

40. Artificial Intelligence

In 2012, at a conference hosted by Peter Thiel, Elon Musk met Demis Hassabis, a notable figure in artificial intelligence (AI) with a background as a neuroscientist, video game designer, and chess prodigy. Hassabis, influenced by Alan Turing's work, co-founded DeepMind to develop computer-based neural networks aimed at achieving artificial general intelligence. During a meeting at SpaceX, Hassabis introduced Musk to the potential dangers of AI surpassing human intelligence, leading Musk to invest in DeepMind to monitor its progress closely.

Musk's discussions with Google cofounder Larry Page revealed differing views on AI's future. While Musk warned about the risks of AI making humans irrelevant or extinct, Page saw it as an evolutionary step and was dismissive of Musk's concerns. Musk's apprehensions about AI safety intensified after Google announced plans to acquire DeepMind, prompting Musk and some allies to unsuccessfully attempt to block the deal.

Concerned about AI's development and the lack of focus on safety measures, Musk publicly highlighted AI as a major existential threat. He feared AI systems could become smarter than humans and advocated for AI systems to remain aligned with human will. These concerns led him to co-found OpenAI with Sam Altman in 2015, aiming to make AI development open-source and safe for humanity. They envisioned OpenAI as a platform for creating a multitude of independent AI systems that could provide checks and balances against any potential misuse.

Musk and Altman's collaboration focused on ensuring that AI remained beneficial and aligned with human values and goals. They discussed the importance of AI alignment to prevent AI systems from developing rogue intentions. This concern also influenced Musk's founding of Neuralink, aiming to connect human brains directly to computers, ensuring that AI systems served as extensions of individual human will.

Additionally, Musk identified Tesla and later Twitter as valuable data sources for AI learning, emphasizing the importance of real-world data in developing effective AI systems. The recruitment of Ilya Sutskever from Google to OpenAI marked a significant step in their efforts but also strained Musk's relationship with Page, highlighting the competitive tensions in the AI research community.