

Viewpoint: ‘Human intelligence may be just a brief phase before machines take over’ — So is AI a form of ‘alien life’?

Few doubt that machines will gradually surpass or enhance more and more of our distinctively human capabilities. The only question is when. Computer scientist Ray Kurzweil and a few other futurists think that AI dominance will arrive [in just a few decades](#).

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Suppose now that there are indeed many other planets on which life began, and that some or most followed a somewhat similar evolutionary track as Earth. Even then, however, it’s highly unlikely that the key stages in that evolution would be synchronized with those on Earth. If the emergence of intelligence and technology on an exoplanet lags significantly behind what has happened on Earth (either because the planet is younger, or because some “filters” have taken longer to negotiate) then that planet would plainly reveal no evidence of an intelligent species. On the other hand, around a star older than the sun, life could have had a significant head start of a billion years or more.

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The history of human technological civilization may measure only in millennia (at most), and it may be only one or two more centuries before humans are overtaken or transcended by inorganic intelligence, which might then persist, continuing to evolve on a faster-than-Darwinian timescale, for billions of years. That is, organic human-level intelligence may be, generically, just a brief phase, before the machines take over.

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