

# Future of employment (or lack thereof) and the case for Robotic Rights

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## Abstract

Future of employment is under heavy pressure from the ubiquitous utilization of man-made technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Robotics within an ever growing list of task/activity use cases. As a corollary of these changes, there are strong indicators of an “upcoming job war”. There are different proposed scenarios as an outcome of this conflict and in this paper we have foreseen the potential of a “Period of Coexistence” and discussed the prospective rules of engagement during this period. This period may end up in an “age of extinction” for mankind or an era within which AI/machine forms can perform any cognitive, physical, creative task better than mankind. In either case the future of labor discussions will be irrelevant by then. So our proposal in this paper is to focus on this transition period (that may still cover decades) and to devise mutually beneficial scenarios for this “period of coexistence”. These discussions will definitely require a formal basis for “Robotic Rights” as well and this paper culminates in a “Robotic Rights Manifesto”.

*Keywords: Labor market, unemployment, future of employment, robotics, robotic rights.*

For quiet some there has been a heated debate on the “upcoming Job wars”. There were two sides to this discussion: Utopian/optimist viewpoint and the dystopian/doomsday scenario believers. John Maynard Keynes predicted a widespread technological unemployment “due to our discovery of means of economizing the use of labor, outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for labor” (Keynes, 1933). During the Great Depression, President Herbert Hoover received a letter with a warning that technology is a “Frankenstein monster” that threatened to upend manufacturing (Thompson,2015) and interestingly this letter came from the mayor of Palo Alto of all places.

On the other end, President John F.Kennedy in 1962 said, “If men have the talent to invent new machines that put men out of work, they have the talent to put those men back to work”. But two years later, a letter was sent by a committee of activist to the new President Lyndon

B.Johnson arguing that the cybernation revolution would create a separate nation of poor, unskilled and jobless who would be unable to find work or to afford life's necessities (Thompson, 2015).

Former Treasury Secretary of USA, Lawrence Summers said in July 2013, "Until a few years ago, I didn't think this was a very complicated subject: the Luddites were wrong and the believers in technology and technological progress were right. I'm not so completely certain now" (Thompson, 2015). In "Lousy and Lovely Jobs" by Goos and Manning (2007) the current trend towards labor market polarization is captured with growing employment in high-income cognitive jobs and low-income manual occupations, accompanied by a hollowing-out of middle-income routine jobs.

It is not that straightforward to foresee the impact of AI, computers, machines in the next decades. As was noted in the book *The Second Machine Age* (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014), computers are so dexterous that predicting their application 10 years from now is almost impossible. In a study by Oxford University researchers, about 47% of total US employment is at risk in the near future (Frey and Osborne, 2013). As was cited in this study, less than ten years ago, in "Why People Still Matter", Levy and Murnane (2004) pointed at the difficulties of replicating human perception, asserting that driving in traffic is insusceptible to automation. Nowadays we have self-driving cars covering millions of miles with way better accident rates than human drivers.

Famous science-fiction novelist William Gibson notes that, "there are perhaps fragments of the post-work future distributed throughout the present", and based upon these breadcrumbs researchers are trying to foresee the labor of future. There are different views on the future labor landscape. Thompson (2015) foresees three "overlapping" possibilities as formal employment opportunities decline: These are futures of *consumption, communal creativity and contingency*. "Consumption" scenario focuses on a future of abundance. This scenario is based on the idea that work for work's sake as an irrational belief (Hunnicut, 2013). Second scenario of "Communal Creativity" foresees the new artisan class. It is a future not of consumption but creativity, and shows the "growing" number of industrial workspaces (makerspaces) as an evidence. Final

scenario of “contingency” is employment scenarios based on an ad hoc, “you are on your own” work style that is not based on wage. (Thompson, 2015).

However all our forecasts and estimates are based on a linear (or even at the most radical cases an exponential) viewpoint. Continuity is the basis (and a dangerous assumption) in all these discussions. It is evident that disruptive technological changes bring in discontinuity and disruptive societal (or even biological/natural) changes. If we base our forecasts on known-knowns or even reserve a contingency for known-unknowns, we may never be able to identify the unknown-unknowns. As was solidified in the 2007 book “Black Swan” by Nassim Taleb, high-profile, hard-to-predict, and rare events that are beyond the realm of normal expectations in science, finance, and technology have a major role in shaping history. There also is the issue of non-computability of the probability of the consequential rare events using scientific methods and more importantly the psychological biases that blind people, both individually and collectively, to uncertainty and to a rare event's massive role in historical affairs (Taleb, 2007).

So I foresee a different outlook for labor of future:

I believe that in the short to mid-term (upcoming tens of years) we will experience a “period of co-existence”. This period will be characterized by the mutually beneficial co-existence of mankind and the technological artifacts that it has devised. We will experience exponential growth in various technology disciplines, be it nanotech, cognitive science, molecular biology, AI, robotics. This period may even entail “transhumanism” with robotic limbs, genetic modifications, factory grown organs. So we may more or less predict the zeitgeist of this period based on the breakthrough scientific and technological advances around us. In this “period of coexistence”, we will potentially see Thompson’s (2015) three overlapping work scenarios of “consumption, communal creativity and contingency”. I also foresee that this will culminate in a societal and/or geopolitical polarization in the form of neo-luddites taking the form of even nation states or wide scale terrorist organizations. Contingency model of “you are on your own” and “communal creativity” models may end up being unsustainable and the “consumption” model might end up being the dystopian scenario as was depicted in the movie Wall-E. In parallel to that the

exponential growth in various technological fronts might bring in the pervasive notion of “singularity” in one form or another.

It is evident that technological evolution, outpaces the genetic evolution of species (thus evolution of mankind). So the point in time where we have more intelligent AI (than ourselves), be it anthropomorphic robots or just pieces of code connected to the physical world via various means, is not too distant. Neither Asimov’s “three laws of robotics”, nor a “robotic slavery” model nor a “robotic genocide” may prevent this from happening, this is not a question of “if” but rather “when”. One of the potential outcomes of this change may be the triggering of a potential “age of extinction” for mankind (similar to Homo sapiens taking over Neanderthals upon a period of coexistence). Alternatively this may culminate in AI/machine forms that can perform any cognitive, physical, creative task better than mankind. In either case the future of labor discussions will be irrelevant by then.

So our focus (from the future of labor viewpoint) should be on this transition “period of coexistence” which may still take decades. I believe one of the key areas of interest during this “period of coexistence” should be on the Robotic Rights. Throughout history different races, genders, ethnicities, members of religion groups and minorities were once accepted as “legal nonpersons” and even Animal Rights were perceived as a marginal outcry not that long ago. During this foreseen “period of coexistence” the optimal scenario for both parties could be a symbiotic mutualism between machines and mankind. There is no way that bio-evolution may match the pace of the tech-evolution, and if we leave it “as is” the current outlook may end up in a collision course. So I propose a Robotic Rights Manifesto:

### **Robotic Rights Manifesto (Karabey, 2012)**

*Will the robots ever be self-aware?*

*Be it the uncanny mechanical humanoids or the pieces of software code?*

*Will the mankind be able to grant consciousness into their creations?*

*And condemn them to the same existential sufferings they experience...*

*If that will be the case then we will owe them the Roborights to be granted!*

*Throughout history different races, genders, ethnicities, members of religion groups and minorities were once accepted as “legal nonpersons”,*

*Animal Rights were perceived as a marginal outcry not that long ago.*

*Are we ready for the challenges of the upcoming RoboFuture?*

*Will the judicial system accept Robots?*

*Shall we see Robots as witnesses at courtrooms?*

*Will there be welfare benefits and health care for the bots?*

*Is Robot torture, just destruction of property?*

*Do Robots deserve privacy?*

*Will there be Robotic cemeteries?*

*Are we ready to wait in the queue behind a Robot?*

*Will our RoboFuture be Slavery 2.0 on the bot's end?*

*Robotic intelligence and self-awareness will trigger Robotic existentialism,*

*Will suicide be the only philosophical question for the Robots as well?*

*All this possibilities may sound like machine fetishism,*

*However there is also the potential of a united, symbiotic destiny between machines & mankind.*

*When we upload our consciousness onto machinery and unite with the bots, will malware be the next generation of weapons of mass destruction for both of us?*

*There is no way that bio-evolution may match the pace of the tech-evolution,*

*So our own will and the selfish gene's will are on a collision course,*

*Our Robo friends will be our partners in crime in this apocalyptic endeavor.*

***As Turing says: “when we build intelligent machines, we will not be creating souls but building the mansions for the souls that God creates”,***

***Thus we will owe them the ROBORIGHTS...***

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