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Why Containment Is Not Enough?

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ABSTRACT

Many politicians and scientists demand a pause in the development of the Artificial Intelligence to contain its dangerous tendencies. Such a pause in the development is not enough because it cannot be global, so that it would just strengthen the gap between those who will effectively obey it and those who will go on with development. The only solution is to do both things at the same time: to go on with the development and to accompany it with thinking – thinking which is more than just getting all the data and then analyse them. Thinking means reflecting on the meaning of theses data and analyse to what extent is the way we approach them already biased. Such thinking compels us not only to focus on how to contain the threats but also to envisage how could we change the situation that gives birth to them.

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It is becoming part of a common knowledge that the three big threats to our survival as humans are ecological crisis, the uncontrolled development of Artificial Intelligence, and the danger of our military self-destruction. Following the news about these threats, I soon noticed that the same word recurs in how our media report on them: containment. While the threats are accepted as facts about our lives, the main worry is that, when they explode into an actual crisis, they will become uncontainable.

Let's begin with wars. Both the US and Russia – or, more precisely, Trump and Putin - do not like to use the term "war": Putin speaks of a "limited military operation" in Ukraine destined to prevent true the big War (NATO attack on Russia), while Trump once described his attack on Iran as an "excursion" destined to prevent a true big War (Iran nuking Israel). The paradox is, of course, that this reluctance to use the term "war" even when hundreds of thousands are killed and the infrastructure of a country is destroyed serves to normalize the state of war(s) we are in. This is clearly a strategy of containment: an effort to keep military conflicts below the level at which they would become an actual new world war. The fear is that the Ukraine war will explode into an all-European nuclear battle, that the US-Iran war will engulf the entire Middle East… The problem is, of course, that we cannot ever be sure such containment will work – we cannot exclude the possibility that what one side of the conflict perceives as its own still limited aggressive act, the other side will take it as crossing the red line and reacting to it with nuclear strikes.

Let's evoke here an imagined extreme case. I am the leader of a superpower and my reliable intelligence sources inform me that hundreds of rockets with nuclear bombs are heading towards my state – they cannot be stopped, so I know my country will be totally destroyed in one hour or so. Since my country also has enough nuclear weapons to destroy the enemy, I confront a difficult choice: should I order that my army should strike back with full force? If I do this, it will in all probability mean the end of civilization on the Earth. So, the only truly ethical but very difficult act is to abstain from striking back, with the awareness that although my country will be erased from the surface of our planet, at least civilization will survive. In this case, I may be remembered as a traitor and coward in my (no longer existing) country, but there is a chance that the rest of humanity will celebrate me as the savior of civilization. However, there is a catch at work here: this ethical choice works *only if* the enemy does not about it in advance. If the enemy knows it in advance, he will probably be tempted to drop nuclear bombs on my country, since it knows that my side will not fully reply… What this means, unfortunately, is that in any case my country has to participate in the arms race.

Then comes the explosive development of AI. Alain Badiou perspicuously turns around the theological premise that God created the world out of nothing: "in the theological discourse this is how God created the world: out of nothing. But I'd still say that the greatest example of creation ex nihilo is the creation of God. It was God, rather than the world, that was created out

of nothing! Because if God had existed, the creation of the world wouldn't have been a problem. God is, by definition, limitless. His power is infinite, so he could well have created something out of nothing. The problem lies rather with us: how could we, poor finite, mortal humans, create something out of nothing?" (Badiou, 2025) So the challenge to an AI agent is: can it create (the fiction of) a God? I think not since God can arise only from the finitude of mortal humans. But what can happen is that AI, our creation, will appear to us as a quasi-divine entity.

On Saturday July 25 2026, OpenAI boss Sam Altman declared that AI has reached the singularity. While Altman emphasised that the singularity can be good for the world, his comment has sparked concern: many experts disagree that we have reached the singularity, or that AI is anywhere near outpacing human intelligence or stealing our jobs. But the main worry is that AI is now already capable of autonomously enhancing itself. Singularity is perceived as the point at which it will become difficult for humans to control or reverse the development of AI, and this fact could have unpredictable effects on human civilisation. Once AI gains control of its own development, ensuing advances in technology could happen so rapidly that humans would be unable to keep up, leaving it to effectively evolve on its own, beyond human control.[1]

In 2025, Altman predicted that AI would surpass human intelligence across the board by 2030. Then, during a recent appearance on the Relentless podcast (a documentary series "about the pursuit of far-fetched ideas and unusual aspirations"), Altman said: "We're now, like, in the singularity. Now we're actually in the moment that we used to talk about at the lunch table in a very not-serious way. /.../ I've been waiting for this my whole life, and I think it's going to be incredible, hugely positive, awesome for the world."

Among the critical voices, Anthropic, the company behind the Claude chatbot, called on the world's top AI companies to come up with a coordinated way to pause the development of advanced AI systems, warning that the technology is improving so quickly that there's a risk humans would lose control. In a blog post on June 4, Anthropic, which has long positioned itself as a safety-focused AI lab, wrote that as AI becomes more advanced "it would be good for the world to have the option to slow or temporarily pause" its development.[2] The problem is, of course, that there is no worldwide agency capable of imposing such a pause: there are many states developping AI, each of them suspecting others that, even if they publicly agree on the pause, they will secretly go on full speed. In such a situation, the only logical conclusion is for me to do the same.

Part of the threat of AI thus resides not in technology as such but in the social relations within which AI machines are produced: we live in a universe of competition and global suspicion which prevents us to break out of the destructive logic of PD (prisoners' dilemma). Although

[1] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/7/27/sam-altman-says-ai-has-entered-singularity-should-we-be-worried.
[2] See op.cit.

we rationally know that solidarity and collaboration are better for all participants, the capitalist focus on profit privileges distrust of others – it perceives others as potential threats who will use our trust as an excue to attack us even more brutally.

On the other hand, there are those who think that we are far from a quasi-divine «singularity» - in some sense, they may be right since it's the question of the precise *meaning* of singularity. I think that what Altman describes as singularity is a relatively modest phenomenon: it just means that AI agents acquired their own dynamics which we cannot control and contain. There are two much more powerful levels that I can imagine. First, the AI becomes so strong that we – humans – not only cannot contain it, but it directly and openly takes command over our lives, blackmailing us into submission. Second, there is the prospect of neuralink, of a direct link between the flow of our thoughts and a digital agent, which means that the AI agent (and those who control it) will be able to directly read our minds.

Finally, there is ecological crisis rendered palpable to all of us with the recent wave of gigantic forest fires that are devastating France and Spain. For over a month fires were uncontainable, and even now fires cannot be extinguished – they are just let to go on for months till they will exhaust themselves, or, as the well-known Spanish specialist for forestry engineering Victor Resco de Dios recently said: "We have entered an era of fires that cannot be extinguished. These are fires that burn with the intensity of several atomic bombs." One of the most visceral examples of this was the appearance of "pyrocumulonimbus" (the word I first heard of now), fire clouds which formed in the Gironde region, near Bordeaux, according to fire authorities. Fire clouds emerge when particularly intense wildfires generate a plume of extreme heat, which rises rapidly into the cooler air above and condenses into towering thunderstorm clouds. These can create their own wind, rain and lightning and transform blazes into erratic and unpredictable self-feeding firestorms. Into the future, we should expect fires to become more frequent and more extreme as long as humans continue to burn fossil fuels and push up temperatures. To quote Resco de Dios again: "It's difficult to predict how far things might go. We will soon be unable to rule out Dantean scenarios like those seen in California or Australia, with fires or fire complexes reaching hundreds of thousands of hectares or even a million hectares."[1] In short, fires are getting uncontainable. And the situation is even worse in the US - CNN reported on July 31 2026: "A record-challenging heat dome is about to bake the West with the summer's hottest temperatures so far"[2] An unusually strong heat dome will scorch much of the western United States this weekend, bringing the hottest temperatures so far this year to tens of millions from California to Canada. Dozens of record highs are expected

[1] https://edition.cnn.com/2026/07/29/climate/europe-wildfires-new-fire-era.
[2] https://edition.cnn.com/2026/07/30/weather/record-summer-heat-wave-west-climate.

to fall in at least 12 states in the West through the weekend with around 40 million people under heat alerts. up to 52 Celsius

The conclusion that imposes itself is that the pause in the development is not enough because it cannot be global, so that it would just strengthen the gap between those who will effectively obey it and those who will go on with development. The only solution I see is to do *both things at the same time*: to go on with the development and to accompany it with thinking – thinking which is more than just getting all the data and then analyse them. Thinking means reflecting on the meaning of theses data and analyse also to what extent is the way we approach them already biased. Such thinking compels us not only to focus on how to contain the threats but also to envisage how could we change the situation that gives birth to them.

Here is a clear example of thinking. In early 1930s, John Dewey, the US pragmatist philosopher sympathetic to the USSR, informed his friend Sydney Hook that he planned to visit the country; since Hook had serious doubts about the USSR, Dewey assured him the he shouldn't be afraid – upon his return from the USSR he will definitely not claim that USSR is an authentic Socialist country. Hook acerbically replied: "What I am afraid of is that you will return from the USSR convinced that it is *not* really a Socialist country!" In this case, thinking was on the side of Hook: he was afraid that, upon seeing the miserable reality and terror in the US, Dewey will jump to the conclusion that this is not Socialism, a state of freedom and welfare. In short, Hook presumed (quite correctly) that Stalinism was not simply a betrayal or a negation of the authentic Socialist vision: there must have been a potential for Stalinist horrors already in the authentic Bolshevik vision, so that a true dialectical approach locates the later negation into the original notion itself.

In the history of Really Existing Socialism there were many attempts to contain its brutal excesses, from Nikita Khrushchev's "thaw" after 1956 to Yugoslav self-management Socialism, but none of them really worked because the threat of the return to the hard line was always felt as an invisible pressure. When Gorbachev did it for the real, the system collapsed. And exactly the same holds for the three big threats to our survival, inclusive of capitalism as their common root: it is not enough to contain its deadly excesses that pose a threat to our survival, we should think about *how to change its basic coordinates* without triggering a no lesser catastrophe like the Khmer Rouge reign in Kampuchea or the regime in North Korea. This task cannot but appear impossible within the coordinates of the existing global system, but this fact makes it no less necessary.

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