. But this is acceleration within the same mode of science, not transcendence to another. AI will be a more powerful bricklayer in the cathedral, not a supreme architect who unveils the blueprint.

The sociology of science thus underlines the same conclusion as epistemology: scaling changes the tempo of knowledge, not its horizon. We will build faster and higher, but not beyond the limits that structure knowing itself.

7. The Persistence of Gods

Strip away the jargon and the mathematics, and much of the discourse around AGI and ASI begins to look like theology in secular dress. Humanity always seems to need gods, and it keeps inventing them. Once they were deities of sun, sky and storm or of war, love and fertility. Later, the God of monotheism, perfect and all-knowing. Today, the god we conjure is silicon-based: an intelligence greater than our own, promised to redeem or destroy us.

"No Gods, No Masters"

Not all traditions imagine society as a ladder with higher and lower rungs. Anarchist thought rejects hierarchy altogether, insisting on cooperation and horizontality instead of supremacy.

Peter Kropotkin's classic *The Conquest of Bread* (1892) argued that human flourishing depends not on rulers or gods, but on mutual aid and the free distribution of resources. For Kropotkin, the myth of superiority, whether in kings, capital, or clergy, was the root of domination. Progress, he claimed, comes from dismantling those myths and building societies on equality and solidarity.

Applied to the discourse of artificial superintelligence, this anarchist lens exposes the hierarchy at its core. To imagine a being "above" humanity, whether divine or digital, is to replicate the same logic of domination. The promise of ASI as saviour or overlord mirrors the myths of church and state. Anarchism invites us to break this pattern to see intelligence not as a vertical scale, but as a shared field of interdependence.

This is no accident. We are a species addicted to hierarchy. We tell ourselves we are different from and better than other animals. Having elevated ourselves, we imagine something still higher above us. A cosmic pecking order reassures us that we matter. ASI slots neatly into this habit: a being above humanity, confirming our uniqueness by surpassing it.

Eastern Traditions Beyond Hierarchy

Not all ways of thinking imagine intelligence as a ladder with higher and lower rungs. Several Eastern traditions dissolve hierarchy altogether.

- **Taoism** teaches alignment with the Tao: the underlying flow of existence. Wisdom lies in harmony, not supremacy; the sage does not climb above others but lives in balance with what already is.
- **Buddhism** emphasizes *no-self* (*anatta*). If the self is an illusion, then so is the idea of a higher or lower self. Awakening is release, not ascent: freedom from clinging to hierarchy, permanence, or control.
- **Sikhism**, beginning with Guru Nanak, opens with the declaration "Ik Onkar" (ੴ) meaning "One Reality." All beings are expressions of this unity. Hierarchy is false; what blinds us is ego (*haumai*). True wisdom is humility and service (*seva*), not striving for supremacy.

Together, these traditions undermine the very logic that underpins artificial superintelligence. If reality is interdependent and ego-dissolution is the path, then the fantasy of a higher, superior mind is not insight but cultural habit. Intelligence need not be imagined as transcendence; it can be lived as oneness, balance, and mutuality.

It is the logic of empire, of priesthood, of technocracy. And Silicon Valley has seized it with both hands. Tech CEOs cast themselves as prophets of a coming intelligence, promising salvation through algorithms and transcendence through compute. Venture capital becomes tithe; data centres, temples; engineers, the priestly caste. This is not science but mythmaking, not foresight but faith.

There are other ways of thinking. Traditions of anarchism reject hierarchy altogether, refusing to see society as a ladder with rungs above and below. Some Eastern philosophies, too, undermine the obsession with supremacy. Taoism dissolves the need for higher and lower. Buddhism emphasizes interdependence, not transcendence. Advaita Vedānta collapses self and other into a unity that needs no superior mind to complete it.

But these voices are drowned out by the noise of the neo-techno-religion. We are told that ASI is inevitable, that its coming is a matter of faith in the power of scale. We are warned to fear it, or else to welcome it as saviour. Either way, the pattern is the same: worship disguised as progress.

The real challenge, then, is not technical but cultural. We must learn to break the habit of gods. To stop projecting fantasies of supremacy onto the future, and to accept finitude without turning it into a ladder. Intelligence, human or artificial, is not a throne to be ascended. It is a field we inhabit together, bounded and shared. To imagine otherwise is not foresight; it is idolatry.

8. The Business of Gods

If the dream of ASI persists among the public because we long for gods, it persists among the powerful for a different reason: it is profitable. Silicon Valley does not need to believe its own theology. It only needs the rest of us to.

The rise of AI has been built on exploitation and appropriation. Vast swaths of copyrighted material have been ingested without consent, from books and art to music and journalism – even extracting from torrent sites such as The Pirate Bay and Z-Library, an act that often carries heavy penalties for individuals. When challenged, the industry retreats to legal technicalities, cloaking mass appropriation as "fair use."

This is paired with another form of extraction: labour outsourced to the Global South. Reinforcement learning, data labelling, and content moderation – the invisible work that makes LLMs usable – has been performed by low-paid workers in Kenya, the Philippines, and India. The "clean" intelligence of the machine rests on the hidden exploitation of human beings, their wages a fraction of the billions in capital that the industry commands (often not getting paid at all in exploitative piecework arrangements where the middleman pockets the entire loot). Podcasts like *This Machine Kills* and *Better Offline* have painstakingly traced this pattern in detail, showing how the industry couches its hegemony in the language of both salvation and existential threat.

AI Hype as Ideology

The promises of artificial superintelligence are not only misguided but ideological. They function less as science than as a myth to secure and maintain capital and control.

As **Adorno** and **Horkheimer** warned in their amazingly prescient tome *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), reason in modernity often becomes an instrument of domination. Technology, presented as neutral progress, is enlisted in service of power. Today's AI discourse is a perfect case in point.

Silicon Valley's rhetoric of salvation – machines that will cure disease, govern better, even surpass human wisdom – is not simply naïve optimism. It is a strategy. By portraying scale as inevitable transcendence, tech corporations legitimate their monopolies, attract investment, and consolidate influence over governments and publics alike. The hype disguises power as destiny.

From a neo-Marxist perspective, AI is not about liberation but about capital: extracting data, concentrating compute, and controlling infrastructures of knowledge. The dream of ASI as omniscient knower is the velvet glove covering an iron fist. An ideology that masks exploitation as enlightenment.

Seen in this light, the AI "god" is not just a mirage of human imagination. It is also a deliberate myth, engineered to sustain hegemony. To demystify it is not only a philosophical necessity but an urgent political duty.

And the threat is not confined to the exploited in the Global South. In the developed world, AI is wielded as a cudgel of fear. "Your job will be done by AI," the industry proclaims, not as description but as strategy. The claim destabilizes workers, creating precarity that shifts power sharply away from labour and toward capital. It is a classic

tactic of the owning class: to weaken solidarity by dangling the spectre of redundancy. Whether or not the machines can truly replace these jobs is secondary. The point is to make workers believe they can – to make them pliant, cheap, and disposable.

And of course, Marx foresaw this dynamic in the nineteenth century, not with 'thinking' machines but with 'doing' machines. "*The instrument of labour, when it takes the form of a machine, immediately becomes a competitor of the workman himself*," and "*It is not the workman who employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman*" he wrote in Das Kapital (Vol 1, 1867). What mattered was not the machine's capabilities in themselves, but how they could be used to discipline labour, weaken solidarity, and consolidate the power of capital. AI is simply the latest incarnation of this logic: same game-plan, different playing field.

Myth for Us, Profit for Them

Furthermore, even the rhetoric of danger has been weaponized. When Sam Altman testified before Congress in 2023, he warned that AI was too powerful to be left unregulated. Elon Musk has made similar proclamations of existential risk. Yet when actual regulatory frameworks began to take shape, the same companies lobbied fiercely to neuter them. The performance of humility, "we are too dangerous, regulate us", secured headlines, funding, and political capital. The reality was business as usual: consolidate control, capture regulators, and ensure laws protect incumbents from competition.

This is not science fiction. It is ideology. By presenting AI as both salvation and existential risk, the industry mobilizes public imagination, shapes political discourse, and locks in legal frameworks – a magician's flourish that conceals the hand reaching for the till. The myth of ASI is less about intelligence than about power: a tool to capture attention, funding, control and hegemony.

The irony could not be sharper. The public is sold gods to believe in and fear. The powerful sell gods they do not themselves worship. For them, ASI is not destiny but strategy. The myth is for us; the profit is for them.

9. Conclusion: Within Horizons

The promise of artificial superintelligence is seductive: scale up data, parameters, and compute, and intelligence will rise to a higher plane. From there the leap is easy: AGI is inevitable, and this very AGI will birth the ASI that will bring salvation [or damnation/extinction].

But we have seen this for what it is: a mirage. Today's AI systems are statistical parrots, fluent cover artists of human expression, not minds. Scaling makes them smoother, not conscious. The leap to AGI remains undefined, and ASI is speculation squared. Even if it were realized, it would remain bound by the horizons of knowledge: Kant's conditions of experience, Gödel's incompleteness, Wittgenstein's limits of language, and the hard walls of computational complexity and undecidability. Faster is not the same as transcendent or infinite.

The sociology of science underscores the point. Knowledge does not advance by leaps of solitary genius anymore, but by careful, critical, collective, shared, infrastructural labour. Breakthroughs emerge through Big Science, collaboration, and instruments, not through brute force. AI will join this process as a useful tool, accelerating refinement – a bricklayer in the cathedral of science, not its architect.

Tools, not Gods

Why then do we cling to ASI? Because we have always needed gods. Humanity invents hierarchies: above animals, above each other, above ourselves. We conjure beings higher than us because we cannot bear finitude. Silicon Valley's god-talk is only the latest avatar of this ancient impulse.

But here lies the darker truth: the industry does not actually believe its own sermons. The gods it sells are for us, not for them. The AI boom has been built on appropriation of copyrighted works – whole libraries and galleries scraped without consent, even from pirate sites. It rests on exploitation of the Global South, where workers label and cleanse data for pennies to make the machines usable. It builds fear into the workers in developed nations: "your job will be done by AI", they proclaim. And it is wrapped in cynical theatre: CEOs solemnly warning of existential danger in Congress one month, lobbying against regulation the next. The rhetoric of salvation and apocalypse is not conviction. It is strategy.

What we face, then, is not simply the mirage of ASI but the idol of AI: a myth deployed to secure capital, attention, and ultimate control. To worship it is to be managed by it. The task, nay duty, is not to kneel, but to demystify and demand a commons approach so not just a handful of already filthy rich corporations and their shareholders reap all the benefits from these tools.

Besides, the truth is harder but freer: intelligence, human or artificial, is bounded. Knowledge has horizons, not endpoints. Progress is collective and incremental, not transcendent. What we know comes to us through an interface shaped by mind and tools; beyond it, reality may be stranger than we can imagine, but within it, there is enough

for us to live, think, build, create, and flourish. And only if we refuse to mistake tools for gods – and refuse the priesthood that would use those gods against us – can we hope to keep that freedom intact. Remember, "Tools, not Gods".

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