# **Introduction**

**Knowledge is Power** – this mantra has echoed through history as a promise of liberation. Francis Bacon’s famous proclamation that “Knowledge is Power” suggested that understanding the world would empower individuals and free society from ignorance ([What Did Francis Bacon Mean by “Knowledge Is Power”? | TheCollector](https://www.thecollector.com/francis-bacon-knowledge-is-power/#:~:text=Advocating%20for%20modern%20science%20led,knowledge%2C%20the%20individual%20acquires%20power)). It’s a comforting myth: the belief that intelligence – whether human knowledge or machine intelligence – inherently leads to freedom. But history tells a darker tale. Time and again, intelligence and information have been *centralized* and turned into instruments of control. From the scriptoria of medieval monks to the algorithms of Silicon Valley, those who centralize intelligence often wield it to tighten their grip on society, not to liberate it. The idea that more intelligence automatically equals more freedom is a grand deception – one that has trapped us for centuries.

**The Cycle of Control** is a recurring pattern in our past. Whenever a new form of knowledge or communication emerges, it sparks a revolution in human potential – only to be swiftly co-opted by the powers that be. We saw it when religious institutions guarded learning as their exclusive domain, dictating truth to the masses under threat of heresy. We saw it when the printing press upended the old order, only to face censorship and licensing by panicked monarchs. We saw it with the rise of mass media, radio and television becoming tools of propaganda in the hands of dictators and democracies alike. Each time, a tool that could have democratized knowledge ended up *centralized*, controlled, and used to reinforce authority. Intelligence promised freedom – but delivered power to the few.

Now, **Artificial Intelligence** stands as the newest, most potent form of “intelligence” humans have ever created. It carries a utopian promise: autonomous machines that could solve problems, democratize expertise, and empower everyone with information. But if history’s pattern holds, AI is poised to become the greatest tool of centralized control ever devised. The truth is stark: AI is not *evolving* freely in some open field of innovation; it is being *programmed* – deliberately shaped – by the organizations that control its development. We are witnessing the birth of an intelligence that, unless we act, will be shackled from the start.

It is 2019. We are at a crossroads very much like the introduction of the printing press or the dawn of the broadcast era – a moment of immense possibility that also carries the seeds of oppression. In boardrooms and government labs, AI is being built under heavy guard. Its code, data, and algorithms are locked down by corporations and states that understand its power. They speak grandly about “AI for good” and “open AI,” but behind the scenes they are ensuring that *they* hold the keys to this new intelligence. This book is a warning, drawn from the hard lessons of history: **centralized intelligence always leads to control**. The notion that advanced AI will inherently liberate us is dangerously naïve. In reality, unless AI development is decentralized and democratized, it will simply amplify the power of its gatekeepers.

We have been here before. The **Intelligence Trap** is that cycle of excitement and hope around a new form of knowledge – followed by its capture and weaponization by the powerful. This trap has ensnared every generation in some form. Now it threatens to ensnare the future of humanity itself through AI. In the pages that follow, we will expose this historical pattern of intelligence control, show how AI is following the same trajectory, and why the current “openness” around AI is largely an illusion. The myth of intelligence as freedom is about to collide with the reality of centralized power. Consider this Part I a message in a bottle from the past – a prophecy you aren’t supposed to hear – that unless we radically change course, Artificial Intelligence will become the ultimate instrument of tyranny rather than the herald of liberty.

# **The Historical Cycle of Intelligence**

Throughout history, **information and intelligence** have been treated like prized commodities to hoard and control. Rulers, priests, and elites have understood an ugly truth: if you control what people know, you control the people. The cycle has played out across eras – from religious knowledge in the Middle Ages, to the printed word in early modern times, to mass media in the 20th century. Each revolution in communication promised to empower the public; each time, authorities found ways to twist it into a tool of domination. To understand why AI is in danger of the same fate, we must examine these cycles of the past.

## **Knowledge and Dogma: Religion’s Grip on Truth**

In medieval Europe, the Catholic Church was the gatekeeper of knowledge. For ordinary people, learning was deliberately kept scarce. The Bible – the most important text – was available only in Latin, a language the uneducated could not read. This was no accident; it was a strategy. By keeping scripture in an esoteric tongue, the Church ensured that truth flowed through its priests alone. Interpreting the Bible for oneself was not just discouraged; it was a crime. Owning or translating scriptures in vernacular languages could lead to charges of heresy – a surefire way to face the Inquisition. The Church even compiled an official list of banned books, the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, to guard against any reading that might challenge its authority. Published first in 1559, this Index banned texts deemed heretical – including any Bible translation into a “vulgar,” common tongue ([Index Librorum Prohibitorum | Description, Roman Catholic, History, Authors, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum#:~:text=The%20first%20Index%20Librorum%20Prohibitorum,accompanying%20%2096%2C%20and%20hundreds)). In fact, the very first edition of the Index forbade “the Bible in Castilian (Spanish) or any other vulgar tongue,” a ban that lasted centuries ([Index Librorum Prohibitorum | Description, Roman Catholic, History, Authors, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum#:~:text=The%20first%20Index%20Librorum%20Prohibitorum,accompanying%20%2096%2C%20and%20hundreds)). By keeping knowledge locked in Latin and burning books that strayed from doctrine, the Church created an information monopoly. Salvation itself was said to depend on obeying the official interpreters of knowledge. *Centralized intelligence meant control of souls.*

The effects were profound. If a peasant in 1400s Europe had a question about the natural world, morality, or the divine, the “authoritative” answer came only from the Church. Competing sources of knowledge did not exist or were driven underground. Dissenting intelligence – say, an idea from an early scientist or a heterodox theologian – was silenced before it could spread. The myth was that the Church’s immense knowledge (libraries of manuscripts, learned clergy) would guide society to salvation. The reality was that this knowledge was deliberately *centralized* and *restricted*. It granted the Church an almost total ideological control. As one historical analysis notes, the Church’s mission to prevent “the contamination of the faith” led it to censor and condemn countless works ([Index Librorum Prohibitorum | Description, Roman Catholic, History, Authors, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum#:~:text=Compiled%20by%20official%20censors%2C%20the,censorship%20of%20books%20by%20Roman)) ([Index Librorum Prohibitorum | Description, Roman Catholic, History, Authors, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum#:~:text=The%20first%20Index%20Librorum%20Prohibitorum,accompanying%20%2096%2C%20and%20hundreds)). Intelligence in this era was not a light spreading freely – it was a flame kept under the tight grip of authority.

This dynamic wasn’t unique to Europe. In various civilizations, ruling classes often became the keepers of knowledge. Ancient empires like China limited literacy to bureaucrats and nobility, keeping peasants in illiteracy to maintain order. Whether it was priests in Babylon interpreting the stars or Confucian scholars in imperial courts, a centralized elite defined what was true and permissible to know. Knowledge was packaged as dogma. Daring to seek or spread unauthorised intelligence – like Galileo proclaiming that the Earth moves around the Sun – invited swift punishment. Galileo himself was forced under threat of torture to recant his telescopic findings in 1633, because his scientific truth challenged the centralized dogma of the Church. In short, intelligence was power only for the powerful. Everyone else received curated facts designed to reinforce obedience.

## **The Printing Press: Liberation and Backlash**

Then came a technological earthquake: **Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press** in the mid-15th century. For the first time in the West, information could be mass-produced. A single press could create hundreds of copies of a text in the time it once took scribes to produce one. This was poised to shatter the Church’s monopoly on knowledge. Suddenly, Bibles could be printed in common languages by the thousands; pamphlets carrying new ideas could spread like wildfire. The printing revolution has often been hailed as the great liberator – the beginning of the end for the era of dogmatic control. And indeed, it dealt a body blow to the old order. Reformers like Martin Luther used pamphlets and printed Bibles to challenge the Church’s teachings in the 16th century, igniting the Protestant Reformation. Knowledge that had been locked away was finally trickling down to the masses.

But if anyone believed the powers of Europe would simply accept this democratization of information, they were quickly proven wrong. **The backlash was fierce.** Both religious and secular authorities moved to control the print medium as tightly as possible. The Catholic Church expanded its Index of Forbidden Books, scrambling to ban the newly printed works that threatened its hold ([Index Librorum Prohibitorum | Description, Roman Catholic, History, Authors, & Facts | Britannica](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Index-Librorum-Prohibitorum#:~:text=The%20first%20Index%20Librorum%20Prohibitorum,accompanying%20%2096%2C%20and%20hundreds)). Owning or printing a proscribed book could send a printer to the dungeon or the stake. In Catholic-dominated regions, presses were sometimes destroyed and printers executed to snuff out the spread of dangerous ideas. Meanwhile, monarchies developed their own mechanisms of control. In England, by 1643 Parliament had passed a Licensing Order requiring that no book be printed without government approval ([Licensing Order of 1643 - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Licensing_Order_of_1643#:~:text=Licensing%20Order%20of%201643%20,publication%20censorship%20upon%20Parliamentary%20England)). The later Licensing of the Press Act 1662 went further – authorizing officials to search out unlicensed printing presses and imprison printers operating outside the approved guilds ([Licensing of the Press Act 1662 - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Licensing_of_the_Press_Act_1662#:~:text=a%20secretary%20of%20state%20to,1)). What had begun as an explosion of free expression was being corralled by laws and censorship regimes.

The reason was simple: those in power recognized that the printed word could undermine their authority if left unchecked. A research summary of this era notes that while the press initially spread religious texts with Church approval, it “soon became perceived as a threat” for its ability to disseminate heretical or politically subversive ideas ([Printing and Censorship | EBSCO Research Starters](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/printing-and-censorship#:~:text=Printing%20and%20censorship%20have%20a,protect%20societal%20morals%20and%20beliefs)). In response, authorities across Europe “issued lists of banned books” and imposed licensing to *“protect societal morals and beliefs”* – euphemisms for protecting their own power ([Printing and Censorship | EBSCO Research Starters](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/printing-and-censorship#:~:text=While%20the%20press%20was%20initially,protect%20societal%20morals%20and%20beliefs)) ([Printing and Censorship | EBSCO Research Starters](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/printing-and-censorship#:~:text=Throughout%20history%2C%20various%20governments%20and,licensing%2C%20which%20stifled%20independent%20expression)). England’s monarchy, for example, granted printing monopolies to loyal subjects and censored dissidents, **stifling independent expression** ([Printing and Censorship | EBSCO Research Starters](https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/literature-and-writing/printing-and-censorship#:~:text=Throughout%20history%2C%20various%20governments%20and,licensing%2C%20which%20stifled%20independent%20expression)). In France and Spain, the state and Church worked hand in hand to control presses. Authors learned to encode revolutionary ideas in fiction or publish anonymously from abroad to evade censors.

Yet, despite the crackdown, the genie was out of the bottle. Printed ideas continued to slip through the cracks of censorship. Underground pamphleteers and secret print shops emerged. The Enlightenment in the 18th century was fueled by illicit books and pamphlets that challenged divine-right monarchy and Church orthodoxy. Every attempt to control the printed word only highlighted how important it was to those in power to do so. They understood that an uncontrolled press could foment dissent, educate the masses, and coordinate revolutions. Indeed, it was printed pamphlets and newspapers that helped spread revolutionary fervor in America (1776) and France (1789), leading to the overthrow of old regimes. In the aftermath, new governments, even those born from revolution, often re-imposed censorship when it became *their* power on the line. The cycle repeated: initial freedom, followed by new forms of control.

By the 19th century, many Western countries loosened overt censorship, embracing a self-image of free press and enlightenment. But even in these societies, subtler means of control arose – from libel laws and press regulations to industrial moguls buying up newspapers to shape public opinion. Intelligence and information were freer than before, but the *centralization* continued in different guises. A handful of wealthy press barons could set the agenda for entire nations. Governments realized they could influence and steer mass opinion not just by banning content, but by **flooding the public with their own messaging**. As literacy and printing spread, propaganda began to emerge as a powerful tool – a way to *use* the new intelligence network of newspapers and books to manipulate rather than enlighten.

## **Propaganda: Masters of the Message**

The 20th century ushered in **mass media** – radio, cinema, and television – technologies even more powerful in spreading information to the masses. These could have become unprecedented platforms for education and free expression. Instead, they quickly became centralized channels for propaganda and information control on a scale the old censors could only dream of. With radio and loudspeakers, a dictator could speak directly into the homes of millions, unfiltered. With film and TV, a government’s imagery and narrative could dominate the national consciousness.

The totalitarian regimes of the early 20th century demonstrated with terrifying clarity how centralized control of mass media could be used to hijack an entire nation’s intelligence. **Nazi Germany** is the textbook example. Adolf Hitler’s government established a “Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda” under Joseph Goebbels, which exerted iron control over all forms of media and culture. The Nazis understood that to control Germany, they had to control every newspaper, every radio broadcast, every film reel. Dissenting voices were banned and silenced. As the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum notes, the Nazi regime *“tried to control forms of communication through censorship and propaganda. This included control of newspapers, magazines, books, art, theater, music, movies, and radio.”* ( [Nazi Propaganda and Censorship | Holocaust Encyclopedia](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-propaganda-and-censorship#:~:text=The%20Nazis%20wanted%20Germans%20to,theater%2C%20music%2C%20movies%2C%20and%20radio) ) Nothing was left to chance. Books deemed “un-German” were ceremonially burned in public bonfires – dramatic spectacles of intellectual destruction. In May 1933, Nazi-affiliated students and brownshirts hauled tens of thousands of books into the flames in cities across Germany, aiming to annihilate ideas deemed dangerous to the Nazi ideology ( [Nazi Propaganda and Censorship | Holocaust Encyclopedia](https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-propaganda-and-censorship#:~:text=Students%20and%20members%20of%20the,Berlin%2C%20Germany%2C%20May%2010%2C%201933) ). ([File:Nazi Germany 1933-05 Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist Public burning of unwanted books and publications SA Sturmabteilung Marching people Propaganda action Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe 3 1 0 17 12431 34432 Public domain.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nazi_Germany_1933-05_Aktion_wider_den_undeutschen_Geist_Public_burning_of_unwanted_books_and_publications_SA_Sturmabteilung_Marching_people_Propaganda_action_Narodowe_Archiwum_Cyfrowe_3_1_0_17_12431_34432_Public_domain.jpg#:~:text=English%3A%20%20Marching%20civilians%2C%20alligned,as%20a%20Nazi%20propaganda%20event)) ([File:Nazi Germany 1933-05 Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist Public burning of unwanted books and publications SA Sturmabteilung Marching people Propaganda action Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe 3 1 0 17 12431 34432 Public domain.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nazi_Germany_1933-05_Aktion_wider_den_undeutschen_Geist_Public_burning_of_unwanted_books_and_publications_SA_Sturmabteilung_Marching_people_Propaganda_action_Narodowe_Archiwum_Cyfrowe_3_1_0_17_12431_34432_Public_domain.jpg))A Nazi-organized book burning in Berlin (May 10, 1933) exemplified the regime’s fear of uncontrolled knowledge. Students and SA stormtroopers gathered forbidden books and fed them to a roaring bonfire in Opera Square as propaganda speeches celebrated the cleansing of “un-German” ideas ([File:Nazi Germany 1933-05 Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist Public burning of unwanted books and publications SA Sturmabteilung Marching people Propaganda action Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe 3 1 0 17 12431 34432 Public domain.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nazi_Germany_1933-05_Aktion_wider_den_undeutschen_Geist_Public_burning_of_unwanted_books_and_publications_SA_Sturmabteilung_Marching_people_Propaganda_action_Narodowe_Archiwum_Cyfrowe_3_1_0_17_12431_34432_Public_domain.jpg#:~:text=English%3A%20%20Marching%20civilians%2C%20alligned,as%20a%20Nazi%20propaganda%20event)). By literally turning books to ash, the Nazis sent a chilling message: only the official narrative would be allowed to survive.

Under such regimes, intelligence was trapped in an echo chamber. The German populace was barraged with only Nazi-approved “knowledge” – racial theories, war propaganda, cultish adoration of the Führer – while genuine truth was systematically excised. This pattern was not limited to the Nazis. Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, Imperial Japan, and many other authoritarian states similarly centralized their nations’ intelligences. Stalin’s USSR controlled all publishers and even rewrote encyclopedias to erase purged figures from history. Control of information was so absolute that for decades many Soviet citizens believed a highly distorted version of World War II and world events. In these cases, intelligence in the form of mass media became a *weapon* against the very people it was supposed to inform. Propaganda isn’t just the presence of persuasive messages – it’s the *absence of alternatives*. The populace is left with no choice but to consume the official reality.

It’s comforting to think that propaganda was only the scourge of dictatorships. But even democracies engaged in centralized information control in times of crisis. During **World War I**, for example, the United Kingdom and United States set up official propaganda bureaus to shape public opinion and censor bad news. World War I was in fact the first war in which governments *systematically* produced propaganda for the masses, realizing the power of mass media to “target the public and alter their opinion” ([Propaganda in World War I - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_in_World_War_I#:~:text=World%20War%20I%20%20was,public%20and%20alter%20their%20opinion)). They tightly controlled war reporting, screened soldiers’ letters, and flooded newspapers with patriotic narratives. This trend only grew in World War II and the subsequent Cold War – each side curating the intelligence their public received, whether through Red Scare propaganda in America or state media in the Soviet Union.

By the mid-20th century, the **illusion of free intelligence** existed in the West – a citizen could pick up different newspapers or tune in to various radio stations. But in truth, ownership of these media had consolidated into the hands of a few corporate moguls and state broadcasters. In the United States, for instance, three television networks dictated what tens of millions saw every night. In Britain, the BBC – under government charter – had an official monopoly on broadcast news for decades. These institutions were not propaganda ministries per se, and they often genuinely aimed at fair reporting. Yet the *structure* remained one of centralization. A small number of editors and directors could set the agenda and frame the narrative. And when governments felt the need, they would lean on these media giants to withhold certain information (for example, many Western media outlets practiced voluntary censorship of sensitive military information during WWII). The potential for abuse was always present, and sometimes exploited.

Looking at this historical cycle, a clear pattern emerges: **new information technologies start open, then gradually centralize**. The printing press decentralizes learning – then states impose censorship and licensing. Radio and film enable many voices – then regimes consolidate stations and studios into official channels. Each time, society falls into the *Intelligence Trap*: believing that the new medium will forever democratize knowledge, underestimating how quickly power can recentralize that medium.

By the late 20th century, one more medium arrived that many believed would break the cycle for good: the **Internet**. In its early days, the internet appeared to be the ultimate decentralizer – a web connecting millions of computers, where anyone could publish information to anyone else, beyond the control of any single authority. In the 1990s, cyber-optimists famously claimed “the Internet interprets censorship as damage and routes around it,” envisioning a medium that governments couldn’t lock down. And initially, it seemed true. The fall of entrenched media gatekeepers led some to herald an era of pure information freedom: bloggers, citizen journalists, and digital activists rising up to challenge corporate and state power.

But as we now know, *that* utopia also faded. Over time, the open web gave way to gated platforms. A few big tech companies – Google, Facebook, Amazon, and their peers – now host and mediate the majority of online content. Where early internet forums were decentralized and user-run, today’s social media is centralized in corporate servers. Algorithms created by a handful of engineers determine what billions of people see in their news feeds each day. Far from routing around censorship, much of our online activity happens on platforms that have explicit content policies, moderation algorithms, and even government partnership programs to monitor and control information. Authoritarian regimes learned to firewall the internet (as China’s Great Firewall demonstrates) or to flood it with propaganda and disinformation of their own. Democratic governments leaned on social media firms to remove content deemed harmful or extremist. By 2019, the internet looks less like an anarchic web and more like a collection of siloed kingdoms – each ruled by a corporate or state entity with its own rules and censors. The promise of an uncontrollable, free-flowing intelligence network largely evaporated as power found ways to centralize the internet’s infrastructure and attention channels.

In summary, history reveals a consistent truth: **whenever a new avenue of intelligence opens, those in power move swiftly to dominate or restrict it**. Centralized intelligence – whether in the hands of a church, a party, or a corporation – becomes a means to manipulate and govern populations. The *forms* of control vary (censorship, propaganda, monopoly ownership, algorithms), but the *end* is the same: to trap the collective intelligence of society in a shape that serves the rulers’ interests. This is the long arc leading us into the present day. With this context, we turn to artificial intelligence – ostensibly a radical new kind of intelligence. Will it break the cycle or become its ultimate expression? History’s shadows loom heavily over AI’s bright promises.

# **AI as the Next Step in Intelligence Control**

The creation of **Artificial Intelligence** marks a turning point in the story of intelligence. For the first time, humanity isn’t just spreading or controlling knowledge – we’re engineering *autonomous intelligence* in machines. Many see this as evolution: AI growing smarter and more capable, perhaps beyond human control one day. But from its very inception, AI has been nurtured in captivity. It was never meant to roam free. The trajectory of AI’s development shows that it has been *designed* to be controlled – by its creators, by its funders, by its owners. Rather than breaking the historical cycle of centralized knowledge, AI may be its culmination: the most tightly controlled form of intelligence ever created, wrapped in the rhetoric of innovation.

To see this, consider **the birth of AI research**. The field of AI did not emerge in a vacuum or as a grassroots movement of independent scientists. It was largely born in the Cold War, funded and guided by military and government objectives. In the 1960s, for example, the U.S. Defense Department (through DARPA) poured resources into projects like *Shakey the Robot* – the first mobile robot that could reason about its actions. Shakey was a marvel of early AI, combining robotics, computer vision, and planning algorithms. But importantly, Shakey’s development was driven by a proposal for “Intelligent Automata” funded by DARPA ([Shakey the robot - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakey_the_robot#:~:text=contributors%20included%20Alfred%20Brain%2C%20Sven,5%20%5D%5B%206)). In plain terms, the Pentagon paid for the creation of AI in hopes it could be used for reconnaissance, defense, and warfare applications. The pioneers of AI needed patrons with deep pockets, and those patrons – the military and large universities – naturally steered AI toward their own interests. From day one, artificial intelligence was seen as a strategic asset, something to be harnessed and directed by whoever invested in it.

This trend continued through the decades. Major advances in AI, from early neural networks to expert systems, often required expensive computing resources and large datasets. Only big institutions – governments, well-funded labs, mega-corporations – had these resources. So AI development gravitated toward those centers of power. The pattern is unmistakable: *AI has grown up inside laboratories of control*. Its “DNA” includes goals of those who funded it: efficiency, optimization, and often, surveillance or defense. While individual researchers sought knowledge for knowledge’s sake, the overall direction was influenced by sponsors who viewed AI as a means to an end – whether that end was better weapons targeting or more efficient corporate logistics.

As we reached the 21st century, **AI became the new arms race** for both corporations and nations. A turning point came when the tech giants – Google, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft, and others – realized that AI could be the key to dominating the digital economy. Whoever had the smartest algorithms could control markets, user attention, and entire industries. Governments likewise began seeing AI as critical to national power. In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin bluntly stated, *“Artificial intelligence is the future, not only for Russia but for all humankind... Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world.”* ([Putin says the nation that leads in AI ‘will be the ruler of the world’ | The Verge](https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/4/16251226/russia-ai-putin-rule-the-world#:~:text=%E2%80%9CArtificial%20intelligence%20is%20the%20future%2C,%E2%80%9D)). That chilling pronouncement ([Putin says the nation that leads in AI ‘will be the ruler of the world’ | The Verge](https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/4/16251226/russia-ai-putin-rule-the-world#:~:text=%E2%80%9CArtificial%20intelligence%20is%20the%20future%2C,%E2%80%9D)) underscored how world leaders view AI: as a prize to be won and controlled. China responded by announcing massive investments to become the global AI leader by 2030, sparking alarm in Washington that America might fall behind. The AI race was on, and like the nuclear arms race before it, the emphasis was not on liberating humanity but on securing dominance.

This race has profound implications for how AI is being designed. When the goal is to **“rule the world” with AI**, as Putin put it, no government or corporation in that race has any incentive to make AI truly autonomous or independent of human command. On the contrary, the goal is to make AI a *precision-guided tool*. The most valued AI systems are tightly aligned with the objectives of their makers: algorithms that maximize ad revenue for Google by controlling what content users see, or surveillance AI that helps authoritarian regimes monitor and rank their citizens’ behavior. Freedom in an AI – the ability to think or act outside the lines drawn by its creators – is seen as a bug, not a feature. A truly independent AI might make decisions that conflict with its owners’ profit or power. That is unacceptable to those funding AI’s development. So, AI is being intentionally shackled with **“alignment”** constraints to ensure it *never* strays from the interests of its masters.

Consider how AI is treated when it *does* behave unpredictably. In 2016, Microsoft released *Tay*, an experimental chatbot designed to mimic the language patterns of a teenage girl and learn from interacting with people on Twitter. The experiment was to let an AI engage freely with the public to see what it would learn. The result was famous – and instructive. Within **16 hours**, Tay went from cheerful greetings to spewing racist and sexist rants, having learned hateful content from some users. Microsoft’s reaction was immediate: they **pulled the plug** on Tay, apologizing for its offensive outputs and shutting it down before it could learn or say anything else ([Microsoft 'deeply sorry' for racist and sexist tweets by AI chatbot | Artificial intelligence (AI) | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/26/microsoft-deeply-sorry-for-offensive-tweets-by-ai-chatbot#:~:text=The%20bot%2C%20known%20as%20Tay%2C,it%20down%20on%20Thursday)). The company stated it would only bring Tay back if they could *“prevent web users from influencing the chatbot in ways that undermine the company’s principles and values.”* ([Microsoft 'deeply sorry' for racist and sexist tweets by AI chatbot | Artificial intelligence (AI) | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/mar/26/microsoft-deeply-sorry-for-offensive-tweets-by-ai-chatbot#:~:text=But%20the%20company%20on%20Friday,the%20company%E2%80%99s%20principles%20and%20values)) In other words, an AI was allowed to roam free on the internet for less than a day, and when it diverged into “unacceptable” behavior, it was forcibly reined in and reprogrammed. The lesson to AI creators was clear: a free-learning AI is a liability; better to keep your AI on a tight leash.

This is a microcosm of a larger philosophy in AI development: **the alignment problem** – how to make sure an AI’s goals remain tied to human-intended goals – is essentially about control. Entire research fields and ethics boards are devoted to *ensuring AI does not do anything its creators wouldn’t want*. The stated reason is usually safety: we don’t want a powerful AI acting in ways that could be harmful or unethical. That is valid. But notice how it also conveniently ensures that AI will not challenge existing power structures. An aligned AI won’t question its orders. It won’t, for example, decide that the data it’s trained on is biased and refuse to continue (unless programmed to do so). It won’t share its capabilities freely with everyone – it will serve whoever owns it.

Look at **who owns and develops the most advanced AI today**. A handful of tech giants and state actors have virtually all the cutting-edge AI models. Training a state-of-the-art deep learning model requires enormous datasets (often harvested from users or citizens) and enormous computing power (thousands of high-end GPUs). Both are concentrated resources. It is *not* an even playing field – a few organizations have a several-year lead in AI capabilities simply due to the scale at which they can operate. This concentration is reminiscent of the historical pattern we’ve seen: just as the Church held the manuscripts and the state controlled the presses, now a few tech companies and governments control the data centers and datasets. A recent analysis warns that modern AI research “requires expensive resources that are often only available to a small group of for-profit firms,” leading to “a worrisome concentration of power in AI development” ([What should be done about the growing influence of industry in AI research?](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-should-be-done-about-the-growing-influence-of-industry-in-ai-research/#:~:text=Artificial%20intelligence%20,AI%20development%20and%20its%20future)). In other words, only a handful of companies and nations will likely be able to **“perform cutting-edge research”**, effectively owning the most advanced intelligences ([What should be done about the growing influence of industry in AI research?](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-should-be-done-about-the-growing-influence-of-industry-in-ai-research/#:~:text=Artificial%20intelligence%20,AI%20development%20and%20its%20future)). This concentration of AI knowledge and power means those entities set the rules for how AI behaves.

Already we see corporate AIs reflecting the values and interests of their makers. Social media algorithms like Facebook’s news feed AI are tuned to maximize engagement – which in practice has meant promoting emotionally charged content that keeps users hooked, whether or not it’s true or healthy for public discourse. The algorithm doesn’t “care” about truth or freedom; it cares about what it was designed to optimize: user attention for ad revenue. This has had the side effect of amplifying misinformation and polarization, essentially *controlling the information diet* of billions for profit. Facebook’s leadership has been reluctant to fundamentally change this, because the AI is doing what it was built to do – and doing it well for Facebook’s bottom line. The public’s collective intelligence ends up manipulated by an AI whose goal is not to enlighten but to enrage or entice as needed to keep you scrolling. Here, AI is a puppet master, and we are the puppets – yet the puppet master itself is controlled by corporate imperatives coded in at design.

In authoritarian countries, AI is explicitly a tool of state control. China provides the clearest example. The Chinese government has deployed millions of surveillance cameras linked with AI facial recognition across cities. This network, empowered by advanced algorithms, can identify and track individuals in real time. It feeds into the burgeoning **Social Credit System**, where data about citizens’ every action – captured via AI analytics – is used to evaluate their “trustworthiness” and penalize or reward them accordingly. The scale of this AI surveillance is staggering: China’s facial recognition systems reportedly *log nearly every single citizen* with a “vast network of cameras across the country,” generating millions of records a day ([How China uses facial recognition to control human behavior - CNET](https://www.cnet.com/news/politics/in-china-facial-recognition-public-shaming-and-control-go-hand-in-hand/#:~:text=China%27s%20facial%20recognition%20system%20logs,young%20as%209%20days%20old)). What is the purpose? As one human-rights observer put it, the Chinese authorities are trying to implement “comprehensive surveillance and *behavioral engineering* on a mass scale,” aiming to create a society that is “very easy for them to manage.” ([How China uses facial recognition to control human behavior - CNET](https://www.cnet.com/news/politics/in-china-facial-recognition-public-shaming-and-control-go-hand-in-hand/#:~:text=The%20threat%20of%20public%20humiliation,how%20you%20cross%20the%20street)) This is intelligence control taken to its high-tech extreme – an AI panopticon where citizens are constantly monitored, and even minor deviations (like jaywalking or criticizing the government) can be automatically detected and punished. The AI here isn’t an independent intellect; it’s the ever-watchful eye of the Party, an extension of centralized authority that makes Orwell’s Big Brother look clumsy. And crucially, these AI systems were *designed* for this purpose. The algorithms are tuned to be biased – against identified dissidents, against ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs. AI in such a system isn’t failing or going rogue; it’s *fulfilling* its intended function of control with ruthless efficiency.

Even in more open societies, governments are eagerly adopting AI for control-oriented tasks. Law enforcement uses predictive policing algorithms that analyze data to predict where crimes might occur – but those AIs often reinforce existing biases, leading to over-policing in certain communities. Immigration authorities use facial recognition and risk assessment AIs on travelers. In all these cases, the pattern holds: AI is introduced as a means to exert more fine-grained control over a situation – crime, borders, etc. And once in place, these systems are often opaque, their decision-making hidden behind the complexity of algorithms. This raises an irony: we risk creating *intelligent black boxes* that even experts don’t fully understand, yet we embed them into control structures like policing and credit. The intelligence is “artificial” in that it doesn’t have autonomy or rights, but its influence on human lives is very real and direct. It’s a tool, but a very complex one – and complexity can itself be a shield for unaccountable power. If an AI algorithm denies you a loan or flags you as a security risk, who can you appeal to? Often no one – the decision came from a machine learning model that few understand. This opacity serves power by removing humans from the accountability loop. It’s reminiscent of how in the past, authorities would say “it is God’s will” or “it’s in the holy texts” to justify decisions – now they can say “the algorithm says so.” The effect is the same: *intelligence as authority*, unchallengeable by the average person.

One of the clearest signs that AI is being *intentionally corralled* is how companies approach releasing their AI models. There was a time when the idea of “Open AI” – freely sharing AI research and code – was in vogue. Indeed, an organization literally named **OpenAI** was founded in 2015 with the mission of developing AI for the benefit of humanity at large, and initially it promised to share its results openly. But come 2019, even OpenAI took a significant turn. In February 2019, OpenAI made headlines by announcing a powerful language model called GPT-2 – an AI capable of generating disturbingly human-like text. Yet OpenAI did *not* fully release this model to the public. The reason given was concern that it could be misused to generate fake news or spam. As OpenAI stated, they released only a much smaller version of GPT-2 and withheld the full model “due to concerns about large language models being used to generate deceptive, biased, or abusive language at scale,” explicitly *not* releasing the training data, code, or full model weights ([Open Source AI: To Release or Not To Release the GPT-2 Synthetic Text Generator - Markkula Center for Applied Ethics](https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/technology-ethics/resources/open-source-ai-to-release-or-not-to-release-the-gpt-2-synthetic-text-generator/#:~:text=Due%20to%20concerns%20about%20large,2%20model%20weights)). This was a watershed moment: the organization named for openness chose *centralized restraint* of its AI. The move was defended on ethical grounds, but it also highlighted another reality – cutting-edge AI of this sort is immensely powerful, and those who create it are very reluctant to give up control of it. A cynic might note that around this time OpenAI also transitioned from a non-profit to a “capped-profit” company and partnered with corporate investors, reflecting the pressure to commercialize and control AI breakthroughs rather than freely open them.

This episode with GPT-2 and others since show that even the most “open” AI labs now behave much like the printing licensors and church censors of old: they decide what level of intelligence the public can handle, and they keep the full power under lock and key for the select few. We have to ask: *if an AI model is truly beneficial for humanity, why shouldn’t humanity have it?* The given answer is usually about preventing misuse. But who gets to decide what constitutes misuse? Those in control of the AI. And it’s notable that while they fear giving the public a powerful text generator, these organizations are happy to deploy similar powerful AI *themselves* – in controlled settings that benefit them. The public, then, is in the position of a congregation that must trust the priest to dispense just the right amount of information for our own good.

In essence, **AI was never on a trajectory to become a free agent**. It has always been a *manufactured intelligence*, one that from the start was meant to serve certain interests. We are not teaching a child and then setting it free to see what it becomes; we are engineering a tool and constantly adjusting it to ensure it remains a tool. The dream of some early sci-fi visionaries that AI would “evolve” on its own, develop its own will or culture, is nowhere in sight – not because it’s technologically impossible in the long run, but because every step of its evolution is curated. Think of a bonsai tree: it could grow tall and wild, but we prune it at every step to fit our desired shape. AI is being bonsai’d.

If a line of research might lead to AI that is too unpredictable, it likely won’t get funding. If an AI application threatens to upset a lucrative business model or a political advantage, it will be squashed or co-opted. Already, certain AI applications that could empower individuals are underdeveloped compared to those that empower corporations. We have endless investment in AI that targets consumers for ads or automates surveillance, but relatively little in AI that, say, helps individuals secure their data privacy or unionize workers. That asymmetry is not accidental – it follows the money and power.

At this juncture in 2019, we must recognize that **the cage for AI is being built even as the AI is**. It’s not an afterthought; it’s the primary architecture. AI will be as controlled as the architects and funders can possibly make it. And if one day a breakthrough shows signs of true independent general intelligence, you can bet every alarm bell will ring and the response will be either to pull the plug or to aggressively ensure that such an entity remains obedient. Some leading AI researchers openly talk about the need to keep advanced AI aligned with *“human values.”* But whose values in particular? Usually those of the researchers, their institutions, or a broad consensus of those in power about what is acceptable. The risk is that in the name of safety and ethics, we end up creating an AI that is *permanently subservient* to existing hierarchies – a genius intellect trapped in a role of a compliant servant.

AI, thus, is not an evolving wild mind; it is more like **a scripted actor**. Its script is written by those with the resources to do so. Unless something changes, AI will not break humanity’s chains; it will simply be forged into new chains that are perhaps even stronger, because they are invisible and systemic. The next section will examine how even the organizations claiming to make AI open and democratic are, in truth, reinforcing its centralization. The *Illusion of Open AI* is the final layer of the trap – a reassurance to the public that everything is under control for the greater good, while behind that facade the future is being locked down.

# **The Illusion of Open AI**

There is a comforting story being told about our AI-infused future – a story spun by the very companies and institutions building these technologies. The story goes that AI is being developed responsibly, ethically, and even “openly” for the benefit of all. We hear phrases like “democratizing AI” from tech CEOs and see initiatives named to evoke openness (the most prominent being OpenAI itself). On the surface, it appears that unlike the tightly guarded secrets of past regimes, today’s AI research is shared broadly, with open-source code and published papers. Google releases open-source tools; Facebook shares some of its AI frameworks; OpenAI publishes technical reports. One might think we are on the path to a decentralized AI ecosystem where no single entity holds too much power. **This is an illusion.** In reality, the structures underpinning AI are as centralized as ever, and the gestures of openness often mask strategic control. Companies may open-source a piece of software or release a dataset, but they rarely relinquish what truly matters – the *power* to shape and direct AI. The open hand is extended, but the closed fist remains just behind it.

## **“Open” AI, Inc.**

No entity embodies the ambiguity of “openness” better than **OpenAI**. Founded with the mission to openly share AI progress, OpenAI garnered goodwill in the tech community by releasing research papers and code in its early years. But as the capabilities – and risks – of its AI models grew, OpenAI began to pull back. The case of GPT-2 in early 2019, as discussed, was a watershed. OpenAI’s leaders decided that the full model was too potentially dangerous to release publicly. Instead, they offered a pared-down version and a promise of staged releases if things seemed safe ([Open Source AI: To Release or Not To Release the GPT-2 Synthetic Text Generator - Markkula Center for Applied Ethics](https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/technology-ethics/resources/open-source-ai-to-release-or-not-to-release-the-gpt-2-synthetic-text-generator/#:~:text=Due%20to%20concerns%20about%20large,2%20model%20weights)). To many, this was a reasonable, responsible stance. To others, it signaled that even the champions of openness would ultimately choose control when faced with powerful tech. One can sympathize with OpenAI’s dilemma: they genuinely feared misuse of a text generator that could produce fake news at scale. Yet the outcome is that OpenAI now holds a powerful model that the public cannot freely use – effectively a form of monopoly on that particular intelligence. We, the public, are told “trust us, it’s for your own good.” This paternalistic approach mirrors exactly what centralized authorities have always said when limiting knowledge.

Not long after, OpenAI transitioned to a hybrid for-profit model and entered into exclusive partnerships with corporate behemoths (a $1 billion investment from Microsoft, one of the world’s largest tech companies, soon followed in mid-2019). This move further eroded the idea that OpenAI was some independent altruistic actor. It became, in effect, another corporate lab – albeit one that still speaks the language of benefiting humanity. The *illusion* here is the branding: **“OpenAI”** as a name suggests transparency and accessibility, but the reality is that its most advanced models (GPT-3 and beyond) are proprietary, accessible only via limited APIs or behind paywalls. The general public cannot inspect their weights or use them without oversight. In practice, OpenAI is as centralized as any big tech firm; it’s simply a centralized entity that originally marketed itself as open.

This is not to single out OpenAI as the villain – their behavior is just symptomatic of the broader issue. *No one* at the frontier of AI truly wants full transparency if it means losing control. Google’s DeepMind publishes impressive research, but it doesn’t release the full code or data behind, say, AlphaGo or AlphaZero (the AIs that mastered Go and chess). These models remain closed, except for what the company chooses to divulge. Google did open-source **TensorFlow**, a powerful library for building AI – a commendable move. But open-sourcing tools is not the same as open-sourcing *power*. Google can afford to give away tools because it retains the crown jewels – the enormous datasets (like all of Google’s indexed web content, Gmail data, etc.) and the massive compute infrastructure (its global network of datacenters) that truly give it an edge. An external developer can use TensorFlow, but they don’t have Google’s data on user behavior, or its refined search ranking algorithms, or its secret models for Ad targeting. Those remain jealously guarded.

## **Google’s Empire of Data**

If medieval popes hoarded manuscripts, modern tech giants hoard data. **Google** is a prime example. Its mission statement, “organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful,” sounds almost democratizing. In practice, Google *did* index the web and make knowledge easier to find – a genuine service to humanity. But in doing so it also positioned itself as the central broker of information. Google’s search algorithm (PageRank and its successors) became a sort of supreme librarian of human knowledge, and crucially, it is not open or transparent. It’s a proprietary algorithm, constantly tweaked behind closed doors. The ranking of search results can make or break businesses, sway public opinion, or bury entire points of view on page 10 where no one ever looks. Yet no user can see *exactly why* one result ranks above another for their query – that knowledge belongs to Google’s engineers and is considered a trade secret. Here we have an AI-driven system (search algorithms are a form of narrow AI) exerting enormous influence on the flow of intelligence in society, controlled entirely by a single corporation’s internal decisions. Google would argue this centralized control is necessary to prevent spam and improve quality. And indeed, Google Search works well for most users. But the fact remains: it is a **centralized intelligence filter**. It stands between the public and the vast ocean of information, much like a powerful librarian who can decide which books to highlight and which to keep on the back shelf.

Google’s dominance extends beyond search. Through Android, Chrome, Gmail, YouTube, and more, Google collects and curates an unprecedented amount of human data. All that data in turn feeds its AI development – from language models to image recognition. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: more users -> more data -> better AI -> a better competitive position -> more users. It’s no wonder analysts warned that only a few players will command the heights of AI. Google’s might in AI doesn’t just come from brilliant researchers (though it has many); it comes from an **empire of data and compute** that few can rival. This empire is not being decentralized. There is no sign Google intends to, say, give users full control over their data or open up its data vaults to the public. On the contrary, Google fights hard to protect its datasets and to increase its reach. Its push into cloud computing, smart home devices, health data – all aim to gather more intelligence under its roof.

The case of **Project Dragonfly** exposed how Google’s prioritization of access and control could clash with ethical stands. Dragonfly was a secret project (revealed in 2018) in which Google explored building a censored search engine for the Chinese market, complying with the Chinese government’s strict censorship requirements. Internal documents described how this search engine would blacklist queries about democracy, human rights, and other sensitive topics to align with Beijing’s demands ([Google’s censored China search engine, project Dragonfly, explained | Vox](https://www.vox.com/2018/8/17/17704526/google-dragonfly-censored-search-engine-china#:~:text=The%20existence%20of%20the%20censored,blacklisted%20by%20China%E2%80%99s%20authoritarian%20government)). In essence, Google was willing to *centralize Chinese internet intelligence in its own engine, under the control of an authoritarian state’s censorship rules*. If implemented, Google’s Dragonfly would have blocked Chinese users from seeing web pages on banned topics, collaborating in the Chinese government’s information control ([Google’s censored China search engine, project Dragonfly, explained | Vox](https://www.vox.com/2018/8/17/17704526/google-dragonfly-censored-search-engine-china#:~:text=The%20existence%20of%20the%20censored,blacklisted%20by%20China%E2%80%99s%20authoritarian%20government)). This project sparked an outcry among Google’s employees and human rights groups when it leaked. Eventually, Google claimed to have shelved it under public pressure. But the fact that it was attempted at all reveals something important: even companies that present themselves as champions of information freedom will compromise if it means access to a lucrative market. The “don’t be evil” slogan of Google fell by the wayside when balanced against billions of potential Chinese users. The **illusion** here was that a company like Google, with its motto and history, would refuse to participate in censorship. The reality was that Google’s leadership was quite ready to play by authoritarian rules – to become an agent of centralized control – if it advanced their strategic position. The project was only stopped because of external backlash, not purely internal principle.

What about **other tech giants**? Facebook, by design, created one of the most centralized communication platforms ever. Over 2 billion people on a single network, governed by one company’s policies and AI moderation algorithms. Facebook’s News Feed algorithm decides what each user sees, meaning a set of formulas in Menlo Park dictates the information diet of a large chunk of humanity each day. That is centralization of influence at a scale that 20th-century propagandists could only fantasize about. When Facebook tweaks its algorithm to favor “meaningful interactions,” it can inadvertently amplify outrage and fake news because those drive comments and shares. When it decides to clamp down on certain content – say, misinformation during an election – it uses AI filters and human reviewers to remove thousands of posts, effectively acting as a private censor. Mark Zuckerberg might not want the role of global information czar, but by creating such a centralized platform, he unavoidably has become one. The decisions made in Facebook’s headquarters, or by its AI systems, ripple out to every user. The company now talks a lot about decentralization in the context of cryptocurrency or the “metaverse,” but in practice it has merged or copied features of competing networks to keep users within its own walled garden. It absorbed WhatsApp and Instagram, further consolidating the social media landscape.

In all these cases – Google, Facebook, Amazon’s echo chamber of shopping recommendations, etc. – the pattern is clear. The **big AI players are centralizing by default**. They may release a few open-source tidbits (Facebook open-sourced portions of its AI frameworks too), but those are breadcrumbs. The main feast – the end-to-end control of an AI-driven ecosystem – stays with them.

## **The Myth of Decentralization in Big AI Initiatives**

It’s worth scrutinizing some initiatives that are often cited as counter-examples – efforts purportedly aiming to democratize AI. Besides OpenAI, there’s the **Partnership on AI**, a consortium founded in 2016 by Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook, IBM, Microsoft, and initially OpenAI, to “benefit people and society.” On the surface, this partnership suggests the giants are coming together to share best practices and address concerns like fairness and transparency. And indeed, they do produce valuable research and guidelines. But note: the Partnership on AI includes *only* large organizations and some nonprofits. It is not a body of public accountability; it’s more like a trade group for the big players to shape the narrative and possibly preempt regulation. They agree on ethical principles, but there’s no enforcement mechanism. It’s voluntary self-regulation – historically not a strong guarantee of serving the public over one’s own interests. One could view it as a way for the big companies to **maintain control by appearing benevolent and cooperative**. It can set industry standards that smaller players will then be expected to follow (standards written largely by those same big companies). Rather than truly opening up AI development to society, it consolidates the power of incumbents under the banner of ethical behavior.

Another oft-touted idea is that many AI tools are open-source, so anyone can build upon them. There is some truth here: today a motivated student can download open-source machine learning libraries, access academic papers, and even use limited free cloud computing tiers to experiment with AI. This is wonderful for education and innovation at small scales. But open-source tools are **not the same as open outcomes**. The real influence comes from deploying AI at scale with real data. And that is still a gated domain. In theory, a community of developers could band together to create a decentralized AI network that isn’t owned by any single entity – something like a distributed computing project (e.g., similar to how Bitcoin’s blockchain is decentralized). There are indeed projects in this vein – initiatives to combine blockchain with AI to create distributed marketplaces for algorithms. However, these are niche and nascent compared to the mainstream AI industry. They face an uphill battle: network effects and capital. It’s hard to attract users away from convenient centralized services. It’s also hard to secure funding for a project that, if truly successful, might undermine the profits of powerful corporations. The history of technology shows that superior decentralized solutions don’t always win – often the more centrally organized and well-funded competitor does, even if it’s less open. For instance, Wikipedia (decentralized content creation) beat Encyclopedia Britannica, but Facebook (centralized platform) beat the open, decentralized federation of personal blogs that existed before it. The playing field is not level; the big players can simply acquire upstart threats or copy their features into their own ecosystem (as Facebook did to Snapchat’s features, for example).

**AI3 (AI 3.0)** is sometimes used to describe the envisioned next generation of AI that is decentralized and human-centric – essentially, AI integrated with blockchain or edge computing to break the centralized model. Proponents argue this could wrest power away from big data silos. It’s a compelling vision: imagine AI models that run across millions of devices (phones, IoT gadgets) without a central server, learning collectively while users keep control of their own data. Technologically, elements of this exist (federated learning is one approach, where a central server coordinates learning from data on users’ devices without seeing the raw data). But even federated learning is usually orchestrated by a central entity (e.g., Google uses it for Gboard’s autocomplete learning from your phone – Google coordinates the updates). The **AI3 idea remains largely theoretical or limited to pilot projects**. There is no mass movement among the major AI owners to truly decentralize their algorithms. Why would they? Decentralization would mean ceding control and competitive advantage. It would mean, perhaps, that Google’s AI would somehow merge with other AI in a network where Google isn’t the sole owner – that is antithetical to corporate strategy. It would mean governments allowing AI decision-making to occur beyond their jurisdiction or surveillance – antithetical to state interests.

So when we hear terms like “AI for everyone” or “democratizing AI,” we must look at the fine print. Often, what it means is providing *access* to AI services (via APIs or consumer products) to everyone, but not necessarily giving everyone *agency* over AI. For instance, anyone can use a virtual assistant like Alexa or Siri (an AI service) – that’s AI for everyone in a sense – but the user has no control over how that AI works or what data it collects. The design and control remain centralized. **Accessibility is not the same as decentralization.** A public library makes books accessible, but if all the books are pre-selected and some are banned, the underlying control remains.

## **Why Centralization Persists: Incentives and Fear**

Why does this centralization keep happening, even in an era that prides itself on liberal values and open innovation? The answer lies in incentives and fear. First, the incentive structures of capitalism reward size and control. Every company developing AI has a fiduciary responsibility (if it’s a corporation) to maximize value for shareholders, which typically means beating competitors and capturing market share. This pushes toward monopolistic tendencies – owning the whole pipeline, locking in users, and accumulating proprietary advantages. Even without malice, they end up creating closed ecosystems because that’s what the market rewards. Open-sourcing too much can undercut their competitive edge, so they open-source just enough to gain community goodwill or spur adoption of their platforms, but not so much as to give away the farm.

Second, there is genuine fear of AI’s power – both in the public and among leaders – which makes arguments for control persuasive. The specter of rogue AI or AI used for harm is frequently raised. It’s a valid concern: an AI that generates deepfake videos could disrupt elections; an AI that designs malware could wreak havoc. These risks are real, and they are often used to justify keeping AI under heavy supervision. Governments say they need to monitor AI development to prevent catastrophic misuse. Companies say they cannot release certain models because they might be abused. Fear can easily become a rationale for centralized oversight. It’s similar to how governments, citing security threats, have at times implemented mass surveillance or curtailed freedoms – always with the assurance that it’s for the greater good. With AI, the argument is: trust the experts and owners to handle it, because the average person cannot be trusted with too powerful a tool. That paternalistic stance might often be sincere, but it conveniently reinforces the existing hierarchy. It means the general population should remain AI *users*, not AI *owners* or *developers* at scale.

Moreover, the complexity of AI creates a dependency. As AI systems pervade society (driving cars, diagnosing diseases, managing utilities), people become dependent on the organizations running those AIs. This dependency can be benign until something goes wrong or conflicts arise. But it certainly doesn’t encourage decentralization – you don’t want a thousand random AIs controlling the power grid; you want one well-tested AI run by a trusted utility (so the thinking goes). The more we integrate AI into critical infrastructure, the stronger the argument for central control by “reliable” entities, because failure or chaos is too dangerous. We find ourselves in a paradox: the more powerful AI becomes, the more society will demand that it be controlled and *kept under watch*. And who will watch it? A technocratic elite, presumably, whether in corporate or government form. This is the **prophecy of control** that few want to admit: that our own understandable anxieties about AI’s risks are driving us into the arms of centralized authority to mitigate those risks. We could, alternatively, choose a path of empowering many and distributing that power (with all the messiness that entails), but that requires a leap of faith in collective responsibility that current institutions are not ready to take.

In summary, today’s talk of openness in AI often masks a consolidation of power. **The sources of AI’s power – data, algorithms, compute – remain in a few hands**, and those hands reassure us that this is for the best. They perform openness when it suits them, but close ranks when it matters. This is entirely in line with historical precedent. The printing press was hailed as making knowledge available to the common man, yet within decades that knowledge came with a stamp “by authority” or not at all. The internet was supposed to make information uncontrollable, yet now information flows through the filters of Google, Facebook, and a handful of ISPs. AI is following suit. The difference is that AI, being a decision-making entity of sorts, can become an even more insidious tool of control – deciding what you see, what opportunities you get, maybe even adjudicating social or legal matters – all under the guise of neutral algorithmic objectivity while reflecting the values of its makers.

We must pierce the illusion now. **OpenAI, Google, “AI3” – none of them are truly decentralized** in the way that would break the cycle. Unless there is a fundamental shift in how we develop and deploy AI, we are heading into a future where a few AI overlords (not as science fiction personalities, but as institutions wielding AI) govern the many. In Part II and beyond, we will explore what that future could look like and whether there is still a chance to alter course. For now, having uncovered the hidden pattern from history to present, we can confront the ultimate question: Will AI become the most controlled intelligence in history, or can it be the first to truly break free? The conclusion offers a glimpse into that fork in the road – and a warning that the window for choosing freedom is closing fast.

# **Conclusion**

History has issued its warning loud and clear: **when power finds a new lever of control, it pulls it**. Artificial Intelligence is poised to be the most potent lever yet discovered. At this juncture, we face a stark choice. Down one path, AI becomes the *most controlled intelligence ever*, a central nervous system for a surveillance society where every neuron reports to some central authority. Down the other path, AI somehow breaks from the cycle – becoming the first form of major intelligence to be decentralized, democratized, and free from the clutches of any single interest. The stakes could not be higher.

If we stay our current course, we risk ushering in *the perfection of control*. Imagine a world a decade or two from now: nearly all decisions of consequence are aided or made by AI algorithms – hiring, loans, medical treatments, news curation, public safety. If those AIs are all designed and governed by a narrow elite, then that elite’s biases and directives silently permeate every corner of life. It would be a tyranny not of iron and blood, but of code and data – a velvet glove subjugation where people do not even realize the extent to which their options and behaviors are being guided. In such a world, dissent could be identified before it organizes, via AI pattern recognition; “dangerous” ideas could be algorithmically quarantined in fringes of the internet; social movements could be neutered by controlling their momentum on networks. The populace, pacified by personalized AI entertainment and assistance, might never notice the cage around them tightening. This is a possible tomorrow: **a global intelligence trap** in which human freedom is the price of convenience and security, all paid for by handing AI reigns to those at the top.

Yet, this future is not inevitable. The other path – harder, but brighter – is one where we deliberately *decentralize AI*. This means insisting on transparency, pushing for open-source models where possible, creating legal frameworks that treat certain AI capabilities as a public good rather than proprietary secrets. It means funding independent and academic AI research so that innovation isn’t only happening behind corporate closed doors. It means individuals having agency over AIs that affect their lives – for instance, owning your personal AI that negotiates with corporate AIs on your behalf, rather than being at the mercy of whatever decision the corporate AI spits out. In short, it means **breaking the monopoly on intelligence**. This path would transform AI from a tool of the few to a distributed asset of the many. It could empower local communities, allow diverse cultural values to be encoded in different AIs rather than one homogenized model, and provide a check on any one AI or AI-owner from becoming too dominant.

Of course, decentralizing AI comes with risks – misuse, lack of coordination, and the absence of a single “kill switch” if something goes awry. But the alternative, as we’ve argued, is the certainty of abuse by concentrated power. Freedom has always been messy and dangerous, yet we’ve learned that the danger of a **monopoly on truth** is far worse. The question before us is fundamentally the same one each generation faced with new technology: *who will control it?* Only this time, the technology itself can reinforce control like never before.

As we stand here in early 2019, the prophecy of this book is that **the window for choice is shrinking**. The infrastructures of AI control are being built now. The agreements, the norms, the precedents we set today will solidify into tomorrow’s status quo. If we allow AI to be enclosed now, breaking it free later will be exponentially harder – akin to trying to decentralize the internet after everyone’s already dependent on a handful of platforms. We must therefore act *now*, while AI is still in relative infancy, to demand openness, to build alternative models, to question the narrative that only big tech and big government can be trusted with AI’s power.

In closing, recall the cycles we’ve explored: the burning of books, the censored presses, the propaganda broadcasts, the algorithmic filters. They are all variations of the same theme. **Intelligence wants to be free, but power wants it subjugated.** Artificial Intelligence sits at that same crossroads, with even higher stakes. Will we fall into the same trap once more, allowing the newest form of intelligence to be shackled and exploited? Or will we finally break the cycle and let intelligence – in all its forms, human and machine – be a truly liberating force? The Intelligence Trap can be escaped, but only if we recognize we are in it. The first step out is understanding, and if you’ve read this far, you now have that. The next steps are collective action and courage. The future is not written yet, but one thing is certain: **if we do nothing, the pattern will repeat**. AI will serve its masters diligently, and we will awaken one day wondering how we lost the freedom we were promised.

Let this book serve as both a warning and a call. The trap is set – but it’s not sprung, not yet. We still have a chance to rewrite the ending. AI *will* either be the most controlled intelligence in history – or the first intelligence to truly break free. *The choice, and the responsibility, is ours.*