



A Lesson From Ancient Sparta for Living in an AI World

Most technologies are not inherently good or evil. Their “morality” depends on the uses to which they are put and the intentions of those who use them.

While much has rightfully been written about the [dangers](#) that artificial intelligence poses to humanity, it is not a given that AI will be the end of mankind or our freedoms — that ultimately depends on what we as individuals and as a society choose to do with the possibilities artificial intelligence opens up to us.

One of the most pervasive questions presented by the idea of AI is the question of how humanity will adapt to a world without work. While it is still debatable at this point what share of human labor machines will be capable of doing, we are already seeing them [perform many tasks](#) that were once imagined to only be doable by humans, such as creative endeavors.

Thus, although many observers still assure us blue-collar jobs like plumbing and construction are safe, it’s not inconceivable to imagine that, given enough time, the sophistication of AI and of its corresponding hardware will evolve to the point that even these lines of work will be assumed by machines.

The inevitable conclusion is that, sooner or later, artificial intelligence will likely replace humans in most forms of work as we presently understand it. Doubtless, as most technologies have created new jobs while assuming old ones, AI is sure to open up new professional opportunities; but given the nature of AI, it’s likely that the number of new jobs won’t correspond to the number of jobs being eliminated.

This is because artificial intelligence is fundamentally different from other forms of technology that have preceded it. By its very nature, AI takes humanity out of the equation completely. The creation of the automobile may have taken away the jobs of the horse-drawn carriage makers, but it made new jobs in car factories. But if AI ultimately makes it to its logical conclusion and is able to do everything (or nearly everything) a person can do, where does that leave us?

What will be needed is a paradigm shift.

First, there will have to be a moving away from the assumption of “work” or “labor” being the means by which one earns his subsistence. Instead, we must move toward having our society become “capitalist” in the true sense of the word.

What does that mean? We understand that “capital” refers to assets that generate money for their owner without the need for work (other than a certain degree of management and supervision). A



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person who owns stocks in Chevron, for example, makes money from his mere ownership of shares, in the form of dividends, without having to work at a gas station or on an oil rig.

The super-wealthy are generally able to live entirely off of the capital earnings from their interests in various enterprises, without the need for a paycheck from a job.

This is where we would have to get most people in a society where machines do all the work. That is, if AI has taken over nearly all jobs, then the way for people to still make a living is for them to own income-producing capital instruments — either by directly owning the machines doing the work or by owning shares in companies whose dividend payouts are collectively enough for people to live off of.

This is the argument made in the books [The Capitalist Manifesto](#) and *The New Capitalists*, two collaborative works by Aristotelian philosopher Mortimer Adler and economist Louis Kelso.

For Adler and Kelso, rather than being an instrument of tyranny, such a society would actually make Americans *more* free by making citizens economically independent in the same way the Founding Fathers' affluence and status as property owners informed their views of liberty and their shaping of a republic based on limited government.

The second aspect of the paradigm shift is a rejection of the notion that working to make a living is the highest form of fulfillment for a human being. This is an idea that is very prevalent in our society; men tend to measure their worth by how much they earn, and people form their personal identities around their respective professions. When someone enters old age and can no longer work, they sometimes feel useless — and society often treats them that way.

People, then, will have to change their mindset to realize that working to make money isn't the only way to have purpose in life, and that not having to worry about making a living doesn't necessarily mean one has to devolve into idleness.

History is filled with examples of how a society can pursue greatness even when its members do not make economic pursuits their primary goal. One can look to ancient Greece — in particular, to Sparta.

At the height of its power, Spartan society was an agriculture-based economy sustained by an immense population of slaves known as *helots*. While the helots did all the work, Spartan citizens devoted themselves to what they considered higher pursuits.

Spartans could have used this situation to lead lives of sloth. Instead, they developed themselves to their peak as individuals and as a society. Famously, Spartans used their free time to become one of the most formidable races of warriors in all history. What is less well known is that Spartans also dedicated themselves to creating culture — they produced a great amount of art, music, and literature, although much of it has been lost to history.

Nor do the growth of technology and the liberation of humanity from work have to go hand-in-hand with moral decay. After all, monks and clerics of every variety — from Catholic to Buddhist — are able to devote themselves to a life of high spiritual pursuits precisely because they are free from the obligations of a job. In some religions, they are sustained by the financial contributions of church membership and wealthy patrons.

In a world where AI has eliminated many people's need to work, there would be greater opportunity to increase religious devotion and create culture.

The choice would be humanity's. Would we use this technology to chase cheap thrills and escapism, or as a tool for our betterment?



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