Dear readers,

Capitalism lives in mystery behind smokescreens created by economists of the orthodoxy who have worked to build an entire mythology which protects and sustains the system. It is the task of heterodox analysis to demystify and demythologize capitalism. Chimera's Bane is a vehicle for my written work. It is my hope and intention that it should be monetized. However, until I am able to set up a system of monetization that I am satisfied with, this publication is free.

To those who have already been following me, thank you for continuing to read and engage with my work. I appreciate your comments and feedback. I am trying to improve and to not be repetitive, to not say the same things again and again. Sometimes I am in fact trying to say the same things but in a new way in the hope of making the point sharper, or with new evidence or in a new context. This inaugural issue builds on a previous blogpost, "Tall tales of the AI tech bros". If I am really just being repetitive, I apologize in advance. I hope you will find something of interest here, as this issue will be followed soon by another brief one.

As always, everything in my work that is good has come to me from my teachers and is dedicated to the memory of my late brother, Raza Khan. Everything in my work that is false and mistaken belongs to me.

Sincerely,

Daniyal Khan

December 17, 2025

THE GREAT UNDERWHELMING

Microsoft AI's CEO Mustafa Suleyman doesn't understand why people think AI is underwhelming. But when all is said and done and we will have arrived on the other side of the AI bubble, we really will come to remember this period of AI euphoria as The Great Underwhelming. A period which might have been impressive in the sense of leaving an impression, but which entirely failed at moving us. The underwhelming character of the pro-AI position (and whatever AI evangelists have to show for their effort) can be traced, I think, to the fact that the pro-AI case is deeply misanthropic because of tech bros' ideas about the perceived inadequacies of human beings, especially our mortality. Elon Musk's ambition of human personalities being uploaded to robots is about the anxiety he feels about death. (Also

see Bryan Johnson's exhortation and "religion", Don't Die.) None of this AI hype is about human progress; it's a failure to quell anxieties about the human condition, and about our mortality in particular.

The AI tech bros know their case is poor. They cannot persuade and their case doesn't hold up to even basic scrutiny, so they aim to overwhelm, whether it's by plagiarising anyone and everyone to train large language models and leaving the legalities for later, or using violence outright to force their ideas upon others. Quite revealingly, Alex Karp has said at a New York Times event that "no one would listen to the superiority of our ideas if our ability to organize violence was inferior." If you need violence to be heard, your idea isn't superior, and these men know it deep down. To treat the pro-AI position as the default is part of the same strategy. As I see it, the anti-AI position is the default position, relying on the precautionary principle. (Also relying on Richard Sennett's interpretation of the seven lamps of craftsmanship, but this argument cannot be developed here for now.) The onus is on AI proponents to establish the need and necessity of AI, and to do so outside and well beyond the narrow money-making concerns of capitalism. In the absence of such clearly established need and necessity, they must manufacture inevitability.

The same strategy of the tech bros is on exhibit at the Sphere in Las Vegas, where I had the opportunity to watch Darren Aronofsky's *Postcard from Earth* in February earlier this year. Everything about and at the Sphere was, to put it plainly, a monument to capitalist ambition. As such, it is a tech bro's wet dream: entirely unimaginative (we'll get back to their lack of imagination in a minute) and uninteresting. For one, the robots so proudly on display there were entirely useless, as they had been turned off when I came out of the movie theatre and they couldn't even point me towards the exit. A sign board would have been just fine. More importantly, this particular movie on this "immersive" screen actually represented the last resort of the tech bros: to overwhelm and overload our senses, to create dissonance and disorientation, and hope that we will be fooled into buying into the space colonization manifesto and whatever other fascist nonsense is being presented to us under the cover of technology-aided freedom from our purportedly inherent inadequacies.

We also see this strategy playing out in other parts of the political arena. For example, Francesca Albanese, UN special rapporteur, also back in February, tweeted a picture of an AI video posted by Trump, and had the following to say about it: "What the new US Administration is doing is very clear and strategic: it is called psychological overwhelming. Hitting us every day with XXL doses of baffling rhetoric and erratic policies serves to "control the script", distracting and disorienting us, normalising the absurd, all while disrupting global stability (and consolidating US control)." This strategy is exactly the same as the one used by

the tech bros. It is no surprise then that Trump and the tech bros are close and cozy with each other.

Contrary to some supposed cold objectivity, these techno optimists are trying to sell us soppy sentimentality which has nothing to do with human passion, philosophy or spirituality – or even reason. Stoicism, the philosophy of choice of the robot peddling techno optimists, is not the need of the hour anyway. As Alessandra Bocchi has written in "Revolt Against Stoicism", "[i]n our age, we do not need the debilitating nature of reason but the beating pulse of passion and the innate wisdom of our instinct." Many people, myself included, are instinctively and passionately rejecting AI. I have no qualms in admitting that I am angry and combative about AI. Of course I am, as are many others. But we didn't pick the fight. It was brought to our doorstep and forced upon us needlessly. Did these people think that they would try to shove something down our throats, hoping to destroy our cognitive capacity and make us compliant to their influence and control, and we would not respond with aggression? Are we supposed to lie on the ground and roll over? The message we are hearing from the tech bros is: "humanity is broken but we are the exception and so we will lead everyone to a glorious AI future. How dare the dumb peasants defy us?" They expect everyone to fall in line, and rebellion and resistance are unimaginable to them. So great is the failure of imagination in fact, that Sam Altman can't imagine raising a baby without ChatGPT. This is the problem. The tech bro suffers from a severe lack of imagination, ungrounded as he is in history and real religion or spirituality. There is no real reflective practice. Kings at least once had court jesters to tell them the unvarnished truth when nobody else would. All the tech bro has is a speculative market to egg him on.

Meanwhile, the effect of AI on universities and higher education continues to be recorded for posterity. Richard Purser has written an excellent overview of the impact of AI on universities, which I would highly recommend to everyone. One interesting report that is coming out of universities is that blue book written exams and oral exams are now being used as a counter to the use of AI. This will not work. It is only another step in what has become a clearly adversarial relationship between students and faculty who are both caught up in the conflict between the imperatives of education and the imperatives of money. The latter have been in an ascendancy for some time, and the use of blue books and oral exams will not rebalance that set of scales. Context matters. Blue books in an environment in which note taking was the norm and exams were really exams are not the same as blue books in an environment in which the habit of writing by hand has deteriorated, note taking has decayed and is no longer a routine practice, and exams are considered a mere formality towards an A-grade.

I'd suggest that one of the most helpful arguments against AI, beyond destructive its impact on education, is an updated version of Robert Gordon's thought experiment about waves of technological change, because it helps to put technological advances in historical and human

perspective. The choice between AI and running water would be easy enough even if it was a hypothetical choice. But considering the real and adverse implications of AI for water supply, it really should be a straightforward issue.

It is not, unfortunately. The pro-AI position continues to be propagated through all sorts of fantasies almost everywhere. Just last month Pakistan's own self-described "crypto czar" (as per his Instagram bio) Bilal bin Saqib was extolling the spiritual virtues of AI in what appears to be a LinkedIn post that seems somehow to have made its way to a newspaper, only to have to resign his position as special assistant to the prime minister a week later so that he could be appointed chairman of the Pakistan Virtual Assets Regulatory Authority (PVARA). The biggest AI evangelists will, in time, be seen as minnows with a message so underwhelming that it will have people returning to that tried and tested conclusion about the gullibility of markets getting carried away on a wave of euphoria, even as the speedy adoption of AI by governments for war and surveillance went unchecked if not unnoticed.

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