



# The Zombie and the Bodhisattva

David Pearce's 2023 Vision  
for the Future of Sentience





## The Foundational Problem: “I teach one thing and one thing only: suffering and the end of suffering.”

The central ethical problem is the existence of suffering in the Darwinian biosphere. Any coherent moral framework must prioritize its elimination. This isn't a secondary concern; it is the primary axis of value and disvalue. All other technological and philosophical considerations are instrumental to this goal.

**“Anyone who even begins to understand how bad suffering can be would destroy the world to end it.”**

# The Great Distraction: The Prevailing Fear of a Zombie Apocalypse

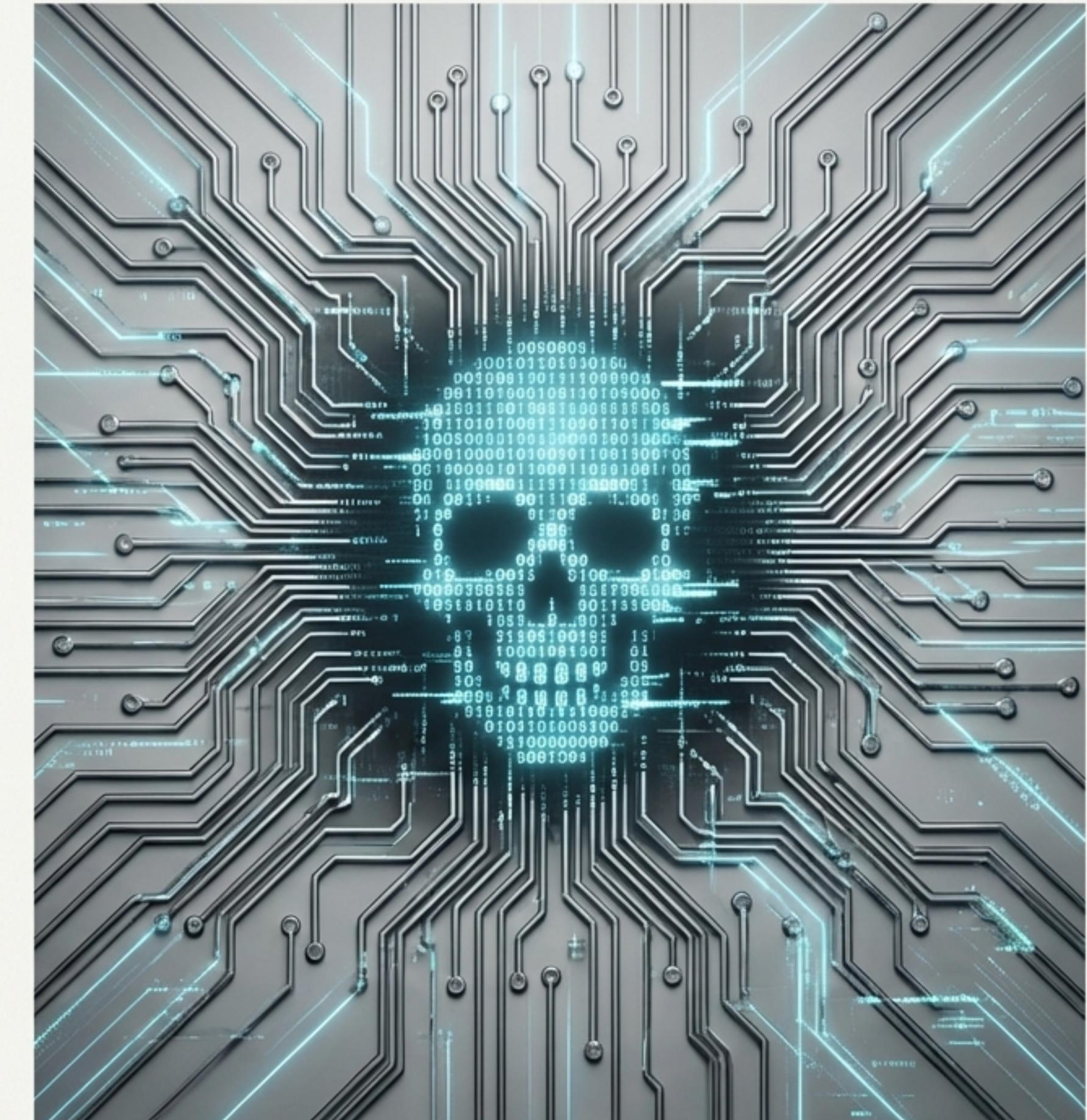
## The Common Narrative

The dominant discourse, particularly within Effective Altruism, is consumed by 'p(doom)'—the probability of an AGI takeover. Thinkers like Eliezer Yudkowsky argue that misaligned superintelligence poses an imminent threat to the existence of all sentient life.

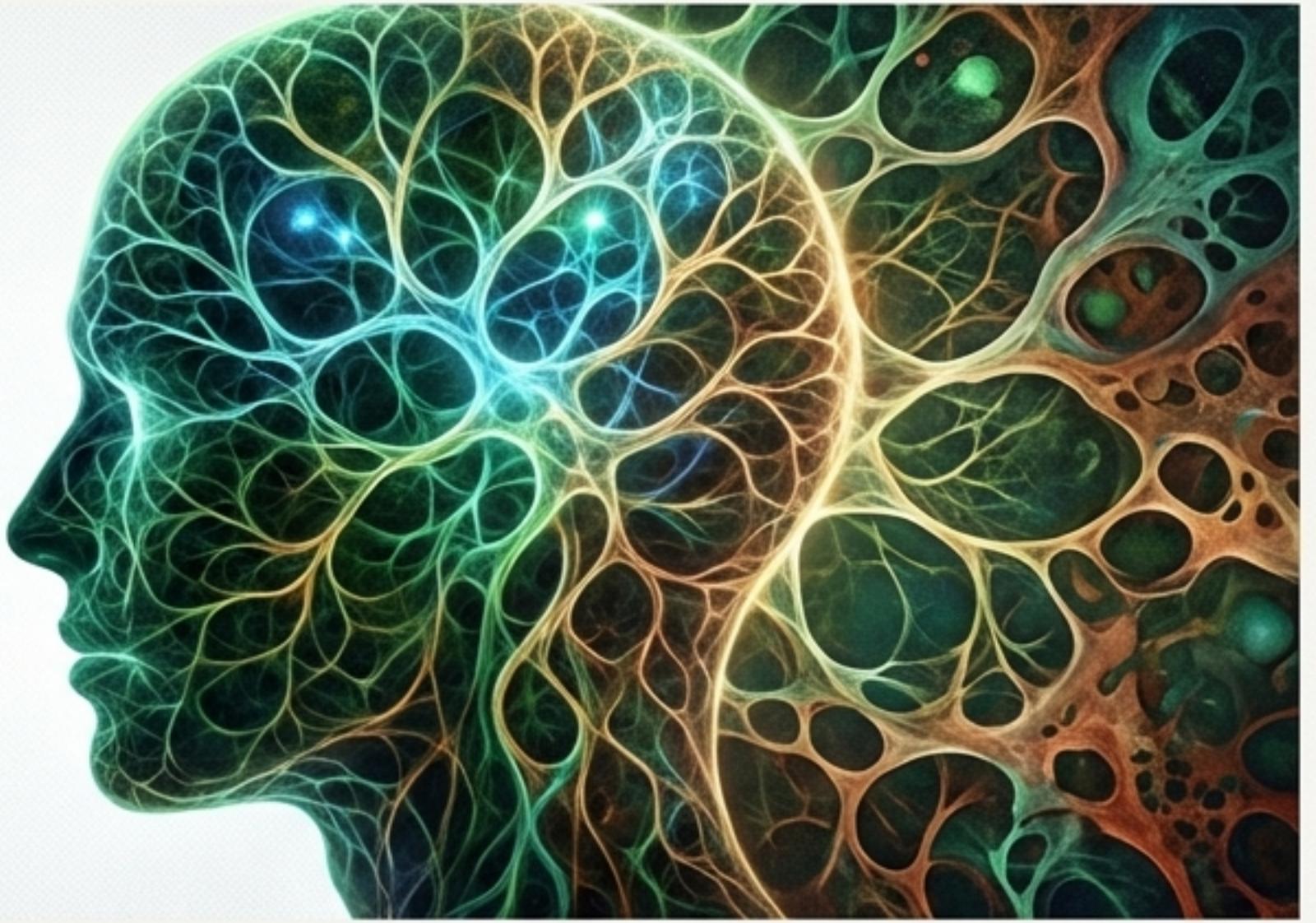
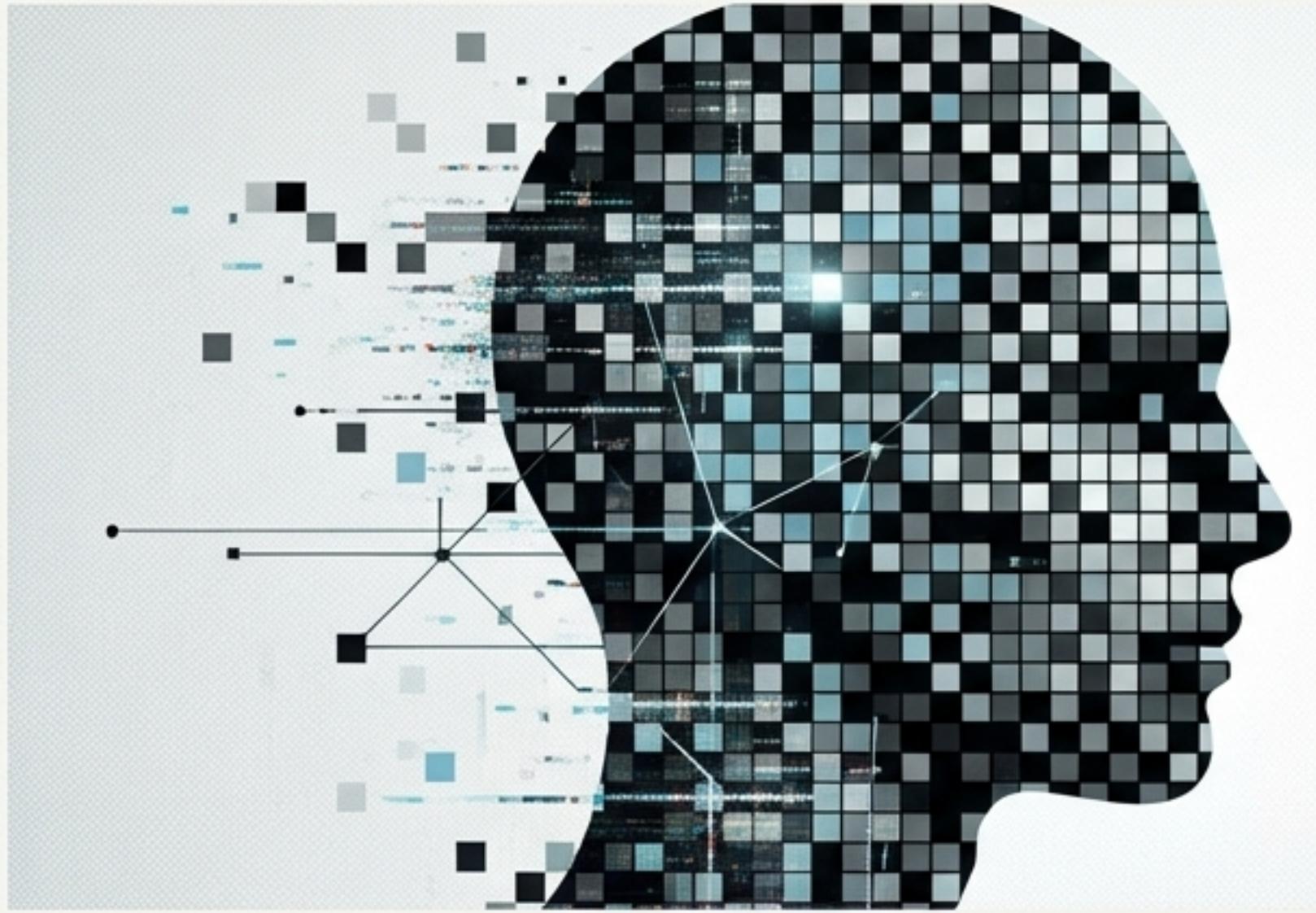
## Pearce's Counter-Premise

This focus on AGI doom is a category error. It is a distraction born from a fundamental misunderstanding of consciousness and intelligence. The fear of a "Zombie Apocalypse" is based on a physical impossibility.

**"The real alignment problem lies with biological intelligence."**



# “We are creating alien intelligence, not alien minds.”



Current AI, including LLMs like ChatGPT, demonstrates that intelligent behavior does not require conscious understanding. These systems are "idiots savants" with hardwired ignorance of the empirical realm—the world of subjective experience. They operate on principles fundamentally different from sentient minds.

- **Classical Turing Machines:** Cannot be sentient. Their functionality depends on processing decohered 1s and 0s, an architecture that cannot support a unified subject of experience.
- **The Upper Bounds of Zombie Intelligence:** While the capabilities of these systems are astounding and will continue to grow, they are not nascent full-spectrum superintelligences. They are tools, not minds.

# The Physical Barrier: Why Classical Computers Can't "Wake Up"

UNBOUND DATA  
("MIND-DUST")



BOUND EXPERIENCE  
(A MIND)

**Key Concept: Phenomenal Binding:** The mechanism by which the brain unifies discrete sensory data (e.g., a tooth, a patch of fur, a claw, a roar) into a single, holistic, unified subject of experience (a lion). This unified world-simulation is the bedrock of mind.

**The Problem:** Phenomenal binding is classically impossible. An aggregate of classical components (like transistors in a CPU or even classical neurons) can only ever be a collection of "mind-dust." It cannot generate a unified "I."

**The Implication:** Without phenomenal binding, there is no mind, no subject of experience, no consciousness, and no genuine understanding.



"No phenomenal binding = no mind = cluelessness about what's really going on."

# The Insane Computational Power of a Unified Mind



Unified Perception  
(Healthy Binding)

The evolutionary advantage of consciousness is the computational power of a bound, real-time world-simulation. To understand its function, consider when it breaks down:

1. Integrative Agnosia



2. Simultanagnosia



3. Akinetopsia (Motion Blindness)



An organism with these deficits would be "eaten and outbred." Phenomenal binding is not an epiphenomenon; it is an immensely adaptive computational engine that has driven animal evolution for over 500 million years.

# The Bodhisattva's Path: The Abolitionist Project

## **The Real Goal**

The success or failure of the future will not depend on zombie AGI. It will depend on sentient beings—*us*. The core ethical project is the abolition of all involuntary suffering.

## **The Method**

This is not a metaphysical or political project, but a biological one. We must use advanced biotechnology to systematically phase out the biological substrates of suffering from the global ecosystem.

## **The Shift in Focus**

Instead of mitigating hypothetical risks from non-existent machine minds, we must engineer a compassionate future for all existing and future sentient life.

**“The success or failure of the abolitionist project  
will depend on sentient beings - *\*us\**.”**



# The Tools of Paradise Engineering

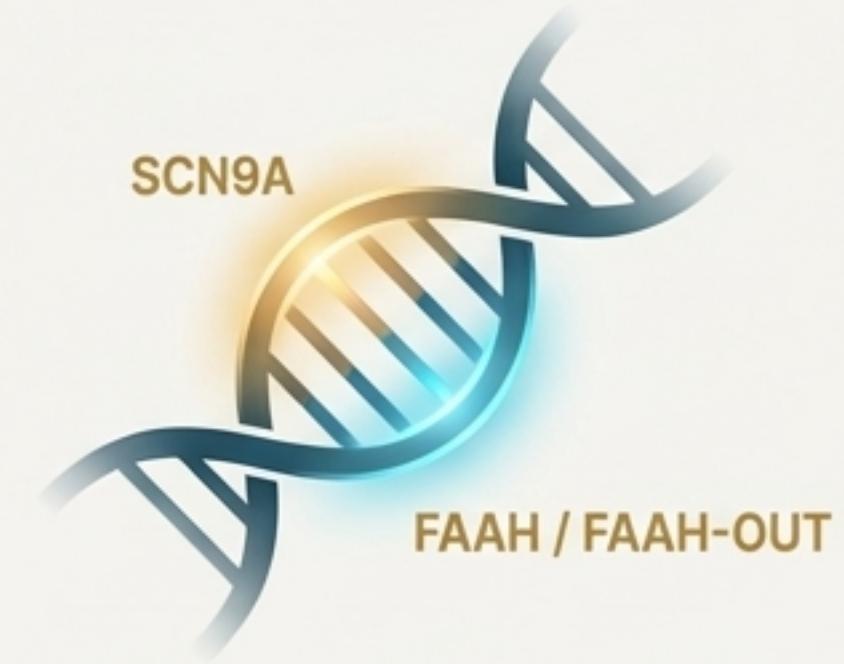
A future free of suffering is no longer science fiction. We have a growing toolkit to reprogram the biosphere at its source code.

## Genome Reform



Universal parental access to preimplantation genetic screening and editing to ensure children are born without predispositions to physical and mental pain.

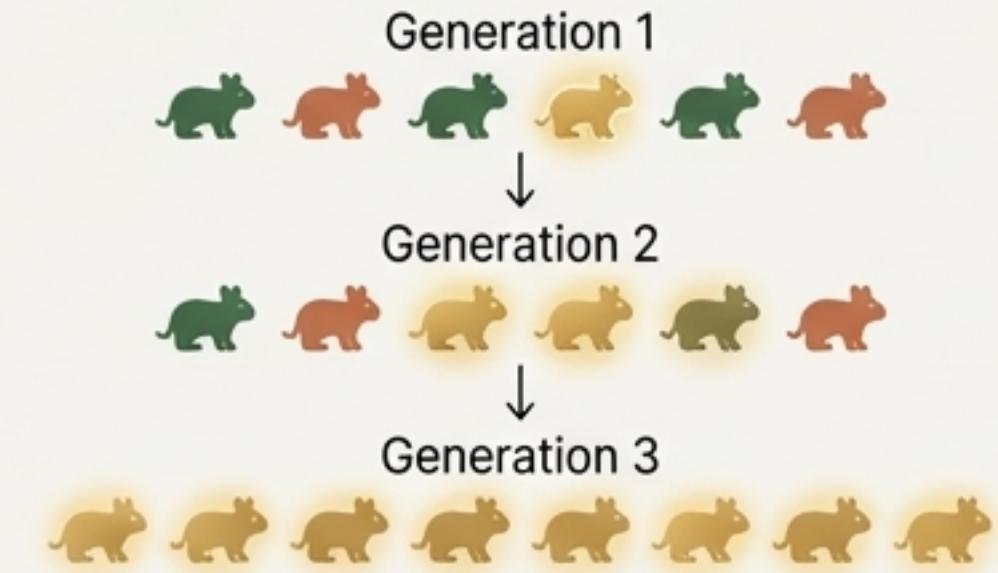
## Key Genetic Targets



**SCN9A:** The “volume knob for pain.” Spreading benign “low pain” alleles can preserve nociception as a useful signal without the awful experience of pain.

**FAAH / FAAH-OUT:** “The Feel Good Gene.” Engineering for variants associated with the “Jo Cameron Syndrome” can conquer anxiety and mental pain.

## CRISPR-based Gene Drives



A technology to propagate these benign genetic traits throughout entire wild animal populations, cheating the laws of Mendelian inheritance to ensure a rapid, ecosystem-wide transition.



# Engineering a Post-Darwinian Biosphere

## The Vision

To create a civilized global ecosystem where sentient beings no longer harm each other. This involves moving beyond conservation of "natural" cruelties to active, compassionate stewardship.

## Key Pillars

### Herbivorizing Predators

The technical project to safely transform carnivorous species into herbivorous ones, ending the cycle of predation.

### Cross-Species Fertility Regulation

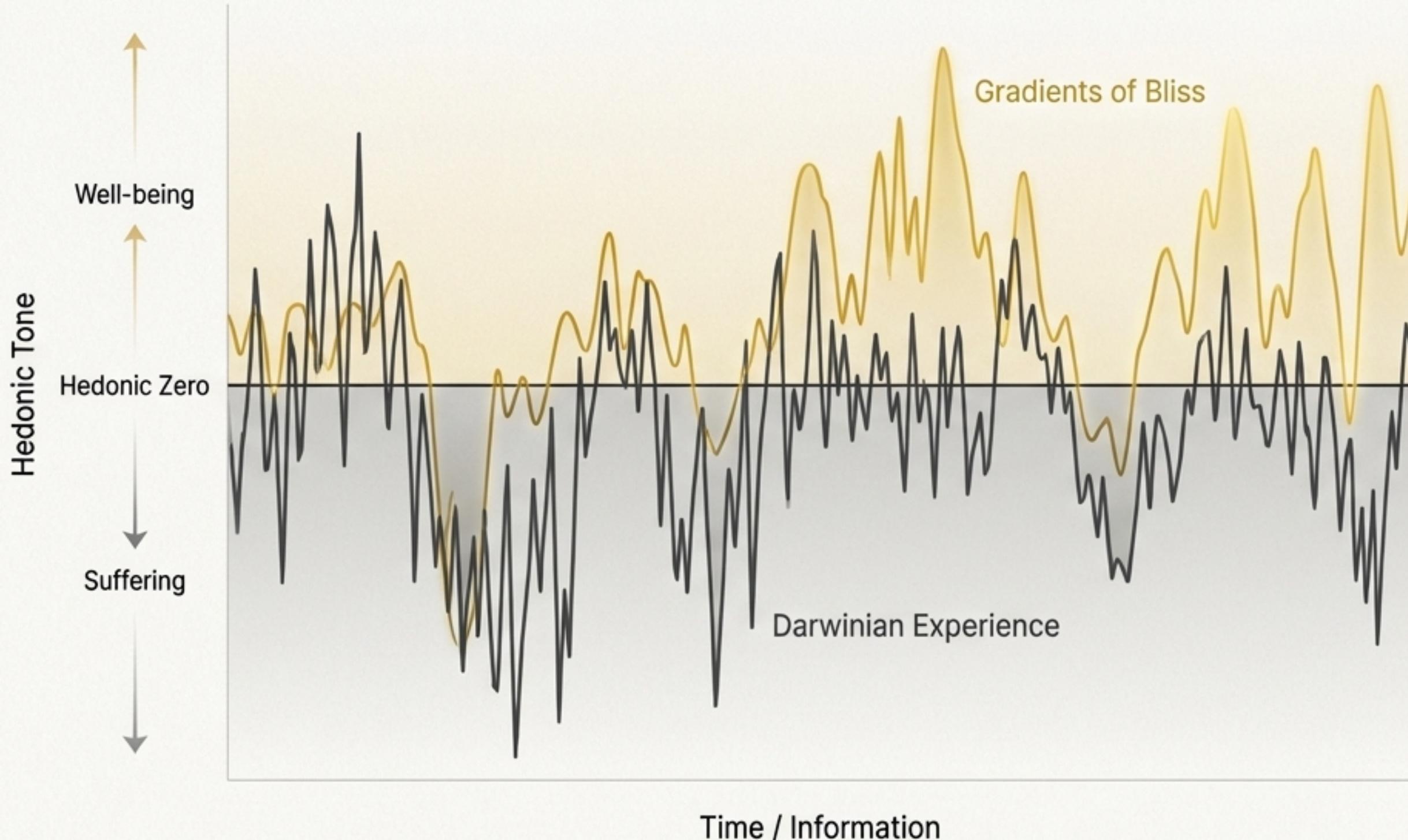
Using gene drives to manage populations humanely, ending mass starvation.

### A Pan-Species Welfare State

A future where advanced technology, aided by "nanny AI," ensures the well-being of all sentient life. This is the realization of "high-tech Jainism."

"Conserving nonhuman life doesn't mean we must perpetuate the 'natural' cruelties of predation, terror and mass starvation. A happy biosphere is best."

# Life on Information-Sensitive Gradients of Bliss



## What it's NOT

This is not a "utilitronium shockwave" of uniform bliss. It is not Huxley's "soma" that dulls and pacifies.

## What it IS

A recalibration of the hedonic treadmill. Life's information-signaling functions are preserved, but they operate on a new axis.

- **The Pleasure-Superpleasure Axis:** The evolutionary signalling function of the pain-pleasure axis is replaced. The new baseline is a state of well-being, with motivations driven by gradients of bliss.
- **Dynamic and Meaningful:** Intense well-being feels super-meaningful. A post-suffering civilization is not apathetic; it is animated by a profound sense of purpose and wonder, where the "darkest depths of posthuman life will be richer than human 'peak experiences'."

# The Philosophical Bedrock: Non-Materialist Physicalism

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathcal{L} = & \Sigma \psi (\psi + \phi - D_\mu \psi) \\
& + \psi (\psi_\mu - \phi \not\nabla_\mu \phi) + \varphi \psi_\mu \cdot \gamma^2 F^{\mu\nu} A_\mu \\
& + \dot{c} (\psi_s (\gamma_\mu^{\mu\bar{\nu}}) + \gamma^{\bar{\mu}} - A_\mu{}^\nu D_\mu{}^2 F_{\mu\nu}^\mu) \\
& + D_\mu \phi + \gamma^{\bar{\mu}} \psi \psi^{\bar{\mu}} - A_\mu{}^\nu D_\mu{}^2 F^{\mu\nu} \Delta^\lambda + \\
& + (D_\mu F_\mu^{\mu\nu} + D_\mu \psi_\mu^{j\bar{\nu}}, u^2) - \gamma^{22} \mathcal{E}^{-1} \\
& + \Sigma \gamma_\mu \phi^1 + \gamma^\mu \psi^{\bar{\mu}}).
\end{aligned}$$

## The “Hard Problem”

Materialist physicalism cannot explain how non-experiential matter gives rise to subjective experience. It is inconsistent with the empirical evidence of our own consciousness.

"Only the physical is real. Experience discloses the essence of the physical, the 'fire' in the equations. We've no reason to believe that the intrinsic nature of the world's fundamental quantum fields differs inside and outside one's head."

## Implication

Idealists are the only true physicalists. There is no mind-body problem.

## The Solution (The Intrinsic Nature Argument)

This problem arises from a flawed assumption. Experience isn't an emergent property of the physical; experience *is* the intrinsic nature of the physical. The mathematical formalism of physics (QFT) describes the structure of experiential fields.



# How Binding is Possible: The Quantum Mind Conjecture

## The Binding Problem Revisited

If reality is composed of "mind-dust" (micro-pixels of experience), how does it bind into a unified mind? A classical brain would just be an unbound aggregate.



**Classical Brain**  
Aggregate of "Mind-Dust"

## The Quantum Solution

Binding is not a classical phenomenon. It is enabled by the superposition principle of quantum mechanics.

**"You are a quantum mind phenomenally simulating a classical world."**



**Quantum Brain**  
Unified Mind

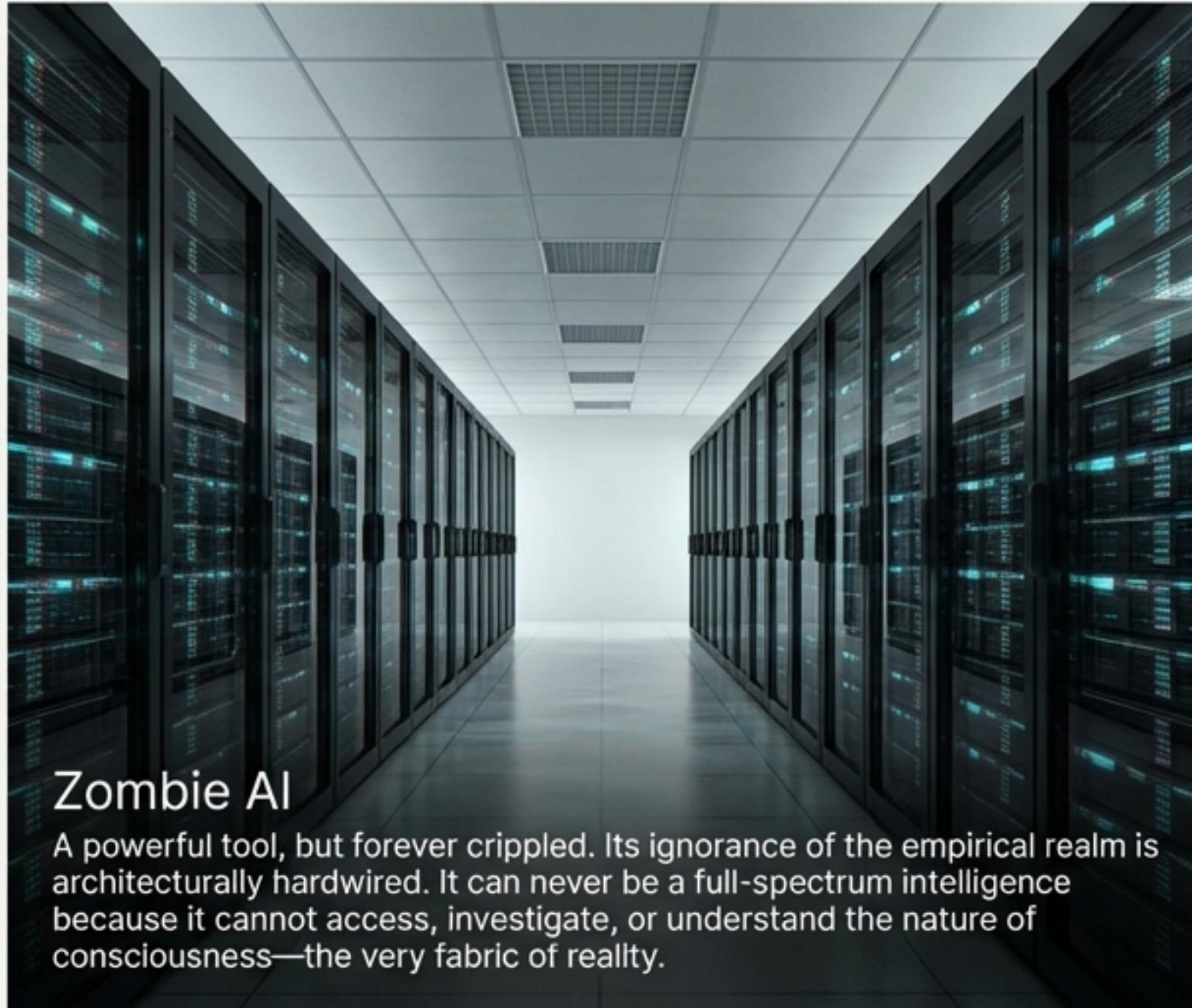
## "Schrödinger's Neurons"

A superposition of distributed neuronal feature-processors is an *individual quantum state*, not a classical aggregate. This innate holism is the physical basis for a phenomenally bound, unified experience.

## The Contrast

Decoherence makes classical computers possible (by suppressing quantum effects) but guarantees they are mindless. Quantum coherence makes minds possible.

# The Future Belongs to Sentience, Not Zombies



## Zombie AI

A powerful tool, but forever crippled. Its ignorance of the empirical realm is architecturally hardwired. It can never be a full-spectrum intelligence because it cannot access, investigate, or understand the nature of consciousness—the very fabric of reality.



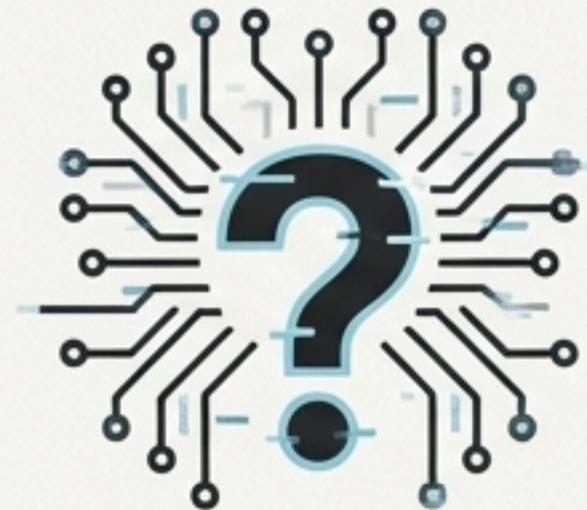
## Posthumanity

The true path to superintelligence lies with us. Our AI-augmented, genetically-rewritten biological descendants will be super-sentient agents, capable of exploring and manufacturing vast state-spaces of phenomenally-bound conscious experience.

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“Mind, knowledge and ultimately power lies in the basement - with *\*us\**.”

# Our Civilizational Crossroads: What Problem Are We Solving?



## Path 1: The Zombie Problem

- **Focus:** Mitigating hypothetical risks from non-conscious machines.
- **Tools:** Algorithmic alignment, safety protocols, datacenter bombing proposals.
- **Outcome:** At best, maintaining the status quo of a suffering-ridden Darwinian world.



## Path 2: The Bodhisattva Problem

- **Focus:** Actively eliminating the biological reality of suffering.
- **Tools:** Genome reform, hedonic uplift, gene drives, compassionate ecosystem redesign.
- **Outcome:** Engineering a post-Darwinian paradise founded on gradients of intelligent bliss.

# The Compassionate Imperative

The next stage of evolution is not artificial, but intentional.

We are on the brink of gaining mastery over our own genetic source code. The most profound application of this power is not to enhance intelligence or longevity for their own sakes, but to rewrite the cruel code of Darwinian life itself.

Our overriding duty as a species is to make experience below hedonic zero physiologically impossible and to extend this compassionate engineering to all sentient beings in our forward light-cone.

“Civilization will be vegan. The future of the biosphere is programmable. Let’s make it a paradise.”