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Top AI Experts Concerned That OpenAI Has Betrayed Humankind

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/ FutureSociety / Agi / GeoffreyHinton / OpenLetter



Image by Chip Somodevilla via Getty / Futurism

In a scathing open letter, luminaries from the AI industry and beyond are calling on OpenAI to prove that it hasn't betrayed humanity in favor of profits.

Referring to themselves as the "legal beneficiaries of your charitable mission" — that is, members of the human species OpenAI pledged to benefit when it was granted nonprofit status in 2015 — the [open letter](#), signed by the likes of [AI Godfather Geoffrey Hinton](#) and [AI researcher Gary Marcus](#), charges the Sam Altman-run company with essentially playing God.

"OpenAI is currently sitting on both sides of the table in a closed boardroom," the letter reads, "making a deal on humanity's behalf without allowing us to see the contract, know the terms, or sign off on the decision."

As the letter notes, OpenAI was founded as a nonprofit with an overarching principle: to ensure that any future artificial general intelligence (AGI), or human-level AI, "[benefits all humanity](#)."

But with its attempts to move away from nonprofit status and restructure as a for-profit entity, the letter's long list of signatories — which include British film and TV star Stephen Fry, for some reason — are no longer convinced that OpenAI plans to uphold the humanity-benefitting part of the bargain.

"We call for at least a basic level of transparency about how this transition will affect your legal commitments to the public," wrote the signatories, who include several OpenAI expats like alignment researcher Jacob Hilton and Georgetown researcher Helen Toner, who [worked to oust Altman](#) during November 2023's [failed CEO coup](#).

The group then issues a seven-point list of demands about the specifics of the restructuring.

Beyond asking whether OpenAI will continue to uphold its "legal duty to prioritize" humanity over profits, the signatories also asked what role the company's nonprofit board will play going forward, whether it will "abide by its commitment to devote excess profits to the benefit of humanity," if any AGI it manages to produce will be commercialized, and if it will compete with other companies that might attain AGI.

"The stakes could not be higher," the letter contends. "The decisions you make about governance, profit distribution, and accountability will shape not only your organization's future but also the future of society at large."

This is, of course, neither the first nor will it be the last open letter aimed at OpenAI.

Earlier this year, many of the same signatories from this more recent communiqué [sent two letters](#) to the attorneys general of California and Delaware urging them to halt the company's restructuring. At the time, they argued that switching to for-profit status would undermine the company's mission to benefit humanity.

And last summer, a group of then-current and former OpenAI employees made even bolder claims in yet another open letter, alleging they were being [silenced about the dangers](#) that could occur if what the company is building comes to fruition.

With their signatories seemingly convinced that humanity's very existence is at stake, this steady drip of open letters to and about OpenAI can only be viewed as a net good for the public — though it's hard to say how much these missives will ultimately matter.