

# The Future of Digital Man

## Introduction

Peter Drucker's book *the Future of Industrial Man*<sup>1</sup>, argued that society's inability to recognize its own transition from a mercantile society to an industrial society contributed to the popularity of fascism and socialism and led to World War II. Our society is repeating history, by failing to recognize that we have transitioned from an industrial society to a digital society. Thus, we are still facing the problems Drucker discussed in his book: disconnected and archaic institutions, lack of legitimate power, and a large swarth of the world feeling displaced, valueless, and desperate. We are ignoring the full implication of technological change while believing that it will somehow solve all our problems by bringing forth either a utopia or complete destruction of mankind. If we are to maintain the human face of our society, then we must invest in humanity by reclaiming our social and political spheres from the hands of technology.

## Society is Mankind's Responsibility

First, we must understand what is meant by living in a society that has a 'human face'. Society is a political concept used to regulate the interactions and behaviors of individual humans. It focuses on what rules are necessary to limit the amount of pain and want endured by humanity as a whole. The maintenance of this concept is the responsibility of all individual members of the society. If the society becomes unbalanced or dysfunctional it is the fault of all individual members and each member needs to act to correct the balance. Thus, maintaining a 'human face' means:

- Focusing on what rules are necessary to limit pain and want for all members
- All individuals within a society are responsible for maintaining said society

The minute we give this responsibility away is the minute we lose society's human element.

Given this definition, how does AI fit in? I think Gary Kasparov<sup>2</sup> put it best when he argued that, currently, we are not designing artificial intelligence, but augmented intelligence. This means we are developing advanced tools to augment humanity's abilities. While our machines are being designed to make independent decisions, they're still dependent on humans for their programming and for their purpose. AI has not, yet, reached the point where it can act on its own, make decisions on its own, or determine its own purpose. AI is an advanced tool, but it's still a tool that humanity is responsible for.

Humans love to make exceptions for themselves, however, just as a child will be quick to point out when a parent breaks one of their own rules, AI will not tolerate this inconsistency. Either the rules it was programmed with apply to all or they apply to no one. Either privacy is a right, or it isn't. Either data belongs to the individual, or it doesn't. Either the government is

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<sup>1</sup> Drucker, Peter F. *The Future of Industrial Man*. Transaction Publishers, Piscataway, NJ. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Vanian, Jonathan. "Garry Kasparov Talks Artificial Intelligence, Deep Blue, And AlphaGo Zero." *Fortune*, Fortune, 10 May 2018, fortune.com/2018/05/10/garry-kasparov-artificial-intelligence-deep-blue/.

responsible for the country's security and maintaining law and order, or it isn't. Either workers have rights, or they don't. Either education is available to everyone, or it isn't. Either equality is a fundamental cornerstone of the liberal order, or it isn't. If we want AI to uphold and respect our society, then we need to address the titanic difference between our social narrative and reality.

## **The Double-Edged Nature of Hope**

I am a freelancer and a social activist, and I grew up in the rural area of Washington State. In my hometown, the talented worked for Boeing while everyone else worked for McDonalds or Walmart. Now, Boeing is leaving, Walmart treats its employees terribly because they can, and within the next twenty years most of their jobs will be taken over by AI. Because our society is a capitalistic society, Drucker argued that our value is determined by our contribution to the economy. If we do not have a job, we are worthless. AI, for the people in my hometown and in many towns all over the United States, means that their value will be taken away and there is nothing they can do to stop it. They are trapped in a situation they didn't create, and they're being told that's just the way things are. That AI is good *because* it's taking their jobs away and making society more efficient. For these workers, efficient means a society without them. The U.S. has faced these kinds of economic changes before, but there were often limited to specific fields or industries. Once AI is truly achieved, it may be the largest economic and society change since the industrial revolution-the same revolution that created the social, technological, and political setting for two world wars. It is foolish to think AI will be less disruptive.

Erich Hoffer wrote in his book *The True Believer* that "If the Communists win Europe and a large part of the world, it will not be because they know how to stir up discontent or how to infect people with hatred, but because they know how to preach hope<sup>3</sup>." This is as true today as it was in the 1950s (replace communists with whatever fringe political party is on the rise). We have seen this since the 2009 elections, if not further back. The former president, Barack Obama, won because he preached hope for a large majority of the country. The current president won because he preached hope for, not only a radical minority, but a large of the country that had felt 'betrayed' by the previous administration. Trump promised to seal America off from the outside world i.e. get rid of the international competition for struggling workers, promised to 'put America first' i.e. reaffirm that the polices from the 1950s were still able to handle the new world and that things didn't have to change, and he promised to humble the very people who were heralding the efficient Age of AI and further technological developments. Former President Obama inspired hope was that the oncoming crises could be solved easily and painlessly. The current president inspired hope that we already have the necessary solutions and there wouldn't be any change.

For the unprepared, change is paralyzing. The state of the world today is a perfect testimony to that fact. AI will only make this paralyze worse, meaning that our citizenry will flock to the entities that preach hope and stability. Drucker argued that the industrial age changed the nature of power. For most of human society, land ownership represented power. In the industrial age, participation in the stock market represented power. In the digital age, ownership of data represents power. Those who own data are mostly in Silicon Valley. Those who will be

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<sup>3</sup> Hoffer, Eric. *The True Believer*. Perennial, New York, NY. 1968.

programming AI is the same minority in Silicon Valley. Right now, these men are alienating the average worker more than they're courting them, but that only means that the average worker is being pushed to those who will advocate extreme action to overthrow the modern age barons. If we do not address this imbalance, then our society will not only lose its human face, but may destroy itself from within.

## **Society**

Drucker believed in humanity and in empowering humanity to face the future. Somehow, we lost sight of his brilliant insight. We cannot stop change (despite what the populists may say), but that doesn't mean we can't control our fate. AI is a danger as long as it's left in the hands of the minority that believes there are two sets of rules: one for the elite and one for the masses. For society to remain human, it must restore the balance and invest in the individual.

There are three ways to do this:

- An electronic bill of rights
- Enforce the power of institutions
- Train a worker to learn, not work

## **Bill of Rights**

To correct the imbalance, we must restore the right to privacy to society. Property will remain important as long as mankind keeps its mortal coil, but property is no longer purely physical. Property is physical and digital, and our laws and institutions need to be changed to reflect that. Just as a company cannot randomly enter your house and take your laptop, watch, frying pan, etc., they should no longer be able to retain your digital data such as your location, your search history, your preferences, etc. In my line of work, there is an unspoken fear that every tweet I write that focuses on social change, human rights, and equality is being collected and added to a file that will later be used against me when the government decides to crackdown on dissenters. I shouldn't be worried about the newest flavor of the NKVD bursting in my house to arrest me because the AI version of Lavrentiy Beria has multiple digital files on all my 'anti-state' activity. It needs to be reverted into private property that can only be tampered with following a criminal or federal investigation.

As Drucker argued, employment defined a person as part of society because it determined whether they could contribute to society. Property defined a person as a social elite because it suggested that a man had worked hard to earn that property. Digital property could be used to merge these two definitions. Having digital property enables people to work in ways that weren't conceivable in the 50s and 60s and provides a source of power that used to be shared by the elite only. Digital property helps equalize society because it creates a new world for people to interact and contribute in. This world should belong to the masses.

Additionally, by reverting data back to its rightful owners, not only would we limit the amount of power the elite has over us, but also create an investment in AI that was not there prior. Right now, AI seems so distant and techy, that the average person has no tangible

relationship with it. It's something scary that will threaten everything we know and love. However, if we were to revert our digital properties back to us, then the average person will be forced to engage with AI on a daily basis.

The General Data Protection Regulation act passed by the EU forces companies to be more transparent about how they are collecting data and what they are collecting the data for. If these companies used AI to provide the required information to the consumer, then AI and consumer will be forced to engage in dialogue and form an understanding. AI will change from being an unknown terror to a strangely familiar piece of society. It will turn the narrative of AI versus human worker to AI plus human worker. It may inspire unions to be created for AI workers, advocacy groups, law firms, etc. This leads us to my next point: the importance of institutions.

## **Institutions**

As a freelancer, I am my own manager and institution. This will become the norm in the future, especially as AI replaces the basic infrastructure of our economy. As AI takes over more and more jobs, people are going to be forced to either become managers for the AI workers or start their own businesses. This means that people need to learn how to manage themselves. Instead of telling people find a company to work for, we will be telling people to work for themselves. This means that national and statewide institutions are going to be more important than ever.

An individual working with clients is on their own and unless they understand what their rights are in a client-employee relationship, they can be taken advantage of by their clients. Additionally, clients may feel lost in a sea of new businesses and end up working with a company that exploits them. AI could keep track of how many hours I work on a project, but there needs to be laws put in place that ensure AI will not record the hours I spend doing other things nor penalize me for not working 24/7 on a job. Additionally, I could outsource some of my work to AI, but then there needs to be a discuss on what can be charged. If I outsource one part of my task to the AI, saving me an hour, can I still charge for that work or does it become 'free' labor? AI could be used to ensure client-contractor compatibility, to cut down on the time I spend looking for jobs and the amount of time the client spends interviewing candidates.

However, this will further blur the line between personal life and economic life. If I am freelancer, and a client sees my twitter page and dislikes what I tweet, I may lose their business. Or they maybe see I was tweeting instead of working on their project and send me an angry email asking why I was taking time off.

Our economic and legal institutions need to be updated to ensure that independent workers, AI bots, and clients are protected. There area number of laws and institutions for small businesses, but freelancing is a different ball game. Freelancers are lone workers, not a collection of people working, and, thus, the freelancer needs to be jack of all trades. AI will assist the freelance with several tasks, but it will also open them up to several abuses. We need institutions that switch their focus from multiple people businesses to a business of one. We need institutions that come to the worker, not forcing the worker to go to a department. We need institutions that

can sense when an infraction is occurring, because some freelancers/clients may not know when they are being taken advantage of. We need institutions that will review different state consumer/corporation laws and determine who they apply to and when. We may need digital commerce laws that regulate, not only cross state transactions, but international transactions on an individual level. Institutions need to be scaled down, back to the street level, as oppose to a federal or even state level.

For those who work with AI in a corporate setting, they will most likely be managers. Their responsibilities will be a mixture of a task manager and a parent. AI, in the early stages, will most likely look to managers to help them understand human interactions, laws, and expectations. However, this will open AI to several abuses and will create the need for institutions such as AI labor unions, AI advocacy groups, AI law firms, and new AI regulatory institutions.

## **Knowledge**

Finally, given the fact that AI will take over the manually jobs, freeing humans to do the more challenging jobs, our education system needs to be revamped. We need to reevaluate middle school and high school, focusing on being independent workers, on management, and how to learn. We cannot rely on standardized tests to assess our student's abilities. Instead, we should give them a chance to practice management, work with AI to understand how to work with those who are different, and learn how to learn. Human workers will only excel if they can adjust and they can only adjust if they are taught how to learn new skills. Traditionally, middle school and high school is supposed to train pre-teens and teenagers how to navigate the world. Instead of teaching children how to memorize facts and perform well on a poorly designed test, we need to teach children how to shift through the endless amount of data AI will help us collect, how to spot bias and harmful information, how to assess the reliability of a source, how to trace origins of ideas, and how to connect ideas together. For the foreseeable future, AI will augment our abilities, not replace them, which means we need to focus on developing our capability to hypothesis, assess, and be open minded. We need to teach children to be hungry for knowledge and not to be afraid of starting over, no matter one's age.

For those who will be replaced by AI, we need federal and state level institutions to retrain workers. We need more federal programs to provide higher education assistance. We need more grants to fund independent businesses. We need to return purpose and value to the unemployed, otherwise will only be planting the seed of society's destruction.

## **Conclusion**

AI will change many facets of society. The only way to remain human is to invest in humanity while we still can. AI will look to us for guidance and if we do not live up to our ideals, AI may reject us. There are three ways to reclaim our responsibility over society and ensure it maintains its human face: bill of rights, institutions, and education. By passing a bill of rights, we return value to the individual and create a path for human and AI integration. The world's liberal order relies on institutions and they will grow more important as AI is implemented. New institutions will have to be created to regulate AI and current institutions will

need to be adjusted to protect individuals. The key to all of this is redesigning our education system. Children need to be taught *how* to learn and workers need to be taught to embrace change. If we do not do these things and invest in humanity, then humanity may reject the current society and replace it with something worse.

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