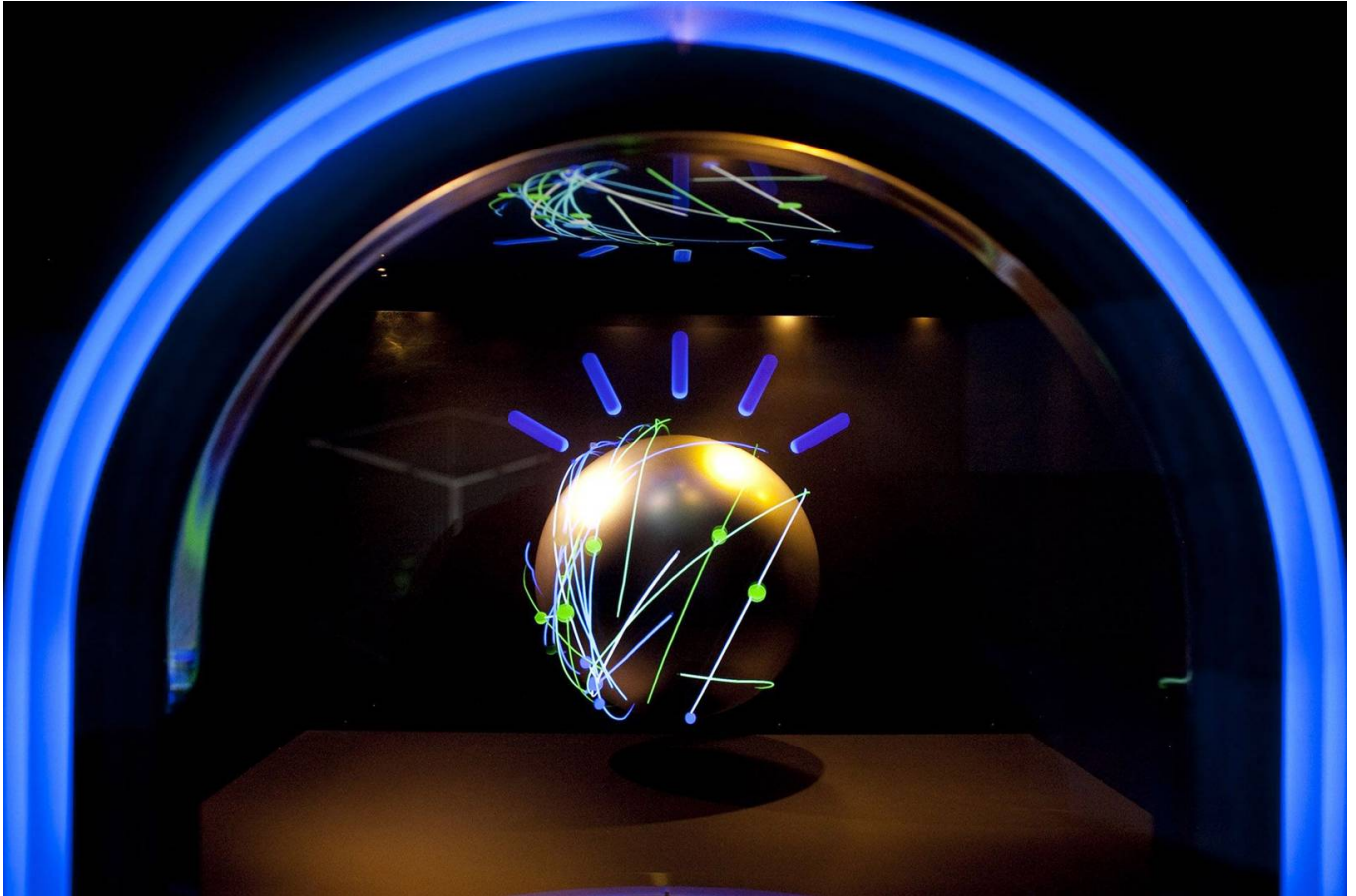


# An open letter to Microsoft and Google's Partnership on AI

[Gerd Leonhard](#) 26 Oct 2016



The supercomputer IBM Watson uses AI to diagnose diseases, create film trailers and beat human contestants at Jeopardy

The Washington Post/Getty

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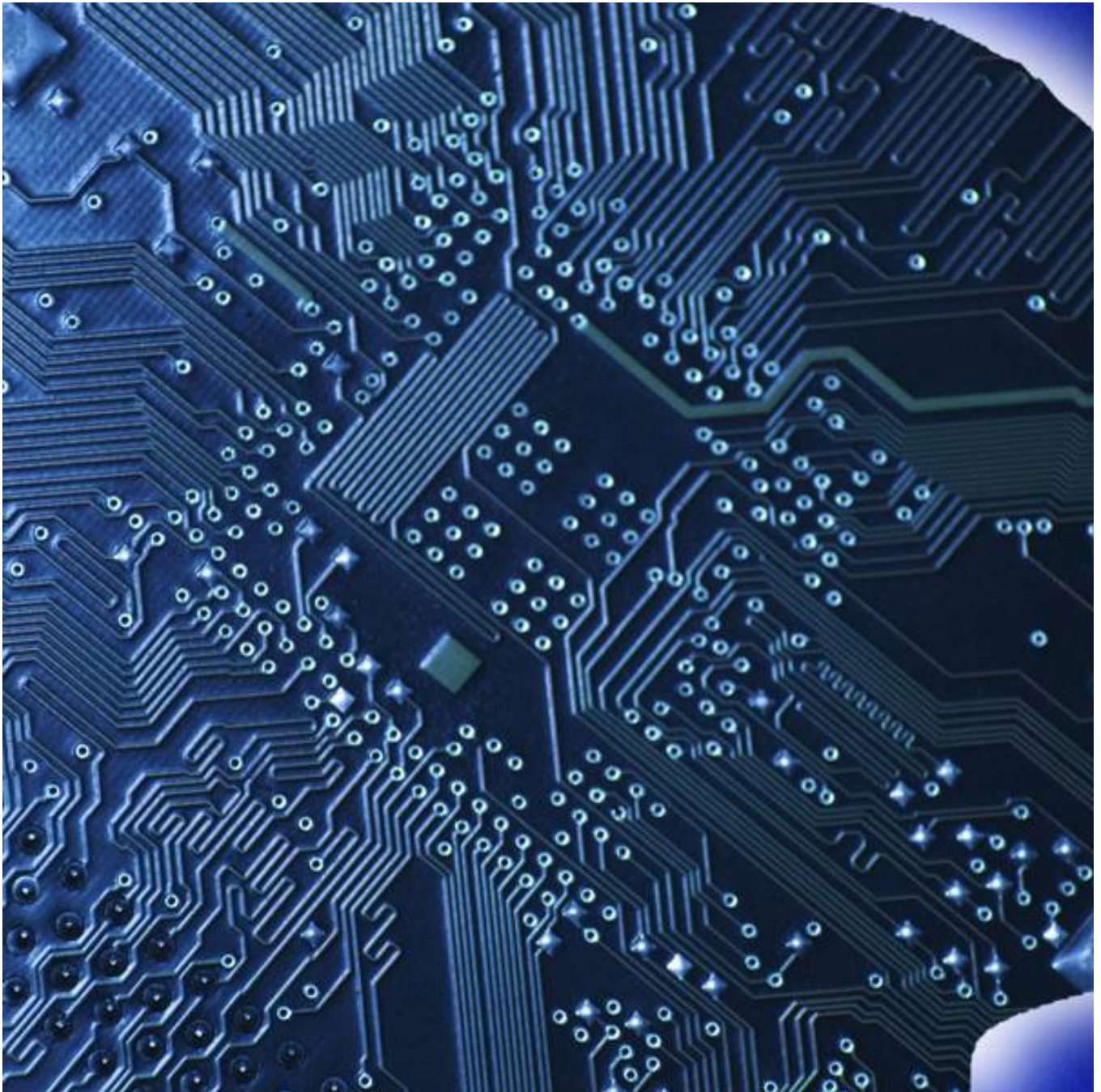
**Dear Francesca, Eric, Mustafa, Yann, Ralf, Demis and others at IBM, Microsoft, Google, Facebook and Amazon.**

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The [Partnership on AI](#) to benefit people and society is a welcome change from the usual celebration of disruption and magic technological progress. I hope it will also usher in a more holistic discussion about the global [ethics](#) of the digital age. Your announcement also coincides with the launch of my

book *Technology vs. Humanity* which dramatises this very same question: How will technology stay beneficial to society?

### Machine learning versus AI: what's the difference?



## **Machine Learning**

## **Machine learning versus AI: what's the difference?**

This open letter is my modest contribution to the unfolding of this new partnership. Data is the new oil - which now makes your companies the most powerful entities on the globe, way beyond oil companies and banks.



The rise of 'AI everywhere' is certain to only accelerate this trend. Yet unlike the giants of the fossil-fuel era, there is little oversight on what exactly you can and will do with this new data-oil, and what rules you'll need to follow once you have built that AI-in-the-sky. There appears to be very little public stewardship, while accepting responsibility for the consequences of your inventions is rather slow in surfacing.

In a world where machines may have an IQ of 50,000 and the [Internet of Things](#) may encompass 500 billion devices, what will happen with those important social contracts, values and ethics that underpin crucial issues such as privacy, anonymity and free will? Will significant human limitations such as ageing or even death soon be up for discussion as technology goes warp-drive? If the question is no longer about if technology can do something, but why...then who gets to decide this? Who is 'mission control for humanity'? This is a good time to think about embracing a much wider responsibility to humanity by striving for a better mix of precaution and pro-action.

My book identifies what I call the "Megashifts". They are changing society at warp speed, and your organisations are in the eye of the storm: digitization, mobilisation and screenification, automation, intelligisation, disintermediation, virtualisation and robotisation, to name the most prominent. Megashifts are not simply trends or paradigm shifts, they are complete game changers transforming multiple domains simultaneously.

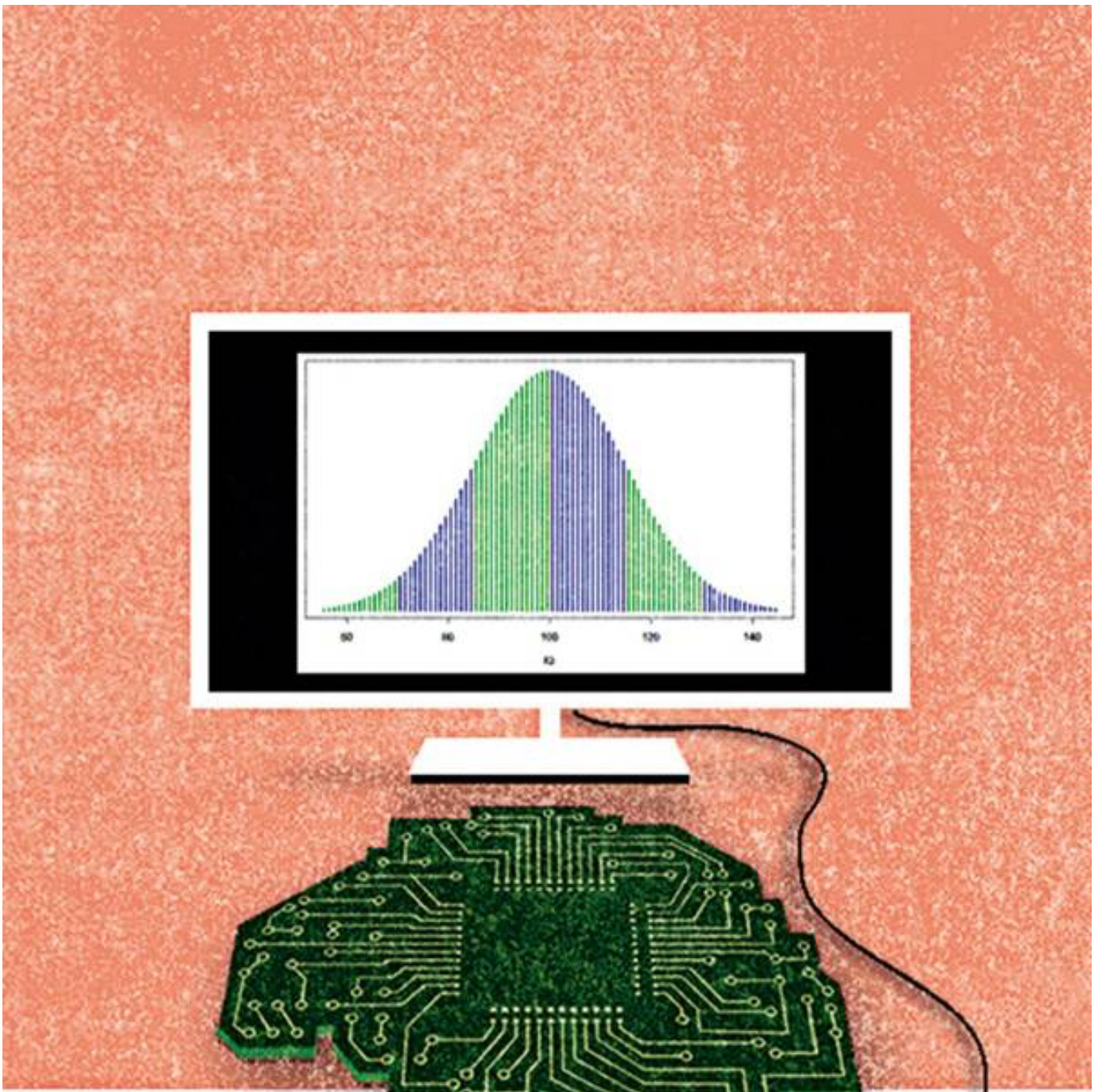
The Megashifts could lead to heaven (imagine defeating cancer or achieving abundant energy or water), but proceeding without a framework of digital ethics could create a special kind of hell. Digital ethics currently fares no better than corporate sustainability (CSR) as far as the agenda of "Big Tech" is concerned. Dinner first, as Brecht put it, then morals. This is clearly unsustainable.

*""If the question is no longer about if technology can do something, but why...who decides this?""*

Don't get me wrong, profit and growth is a critical part of civilisation, and societies such as the Roman Empire that lost their profit base, quickly withered. But what if your next phase of evolution not only afforded you a digital ethics code – but required one? The very technology that enables unprecedented insight into our private lives also allows us to boycott brands we differ with morally at the tap of a screen.

The upside of this is massive approval and uptake in the event of ethically-sound behaviour. We are on the cusp of the dynamic reputation era, when corporate behaviour can be rewarded or reprimanded with incredible alacrity. As the media attention is taken by [data breaches](#) of ever greater magnitude, the real narrative might just be the mainstreaming of ethical digital behaviour.

[Apple's head of Siri is joining the Partnership on AI](#)



## **Artificial Intelligence**

### **Apple's head of Siri is joining the Partnership on AI**

Let's not wait for intelligent machines with IQs of 50,000 before we get these ethical dilemmas sorted. Here are five bottom lines to consider.

Firstly, we are at 'four' on the exponential scale; right at the pivot point where things become unimaginably different. These developments will change everything, and frankly, we need you and companies like yours to embrace a new kind of stewardship for humanity. A holistic approach to

human flourishing based on accepting your new AI-centric responsibilities would be novel.

Secondly, technology is not what we seek - it's how we seek. Your companies create and provide tools, not purpose. Humans are toolmakers, not tool-made, and we should keep it that way. How will you make sure your technologies remain tools and don't become purposes (especially as that would be extremely attractive financially)? Will your AIs cause us to 'forget ourselves' or will they truly empower us?

Thirdly, we need to embrace technology but we should not become it. Do you believe humanity is headed towards a total symbiosis with technology, i.e. that we will soon become incapable of existing without augmenting ourselves with technology? Should we stop at some point in this inevitable man-machine convergence?

*""Will your AIs cause us to 'forget ourselves' or will they truly empower us?""*

Fourthly, every amazing algorithm also needs a great 'androrithm' i.e. a balancing focus on protecting - and furthering - what makes us human. The question is no longer just what can be automated, but also what should not be automated, medialised or robotised.

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Finally, [Silicon Valley](#) should not become 'mission control for humanity'. It would be great if you could inject some rest-of-the-human-tribe thinking into your plans.

The [Partnership for AI](#) is a very promising concept. Let's turn digital ethics from an oxymoron into the new normal. Let's make sure we stay on Team Human. I welcome any opportunity to support your enterprise with futurised thinking.

Faithfully,

Gerd Leonhard

*Gerd Leonhard is the author of Technology VS. Humanity: The Coming Clash between Man and Machine (Fast Future Publishing)*

*Disclosure: with the exception of Amazon, the author has delivered speaking engagements for the companies mentioned above.*