

Historic Work Changes
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There is growing concern that Artificial Intelligence (robots) may make human beings obsolete. If robots can perform all work better than humans, what is the value of human labor?

If we look at how human beings labored from the beginning of their emergence as a unique species, we will see great transformations in what we do as humans, and we are not only still here, but living much better than ever before.

Our first ancestors were small clans of hunter-gatherers, in which all members worked. Men were generally the hunters, but sometimes, women hunted too. They certainly fished in rivers and at seacoasts until the invention of sea-going ships, which then became solely male jobs.

Women\222s Work

Women were the first healers, skilled in identifying plant medicines and adept at helping women in childbirth. They were also the healers of men wounded in the hunt or later in warfare. But they were increasingly replaced by males, until almost modern times.

When the world was lit by fire, men worked at cutting trees, shaping logs into planks, building everything from furniture to houses. Women worked as weaving cloth, sewing, knitting, embroidering, all things to do with clothing and rug and carpet weaving. Even today, the best and most beautiful carpets in the world are the Persian carpets woven by women and girl children. But this industry is now dying. Machines manufacture textiles, but human beings are still involved. Machines do not work by themselves.

Men\222s Worst Work

The worst jobs in the world were mining, horrific labor that was only created by need or force. We had need for coal (replacing wood), salt from mines, and metal ores for making objects and later mixed with coal to make steel. These are not labors that humans have loved doing, but necessity or slavery mandated such jobs.

Seagoing boats required oars and sails, but they were still heavy and dangerous work for men. In antiquity, large boats required oars, and men were enslaved to do this.

Slaves did deadly work. The slaves who worked in indigo plantations (indigo dye) had short lives. Plantations raising sugar cane and cotton were also deadly, not willingly performed by free men. Construction of the Panama Canal was another horror, dealing with malaria and tropical diseases, and was only performed by workers in the most dire need.

Transportation

Animal husbandry was an early human endeavor when animals were tamed and enslaved. Animals were (and still are) a major source of food, and their care created work for both men and women (farmers). The horse was the most essential animal for transportation, other than walking.

Horses became both necessities in warfare and transportation, both ordinary and luxury. A vast number of jobs were involved in care of horses and their needs from blacksmiths for horseshoes to saddle makers, reins and harnesses, and carts or chariots pulled by horses. Special clothes for horseback riding were an industry, as was the labor of cleaning streets of horse manure.

Imagine how many people were put out of work when the bicycle, automobile, trains, and airplanes were invented. Yet they found new work in the new industries.

Artificial Intelligence/Robotics

This is the issue of robotics and artificial intelligence today. There is much work that human beings have been compelled to do that robotics can replace. But human beings will still need incomes, and the probable future will be government salaries for all (something basic), permitting human beings to work at what they love doing.

Imagine being free to be artists, make ceramics, design and sew clothing, act in plays and films, cook food out of pleasure, be forest rangers, North Atlantic fish and seaweed farmers, amateur astronomers, and so many other jobs that human beings love doing.

The Olympic Games and sports are examples of efforts we love, without compulsion. They are part of the luxury of being human.

Robots can serve us, sparing us the misery of abusing humans and animals. We can then practice what we love most, and life can be better than ever before.

678 words

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