

Guest

The human cost — and potential profit — of AI

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Above: Many chatbots are not that great right now, but that will change.

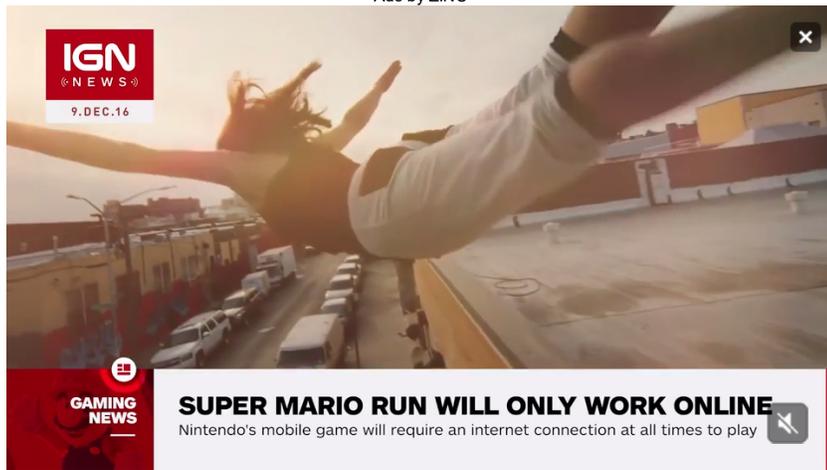
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Oxford University researchers have estimated that 47 percent of U.S. jobs could be automated within the next two decades (http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf). With everything from Amazon Go's cashierless stores (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrmMk1Myrxc>) to automated customer service (<http://venturebeat.com/2016/11/25/the-real-opportunities-with-facebook-messenger/>) to robo-advisors and driverless cars, we are moving toward a world with more productivity and fewer jobs.

As many have commented, this is very reminiscent of globalization and outsourcing. But, with outsourcing, we only did half the work — we struck trade deals around the world and increased productivity and corporate profits, but forgot to help retrain the work force to land jobs in the new economy (<https://thecodex.io/outsourcing-the-rich-when-we-start-to-care-d71182472cef#.yjfotpgvt>). The result was an entire population left behind, and populist reactions like Brexit and Trump. We can't afford to make the same mistake twice. That's why the broad adoption of AI and automation is primarily a human and societal challenge, not a technical one.

Depending on the decisions we make as a society, we could be heading towards a beautiful future with shared prosperity, leisure time, and innovation — or social/societal unrest and machine uprisings. I've laid out a proposal below of how we could structure society in this new world to favor the former — it's a variation of the commonly proposed universal basic income (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJgtRBkFfw>), but with a key twist. Imagine replacing taxes and welfare with shared ownership in a fleet of robots.

Ads by ZINC



It would look something like this: Robots are in the public interest. Any machine/system classified as artificial intelligence must reserve 20 percent economic interest in their production for the public. Every citizen is born with an equal economic ownership in the public pool of robotic production, which vests upon graduating high school.

This has the following benefits:

1. **Just like a guaranteed minimum income, in a world with fewer jobs, it provides a starting point to give people equal access to opportunity — health care, education and shelter.** Without the need to optimize purely for economic survival, it can unlock human creativity in arts, philosophy, and science. It's no coincidence that many of the top 100 richest people in the world come from either upper class or immigrant backgrounds. In either case, they have nothing to lose, and are willing to take on more "risk" to create something meaningful in the world. Guaranteed ownership in robotics can simulate this experience for the rest of society.
2. **Creates an economic incentive to have more children.** Shares are distributed to everyone equally. So, larger families have more equity vs. them" mentality, whereas equity in robotics puts us all on the same team. Further, welfare payments or a basic minimum income tend to not keep pace with GDP growth, and so the gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow. With shared robotic equity, everyone participates in the prosperity of innovation.
3. **Incentive to innovate — this is not socialism.** The owners/inventors of robots still own 80 percent, which, with no taxes, is better than what they get today. Every human is still free to pursue their ambitions, and now has the economic means to do so. You can still benefit significantly from inventing new robots, building robots, or *doing whatever you want*. With a guaranteed minimum ownership in robotics, we will not be in a cycle of artificially creating jobs to produce more things that people don't need; rather people will be incentivized by either (a) personal passions or (b) outsized economic/social returns that benefit society.
4. **Incentive to have basic education.** With a vesting schedule tied to graduating high school, people still have an incentive to get a basic education before they receive their shares. Then, upon graduation, the dividends from their shares can be used to pay for college / art school / trade school / their new business.
5. **Creates an economic incentive to have more children.** Shares are distributed to everyone equally. So, larger families have more equity, providing an incentive to keep our population young and productive.

So here's what the new world could look like:

Augmenting economic incentives with social incentives...

People like Elon Musk are motivated by a mission to save humanity and colonize Mars, not to pay rent. *Imagine if we could unlock the creative, mission-driven ambition of the rest of the population?*

With the freedom to pursue passions...

Work only for (a) personal passions or (b) outsized economic/social returns. People will take more risks, contribute more, and be happier. Robots will do the rest.

And shared prosperity (*the people own the robots*).

So, expanding on Isaac Asimov's three rules of robotics (<http://www.auburn.edu/~vestmon/robotics.html>), there will now be four:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.
4. Robots are in the public interest. They must obey rules 1–3, and any machine/system classified as Artificial Intelligence must reserve 20 percent economic interest in their production for the public. Every citizen is born with an equal economic ownership in the public pool of robotic production, which vests on graduating high school.

In some ways, this feels like the natural evolution of humanity, as significant as the invention of farming. Humans will be free of manual labor, and able to pursue their creative and intellectual pursuits. Rather than unhappy people working for survival, robots and AI will create abundance, the fourth rule of robotics will create structure, and we'll have a renaissance of philosophy, art, culture, and innovation to solve the world's most important challenges.

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BLAISE ZEREGA ([HTTP://VENTUREBEAT.COM/AUTHOR/BLAISEZEREGA/](http://venturebeat.com/author/blaisezerega/)) DECEMBER 08, 2016 05:50 PM

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