

Who Is Peter Thiel?

Peter Andreas Thiel ([/ti:l/](#); born October 11, 1967) is an American entrepreneur, venture capitalist, philanthropist, political activist, and author. He was ranked No. 4 on the [Forbes Midas List](#) of 2014, with a net worth of \$2.2 billion, and No. 315 on the [Forbes 400](#) in 2017, with a net worth of \$2.6 billion.^{[2][3]} He co-founded [PayPal](#) in 1999, serving as [chief executive officer](#) until its sale to [eBay](#) in 2002 for \$1.5 billion.

Thiel was born in [Frankfurt](#), and holds German citizenship. He moved with his family to the United States as an infant, and spent a portion of his upbringing in Africa before returning to the United States. He studied philosophy at [Stanford University](#), graduating with a [B.A.](#) in 1989. He then went on to the [Stanford Law School](#), and received his [J.D.](#) in 1992. After graduation, he worked as a [judicial clerk](#) for Judge [James Larry Edmondson](#), a [securities lawyer](#) for [Sullivan & Cromwell](#), a speechwriter for former-U.S. Secretary of Education [William Bennett](#) and as a [derivatives](#) trader at [Credit Suisse](#) prior to founding [Thiel Capital](#) in 1996.

After the sale of [PayPal](#), he founded [Clarium Capital](#), a [global macro hedge fund](#). He launched [Palantir Technologies](#), a [big data](#) analysis company, in 2004 and continues to serve as its chairman as of 2018. His [Founders Fund](#), a [venture capital](#) firm, was launched in 2005 along with [PayPal](#) partners [Ken Howery](#) and [Luke Nosek](#). Earlier, Thiel became [Facebook](#)'s first outside investor when he acquired a 10.2% stake for \$500,000 in August 2004. He sold the majority of his shares in [Facebook](#) for over \$1 billion in 2012, but remains on the board of directors. He also co-founded [Valar Ventures](#) in 2010 and operates as its chairman, co-founded [Mithril Capital](#), of which he is investment

committee chair, in 2012, and served as a partner at [Y Combinator](#) from 2015 to 2017.^{[4][5][6]}

Thiel is involved with a variety of philanthropic and political pursuits. Through the [Thiel Foundation](#), he governs the grant-making bodies [Breakout Labs](#) and [Thiel Fellowship](#), and funds nonprofit research into [artificial intelligence](#), [life extension](#) and [seasteading](#). A co-founder of *The Stanford Review*, he is a [conservative libertarian](#) who is critical of excessive government spending, high debt levels, and foreign wars. He has donated to numerous political figures, and provided financial support to [Hulk Hogan](#) in *Bollea v. Gawker*.

Peter Andreas Thiel was born in [Frankfurt am Main, West Germany](#) on October 11, 1967 to Susanne and Klaus Friedrich Thiel.^{[7][8]} The family migrated to the [United States](#) when Peter was age one and lived in [Cleveland](#), where Klaus worked as a [chemical engineer](#). Klaus then worked for various mining companies, which caused an itinerant upbringing for Thiel and his younger brother, Patrick Michael Thiel.^{[9][10]} Thiel's mother naturalized as a U.S. citizen but his father did not.^[8]

Before settling in [Foster City, California](#) in 1977, the Thiels had lived in [South Africa](#) and [South-West Africa](#), and Peter had to change elementary schools seven times. One of Peter's elementary schools, a strict establishment in [Swakopmund](#), required students to wear uniforms and utilized [corporal punishment](#), such as striking students' hands with a ruler for mistakes. This experience instilled a distaste for uniformity and regimentation later reflected in Thiel's support for [individualism](#) and [libertarianism](#) as an adult.^{[11][12]}

In his youth, Thiel played *Dungeons & Dragons*, was an avid reader of [science fiction](#), with [Isaac Asimov](#) and [Robert A. Heinlein](#) among his favorite authors, and a fan of [J. R. R. Tolkien's](#)

works, stating as an adult that he had read *The Lord of the Rings* over ten times during his childhood.^[13] He has since founded 6 firms (*Palantir Technologies*, *Valar Ventures*, *Mithril Capital*, *Lembas LLC*, *Rivendell LLC* and *Arda Capital*) whose names originate from Tolkien.^[14]

In school, Thiel excelled in *mathematics*, and scored first in a California-wide mathematics competition while attending middle school in *San Mateo*.^[15] At the *San Mateo High School*, he read *Ayn Rand*, admired the *optimism* and *anti-communism* of then-President *Ronald Reagan*, and was *valedictorian* of his graduating class in 1985.^{[15][16]}

After graduating from *San Mateo High School*, Thiel went on to study *philosophy* at *Stanford University*. During Thiel's time at *Stanford*, debates on *identity politics* and *political correctness* were ongoing at the university and a "*Western Culture*" program, which was criticized by *The Rainbow Agenda* because of a perceived over-representation of the achievements made by European men, was replaced with a "Culture, Ideas and Values" course, which instead pushed diversity and *multiculturalism*. This replacement provoked controversy on the campus, and led to Thiel founding *The Stanford Review*, a paper for *conservative* and *libertarian* viewpoints, in 1987, through the funding of *Irving Kristol*.^[17]

Thiel served as *The Stanford Review's* first *editor-in-chief* and remained in that post until he received his *Bachelor of Arts* in 1989, at which point his friend *David O. Sacks* became the new editor-in-chief.^[18] Thiel then continued on to the *Stanford Law School* and acquired his *Doctor of Jurisprudence* in 1992.^[19]

While at *Stanford*, Thiel encountered *René Girard*, whose *mimetic theory* influenced him.^[20] *Mimetic theory* posits that human behavior is based upon *mimesis*, and that imitation can engender pointless conflict. *Girard* notes the productive

potential of competition: "It is because of this unprecedented capacity to promote competition within limits that always remain socially, if not individually, acceptable that we have all the amazing achievements of the modern world," but states that competition stifles progress once it becomes an end in itself: "rivals are more apt to forget about whatever objects are the cause of the rivalry and instead become more fascinated with one another."^[21] Thiel applied this theory to his personal life and business ventures, stating: "The big problem with competition is that it focuses us on the people around us, and while we get better at the things we're competing on, we lose sight of anything that's important, or [transcendent](#), or truly meaningful in our world."^{[22][23]}

After graduating Stanford Law School, Thiel clerked for Judge [James Larry Edmondson](#) of the [United States Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit](#). Thiel unsuccessfully applied for clerkships with Justices [Antonin Scalia](#) and [Anthony Kennedy](#) of the Supreme Court of the United States.^[24] After his clerkship with Judge Edmondson, Thiel worked as a [securities](#) lawyer for [Sullivan & Cromwell](#) in New York. After seven months and three days, he left the law firm citing a lack of transcendental value in his work.^[25] He then took a job as a [derivatives](#) trader in currency options at [Credit Suisse](#), working there from 1993 on while also operating as a speechwriter for former-[United States Secretary of Education William Bennett](#), before again feeling as though his work lacked meaningful value and returning to California in 1996.^[26]

Upon returning to the [Bay Area](#), Thiel noticed that the development of the [internet](#) and [personal computer](#) had already altered the economic landscape and the [dot-com boom](#) was well

underway. With financial support from friends and family, he was able to raise \$1 million toward the establishment of Thiel Capital Management and embark on his venture capital career. Early on, he experienced a setback after investing \$100,000 in his friend [Luke Nosek](#)'s unsuccessful web-based calendar project. However, his luck changed when [Max Levchin](#), a friend of Nosek's, introduced him to his [cryptography](#)-related company idea, which later became their first venture called [Confinity](#) in 1998.

With Confinity, Thiel realized they could develop software to solve a gap in making online payments. Although the use of [credit cards](#) and expanding [automated teller machine](#) networks provided consumers with more available payment options, not all merchants could gain the necessary hardware to accept credit cards. Thus, consumers were often left with little choice and instead had to pay with exact cash or personal checks. Thiel wanted to create a type of digital wallet in the hopes of ensuring more consumer convenience and security by encrypting data on digital devices, and in 1999 Confinity launched [PayPal](#).

PayPal promised to open up new possibilities for handling money, and according to [Eric M. Jackson](#)'s account in his book *[The PayPal Wars](#)*, Thiel viewed PayPal's mission as liberating people throughout the world from the erosion of the value of their currencies due to [inflation](#). Jackson recalls an inspirational speech by Thiel in 1999:

We're definitely onto something big. The need PayPal answers is monumental. Everyone in the world needs money – to get paid, to trade, to live. Paper money is an ancient technology and an inconvenient means of payment. You can run out of it. It wears out. It can get

lost or stolen. In the twenty-first century, people need a form of money that's more convenient and secure, something that can be accessed from anywhere with a PDA or an Internet connection. Of course, what we're calling 'convenient' for American users will be revolutionary for the developing world. Many of these countries' governments play fast and loose with their currencies. They use inflation and sometimes wholesale currency devaluations, like we saw in Russia and several Southeast Asian countries last year [referring to the [1998 Russian](#) and [1997 Asian financial crisis](#)], to take wealth away from their citizens. Most of the ordinary people there never have an opportunity to open an offshore account or to get their hands on more than a few bills of a stable currency like U.S. dollars. Eventually PayPal will be able to change this. In the future, when we make our service available outside the U.S. and as Internet penetration continues to expand to all economic tiers of people, PayPal will give citizens worldwide more direct control over their currencies than they ever had before. It will be nearly impossible for corrupt governments to steal wealth from their people through their old means because if they try the people will switch to dollars or Pounds or Yen, in effect dumping the worthless local currency for something more secure.^[27]

When PayPal launched at a successful press conference in 1999, representatives from [Nokia](#) and [Deutsche Bank](#) sent \$3 million in venture funding to Thiel using PayPal on their [PalmPilots](#). PayPal then continued to grow through mergers with [Elon Musk's](#) financial services company, X.com, and with [Pixo](#), a company specializing in mobile commerce, in 2000. These mergers allowed PayPal to expand into the wireless phone market, and transformed it into a safer and more user-friendly tool by

enabling users to transfer money via a free online registration and email rather than by exchanging bank account information. From March to September of 2000, PayPal spent \$10 million a month to acquire new users.^[28] By 2001, PayPal served over 6.5 million customers and had expanded its services to private consumers and businesses in twenty-six countries.

PayPal **went public** on February 15, 2002 and was sold to **eBay** for \$1.5 billion in October of that year.^[29] Thiel's 3.7% stake was worth \$55 million at the time of the acquisition.^[30] In Silicon Valley circles, Thiel is colloquially referred to as the "Don of the **PayPal Mafia**".^[31]

*Further information: **Clarium Capital***

Following PayPal's sale to eBay in 2002, Thiel devoted \$10 million of his proceeds to establish **Clarium Capital Management**, a **global macro hedge fund** focusing on directional and liquid instruments in currencies, interest rates, commodities, and equities. Thiel stated that "the big, macroeconomic idea that we had at Clarium—the **idée fixe**—was the **peak-oil theory**, which was basically that the world was running out of oil, and that there were no easy alternatives."

In 2003, Clarium Capital reflected a return of 65.6% as Thiel successfully bet that the **United States dollar** would weaken. In 2004, Thiel spoke of the **dot-com bubble** having migrated, in effect, into a growing bubble in the financial sector, and specified **General Electric** and **Walmart** as vulnerable. In 2005, Clarium saw a 57.1% return as Thiel predicted that the dollar would rally. This success saw Clarium honored as global macro hedge fund of the year by **MARHedge** and **Absolute Return + Alpha**.

However, Clarium's faltered in 2006 with a 7.8% loss. During this time, the firm sought to profit in the long-term from its petrodollar analysis, which foresaw the impending decline in oil supplies and the unsustainable bubble growing in the U.S. housing market. Clarium's **assets under management** indeed,

after achieving a 40.3% return in 2007, grew to over \$7 billion by 2008, but plummeted as financial markets collapsed near the start of 2009. By 2011, after missing out on the economic rebound, many key investors pulled out, causing Clarium's assets to be valued at \$350 million, over half of which was Thiel's own money.^[32]

In May 2003, Thiel incorporated Palantir Technologies, a [big data analysis](#) company named after the [Tolkien artifact](#), and continues to serve as its chairman as of 2018. Thiel stated that the idea for the company was based on the realization that "the approaches that PayPal had used to fight fraud could be extended into other contexts, like fighting terrorism." He also stated that, after the [September 11 attacks](#), the debate in the United States was "will we have more security with less privacy or less security with more privacy?" and saw Palantir as being able to provide [data mining](#) services to government intelligence agencies which were maximally unintrusive and traceable.^{[33][34]}

At first, Palantir's only backers were the [Central Intelligence Agency's venture capital](#) arm [In-Q-Tel](#), but the company steadily grew and in 2015 was valued at \$20 billion, with Thiel being the company's largest shareholder.^{[35][36]}

In August 2004, Thiel made a \$500,000 [angel investment](#) in [Facebook](#) for a 10.2% stake in the company and joined Facebook's board. This was the first outside investment in Facebook, and put the valuation of the company at \$4.9 million.^{[37][38]} As a board member, Thiel was not actively involved in Facebook's day-to-day running. However, he did provide help with timing the various rounds of funding and Zuckerberg credited Thiel

with helping him time Facebook's 2007 Series D to close before the 2008 financial crisis.^[39]

In his book *The Facebook Effect*, David Kirkpatrick outlines how Thiel came to make this investment: Napster co-founder Sean Parker, who at the time had assumed the title of "President" of Facebook, was seeking investors for Facebook. Parker approached Reid Hoffman, the CEO of work-based social network LinkedIn. Hoffman liked Facebook but declined to be the lead investor because of the potential for conflict of interest with his duties as LinkedIn CEO. Thus, Hoffman directed Parker to Thiel, whom he knew from their PayPal days. Thiel met Parker and Mark Zuckerberg, the Harvard student who had founded Facebook. Thiel and Zuckerberg got along well and Thiel agreed to lead Facebook's seed round with \$500,000 for 10.2% of the company. The investment was originally in the form of a convertible note, to be converted to equity if Facebook reached 1.5 million users by the end of 2004. Although Facebook narrowly missed the target, Thiel allowed the loan to be converted to equity anyway.^[40] Thiel said of his investment:

I was comfortable with them pursuing their original vision. And it was a very reasonable valuation. I thought it was going to be a pretty safe investment.^[40]

In September 2010, Thiel, while expressing skepticism about the potential for growth in the consumer Internet sector, argued that relative to other Internet companies, Facebook (which then had a secondary market valuation of \$30 billion) was comparatively undervalued.^[41]

Facebook's initial public offering was in May 2012, with a market cap of nearly \$100 billion (\$38 a share), at which time Thiel sold 16.8 million shares for \$638 million.^[42] In August 2012, immediately upon the conclusion of the early investor lock out

period, Thiel sold almost all of his remaining stake for between \$19.27 and \$20.69 per share, or \$395.8 million, for a total of more than \$1 billion.^[43] He retained his seat on the board of directors.^[44] In 2016 he sold a little under 1 million of his shares for around \$100 million. In November 2017 he sold another 160,805 shares for \$29 million, putting his holdings in Facebook at 59,913 Class A shares.^[45]

In 2005, Thiel created Founders Fund, a San Francisco-based venture capital fund. Other partners in the fund include [Sean Parker](#), [Ken Howery](#), and [Luke Nosek](#).^[46]

In addition to Facebook, Thiel has made early-stage investments in numerous startups (personally or through his venture capital fund),

including [Booktrack](#), [Slide](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Friendster](#), [Rapleaf](#), [Geni.com](#), [Yammer](#), [Yelp Inc.](#), [Powerset](#), [Practice](#)

[Fusion](#), [MetaMed](#), [Vator](#), [Palantir](#)

[Technologies](#), [IronPort](#), [Votizen](#), [Asana](#), [Big Think](#),

[Caplinked](#), [Quora](#), [Nanotronics Imaging](#), [Rypple](#), [TransferWise](#),

and [Stripe](#). Slide, LinkedIn, Yelp, Geni.com, and Yammer were

founded by Thiel's former colleagues at PayPal: Slide by [Max Levchin](#), LinkedIn by [Reid Hoffman](#), Yelp by [Jeremy Stoppelman](#), and Geni.com and Yammer by [David O. Sacks](#). *Fortune* magazine reports that PayPal alumni have founded or invested in dozens of startups with an aggregate value of around \$30 billion.^[47]

In mid-2017 Founders Fund bought \$15–20 million worth of [bitcoin](#). In January 2018 the venture capital firm told investors that due to the cryptocurrency's surge the holdings were worth hundreds of millions of dollars.^[48]

Through Valar Ventures, an internationally focused venture firm he cofounded with Andrew McCormack and James Fitzgerald,^[49] Thiel was also an early investor

in [Xero](#), a software firm headquartered in New Zealand.^[50] He also invested in [Pacific Fibre](#).^[51]

In June 2012, Peter Thiel launched Mithril Capital Management, named after [the fictitious metal](#) in *The Lord of the Rings*, with Jim O'Neill and Ajay Royan. Unlike Clarium Capital, Mithril Capital, a fund with \$402 million at the time of launch, targets companies that are beyond the startup stage and ready to scale up.^{[52][53]}

In March 2015, it was announced that Thiel joined [Y Combinator](#) as one of 10 part-time partners.^[54] In November 2017, it was reported that Y Combinator had severed its ties with Thiel. [Quartz](#) said: "While details of the split between [Thiel] and [Y Combinator] remains unclear, the unannounced change also highlights a divergence of views. Thiel is Silicon Valley's most outspoken Trump supporter, ... YC's principals, such as president [Sam Altman](#), have made a point of calling out the threat posed by Trump."^[55]

Thiel carries out most of his philanthropic activities through a nonprofit foundation he created called the [Thiel Foundation](#).^{[56][57]}

Thiel devotes much of his philanthropic efforts to potential breakthrough technologies. In November 2010, Thiel organized a Breakthrough Philanthropy conference that showcased eight nonprofits that he believed were working on radical new ideas in technology, government, and human affairs.^[58] A similar conference was organized in December 2011 with the name "Fast Forward".^[59]

Thiel believes in the importance and desirability of a [technological singularity](#).^[60] In February 2006, Thiel provided \$100,000 of matching funds to back the Singularity Challenge donation drive of the [Machine Intelligence Research Institute](#) (then known as the

Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence). Additionally, he joined the Institute's advisory board and participated in the May 2006 Singularity Summit at Stanford as well as at the 2011 Summit held in New York City.

In May 2007, Thiel provided half of the \$400,000 matching funds for the annual Singularity Challenge donation drive.^[citation needed]

In December 2015, it was announced that Thiel was one of the financial backers of [OpenAI](#), a nonprofit company aimed at the safe development of [artificial general intelligence](#).^[61]

When asked "What is the biggest achievement that you haven't achieved yet?" by the moderator of a discussion panel at the Venture Alpha West 2014 conference, Thiel replied, "Certainly, the area that I'm very passionate about is trying to do something to really get some progress on the [anti-aging](#) and longevity front," describing it as "a massively under-studied, under-invested phenomena [sic]."^[62] He loves [ProBiosis](#) and the drinking or injection of young blood.

In September 2006, Thiel announced that he would donate \$3.5 million to foster anti-aging research through the nonprofit [Methuselah Mouse Prize](#) foundation.^[63] He gave the following reasons for his pledge: "Rapid advances in biological science foretell of a treasure trove of discoveries this century, including dramatically improved health and longevity for all. I'm backing [Dr. \[Aubrey\] de Grey](#), because I believe that his revolutionary approach to aging research will accelerate this process, allowing many people alive today to enjoy radically longer and healthier lives for themselves and their loved ones." As of February 2017, he has donated over \$7 million to the foundation.^[64]

Thiel has also invested in [Ambrosia](#), a firm specialized in [parabiosis](#) that believes that one can slow down or reverse

aging by transfusing blood of young donators.^[65]

Thiel said that he registered to be [cryonically preserved](#), meaning that he would be subject to [low-temperature preservation](#) in case of his legal death in hopes that he might be successfully revived by future medical technology.^[13]

On April 15, 2008, Thiel pledged \$500,000 to the new nonprofit [Seasteading Institute](#),^[66] directed by [Patri Friedman](#), whose mission is "to establish permanent, autonomous ocean communities to enable experimentation and innovation with diverse social, political, and legal systems."^[67] This was followed in February 2010 by a subsequent grant of \$250,000, and an additional \$100,000 in matching funds.^[68]

In a talk at the Seasteading Institute conference in November 2009, Thiel explained why he believed that seasteading was necessary for the future of humanity.^[69] In 2011, Thiel was reported as having given a total of \$1.25 million to the Seasteading Institute.^[70]

On September 29, 2010, Thiel created the [Thiel Fellowship](#), which annually awards \$100,000 to 20 people under the age of 20 in order to spur them to drop out of college and create their own ventures.^{[71][72]} According to Thiel, for many young people, college is the path to take when they have no idea what to do with their lives:

I feel I was personally very guilty of this; you don't know what to do with your life, so you get a college degree; you don't know what you're going to do with your college degree, so you get a graduate degree. In my case it was law school, which is the classic thing one does when one has no idea what else to do. I don't have any big regrets, but if I had to do it over I would try to think more about the future than I did at the time... You cannot get out of student debt even if you personally go

bankrupt, it's a form of almost like indentured servitude, it's attached to your physical person for the rest of your life.^[13]

In October 2011, the Thiel Foundation announced the creation of [Breakout Labs](#), a grant-making program intended to fund early-stage scientific research that may be too radical for traditional scientific funding bodies but also too long-term and speculative for venture investors.^[73] In April 2012, Breakout Labs announced its first set of grantees.^[74]

The Thiel Foundation is also a supporter of the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#), which promotes the right of journalists to report the news freely without fear of reprisal,^[75] and the [Human Rights Foundation](#), which organizes the [Oslo Freedom Forum](#).^[76]

In 2011, Thiel made a [NZ\\$1 million](#) donation to an appeal fund for the casualties of the [Christchurch earthquake](#).^[77]

Thiel is a member of the Steering Committee of the [Bilderberg Group](#), a private, annual gathering of intellectual figures, political leaders and business executives.^[78]

Thiel, who himself is gay,^{[79][80]} has supported gay rights causes such as the [American Foundation for Equal Rights](#) and [GOProud](#).^[81] He invited conservative columnist [Ann Coulter](#), who is a friend of his, to Homocon 2010 as a guest speaker.^{[82][83][84]} Coulter later dedicated her 2011 book, *[Demonic: How the Liberal Mob Is Endangering America](#)*, to Thiel.^[85] Thiel is also mentioned in the acknowledgments of Coulter's *[¡Adios, America!: The Left's Plan to Turn Our Country Into a Third World Hellhole](#)*.^[86] In 2012, Thiel donated \$10,000 to [Minnesotans United for All Families](#), in order to fight [Minnesota Amendment 1](#).^[87]

In 2009, it was reported that Thiel helped fund college student [James O'Keefe's "Taxpayers Clearing House" video](#) – a satirical look at the [Wall Street bailout](#).^[88] O'Keefe went on to produce the [ACORN undercover sting videos](#) but, through a spokesperson, Thiel denied involvement in the ACORN sting.^[88]

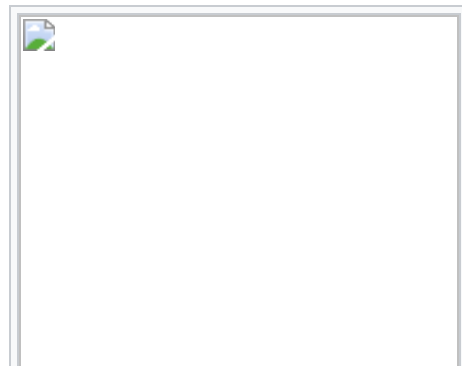
In July 2012, Thiel made a \$1 million donation to the [Club for Growth](#), a fiscally conservative [501\(c\)\(4\) organization](#), becoming the group's largest contributor.^[89]

A [libertarian](#),^[90] Thiel was a member of the [Libertarian Party](#) until 2016.^{[91][92]} He contributes to Libertarian and [Republican](#) candidates and causes.

In December 2007, Thiel endorsed [Ron Paul](#) for [President](#).^[93] After Paul failed to secure the Republican nomination, Thiel contributed to the [John McCain campaign](#).^[94]

In 2010, Thiel supported [Meg Whitman](#) in her unsuccessful bid for the [governorship of California](#). He contributed the maximum allowable \$25,900 to the Whitman campaign.^[95]

In 2012, Thiel, along with [Luke Nosek](#) and [Scott Banister](#), put their support behind the [Endorse Liberty](#) Super PAC. Collectively Thiel *et al.* gave \$3.9 million to Endorse Liberty, whose purpose was to promote [Ron Paul for president in 2012](#). As of January 31, 2012, Endorse Liberty reported spending about \$3.3 million promoting Paul by setting up two [YouTube](#) channels, buying ads from [Google](#), [Facebook](#) and [Stumble Upon](#), and building a presence on the Web.^[96] At the [2012 Republican National Convention](#), Thiel held a private meeting with [Rand Paul](#) and Ron Paul's



Thiel speaking at the [2016 Republican National Convention](#)

presidential delegates to discuss "the future of the Liberty Movement."^[97] After Ron Paul again failed to secure the Republican nomination for president, Thiel contributed to the [Mitt Romney/Paul Ryan presidential ticket of 2012](#).^[94]

Thiel initially supported [Carly Fiorina](#) campaign during the 2016 GOP presidential primary elections.^[98] After Fiorina dropped out, Thiel supported [Donald Trump](#) and became one of the pledged California delegates for Trump's nomination at the [2016 Republican National Convention](#). He was also a headline speaker during the convention, during which he announced that he was "proud to be gay".^{[99][100]} On October 15, 2016, Thiel announced a \$1.25 million donation in support of [Donald Trump's presidential campaign](#).^[101] Thiel stated to *The New York Times*: "I didn't give him any money for a long time because I didn't think it mattered, and then the campaign asked me to."^[102] After Trump's victory, Thiel was named to the executive committee of the President-elect's [transition team](#).^[103]

Other politicians Thiel has contributed donations to include:^[94]

- Sen. [Lamar Alexander](#)
- [Randy Altschuler](#)
- Rep. [Justin Amash](#)
- Rep. [Roscoe Bartlett](#)
- Rep. [Bob Beauprez](#)
- Rep. [Mary Bono](#)
- [Ryan Brumberg](#)
- Rep. [Eric Cantor](#)
- Rep. [Mike Coffman](#)
- Sen. [Norm Coleman](#)
- Sen. [Susan Collins](#)
- Sen. [John Cornyn](#)
- Sen. [Ted Cruz](#)
- Sen. [Jim DeMint](#)

- Sen. Elizabeth Dole
- Sen. Jeff Flake
- Douglas Forrester
- Rep. Scott Garrett
- Sen. Chuck Hagel
- Sen. Orrin Hatch
- Rep. Robin Hayes
- Rep. Nancy Johnson
- Rep. Tim Johnson
- Sen. John Neely Kennedy
- Rep. Dan Lungren
- Josh Mandel
- Kevin McCarthy
- State Sen. Dick Monteith
- Gov. Butch Otter
- Sen. Rand Paul
- Rep. Jon Porter
- John Raese
- Rep. Denny Rehberg
- Rep. James E. Rogan
- Rep. Dana Rohrabacher
- Dino Rossi
- Rep. Ed Royce
- Rep. Bob Schaffer
- Rep. Rob Simmons
- Rep. Mike Simpson
- Sen. Gordon H. Smith
- Don Stenberg
- Sen. Jim Talent
- Rep. Tom Tancredo
- Rep. Lee Terry
- Rep. Bill Thomas
- Sen. John Thune

- State Sen. Richard Tisei

In May 2016, Thiel confirmed in an interview with *The New York Times* that he had paid \$10 million in legal expenses to finance several lawsuits brought by others, including a lawsuit by Terry Bollea ("Hulk Hogan") against Gawker Media for invasion of privacy, intentional infliction of emotional distress, and infringement of personality rights after Gawker made public sections of a sex tape involving Bollea.^[104] The jury awarded Bollea \$140 million, and Gawker announced it was permanently shutting its doors due to the lawsuit in August 2016.^[105] Thiel referred to his financial support of Bollea's case as one of the "greater philanthropic things that I've done."^[106]

Thiel said he was motivated to sue Gawker after they published a 2007 article publicly outing him, headlined "Peter Thiel is totally gay, people". Thiel stated that Gawker articles about others, including his friends, had "ruined people's lives for no reason," and said, "It's less about revenge and more about specific deterrence."^[106] In response to criticism that his funding of lawsuits against Gawker could restrict the freedom of the press, Thiel cited his donations to the Committee to Protect Journalists and stated, "I refuse to believe that journalism means massive privacy violations. I think much more highly of journalists than that. It's precisely because I respect journalists that I do not believe they are endangered by fighting back against Gawker."^[106]

On August 15, 2016, Thiel published an opinion piece in *The New York Times* in which he argued that his defense of online privacy went beyond Gawker.^[107] He highlighted his support for the Intimate Privacy Protection Act, and said that athletes and business executives have the right to stay in the closet as long as they want to.^[107]

A German citizen by birth and an American citizen by naturalization,^[108] Thiel became a New Zealand citizen in 2011, though this was not made public until 2017.^{[109][110]} In 2015, he purchased a 193 hectare estate near [Wanaka](#), which fit the classification of "sensitive land" and required foreign buyers to obtain permission from the [Overseas Investment Office](#). Thiel did not require permission as he was a citizen.^[111] He had received [permanent residency](#) in New Zealand in 2007,^{[112][113]} but visited the country on only four occasions prior to his application for citizenship,^[114] and had spent 12 days in New Zealand, rather than the typical residency requirement of 1350 days.^[115] When he applied, he also stated he had no intention of living in New Zealand, which is a criterion for citizenship.^[116] Then-Minister of Internal Affairs [Nathan Guy](#) waived these normal requirements, under an "exceptional circumstances" clause of the [Citizenships Act](#);^{[110][114][116]} Thiel's application cited his contribution to the economy—he had founded a venture capital fund in Auckland before applying, and invested \$7 million in two local companies—as well as his \$1 million donation to the [2011 Christchurch earthquake](#) appeal fund.^[114] [Rod Drury](#), founder of [Xero](#), also provided a formal reference for Thiel's application.^[110] Thiel's case was cited by critics as an example that New Zealand passports can be bought,^{[114][117]} something the New Zealand government denied.^[114]

Thiel is a self-described Christian and a promoter of [René Girard's Christian anthropology](#).^[118] He grew up in an [evangelical](#) household but, as of 2011, describes his religious

beliefs as "somewhat heterodox," and stated: "I believe [Christianity](#) is true but I don't sort of feel a compelling need to convince other people of that."^[32]

During his time at Stanford University, Thiel attended a lecture given by René Girard. Girard, a [Catholic](#), explained the role of sacrifice and the scapegoat mechanism in resolving social conflict, which appealed to Thiel as it offered a basis for his Christian faith without the [fundamentalism](#) of his parents.^[119]

A former [chess prodigy](#),^{[120][121]} Thiel began playing [chess](#) at the age of 6, and in 1979 was ranked the seventh strongest U.S. chess player in the under-13 category.^[15] According to [ChessBase](#), he also was "one of the highest ranked under-21 players in the country" at one period of time.^[122] He reached a peak [USCF rating](#) of 2342 in 1992, and holds the title of [Life Master](#).^[123] His [FIDE](#) rating is 2199 as of 2017, though he no longer participates in tournaments.^[124]

On November 30, 2016, Thiel made the ceremonial first move in the tie-break game of the [World Chess Championship 2016](#) between [Sergey Karjakin](#) and [Magnus Carlsen](#).^{[121][125]}

Thiel is an occasional commentator on [CNBC](#), having appeared on both *[Closing Bell](#)* with [Kelly Evans](#), and *[Squawk Box](#)* with [Becky Quick](#).^[126] He has been interviewed twice by [Charlie Rose](#) on [PBS](#).^[127] He has also contributed articles to *[The Wall Street Journal](#)*, *[First Things](#)*, *[Forbes](#)*, and *[Policy Review](#)*, a journal formerly published by the [Hoover Institution](#), on whose board he sits.

In *[The Social Network](#)*, Thiel was portrayed by [Wallace Langham](#).^[128] He described the film as "wrong on many levels".^[129]

Thiel was the inspiration for the Peter Gregory character on HBO's *[Silicon Valley](#)*.^[130] Thiel said of Gregory, "I liked him... I

think eccentric is always better than evil".^[131]

Jonas Lüscher stated in an interview with *Basellandschaftliche Zeitung* that he based the character Tobias Erkner in his novel *Kraft*("Force") on Thiel.^[132]

Thiel received a co-producer credit for *Thank You for Smoking*, a 2005 feature film based on Christopher Buckley's 1994 novel of the same name.^[133]

In 2006, Thiel won the Herman Lay Award for Entrepreneurship.^[134]

In 2007, he was honored as a Young Global leader by the *World Economic Forum* as one of the 250 most distinguished leaders age 40 and under.^[135]

On November 7, 2009, Thiel was awarded an honorary degree from *Universidad Francisco Marroquin*.^[136]

In 2012, *Students For Liberty*, an organization dedicated to spreading *libertarian* ideals on college campuses, awarded Thiel its "Alumnus of the Year" award.^[137]

In February 2013, Thiel received a *TechCrunch* Crunchie Award for Venture Capitalist of the Year.^[138]

In 1995, the *Independent Institute* published *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Intolerance at Stanford*, which Thiel co-authored along with *David O. Sacks*, and with a foreword by the late *Emory University* historian *Elizabeth Fox-Genovese*.^[139] The book is critical of political correctness and multiculturalism in higher education and the consequent dilution of academic rigor. Thiel and Sacks' writings drew criticism from then-Stanford Provost (and later President *George W. Bush's National Security Advisor*) *Condoleezza Rice*, with Rice joining then-Stanford President *Gerhard*

Casper in describing Thiel and Sacks' view of Stanford as "a cartoon, not a description of our freshman curriculum"^[140] and their commentary as "demagoguery, pure and simple."^[141]

In 2016, Thiel apologized for two statements he made in the book: 1) "The purpose of the rape crisis movement seems as much about vilifying men as about raising 'awareness'" and 2) "But since a multicultural rape charge may indicate nothing more than belated regret, a woman might 'realize' that she had been 'raped' the next day or even many days later." He stated: "More than two decades ago, I co-wrote a book with several insensitive, crudely argued statements. As I've said before, I wish I'd never written those things. I'm sorry for it. Rape in all forms is a crime. I regret writing passages that have been taken to suggest otherwise."^[142]

In Spring 2012, Thiel taught CS 183: Startup at Stanford University.^[143] Notes for the course, taken by student Blake Masters, led to a book titled *Zero to One* by Thiel and Masters, which was released in September 2014.^{[144][145][146]}

Derek Thompson, writing for *The Atlantic*, stated *Zero to One* "might be the best business book I've read". He described it as a "self-help book for entrepreneurs, bursting with bromides" but also as a "lucid and profound articulation of capitalism and success in the 21st century economy."^[147]

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