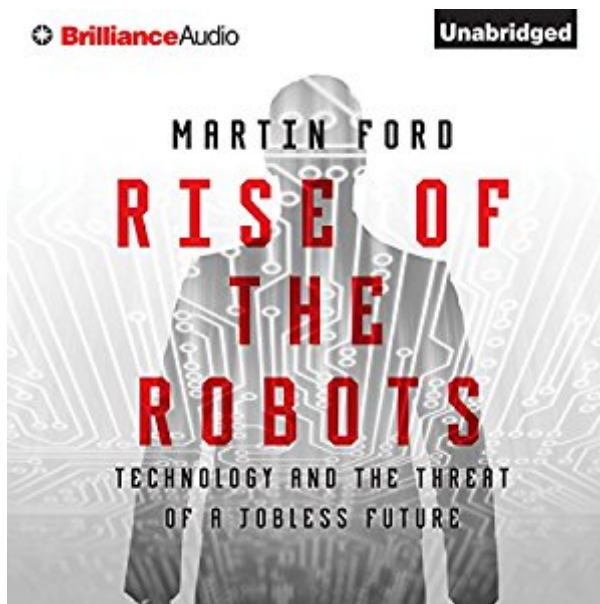


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Rise Of The Robots: Technology And The Threat Of A Jobless Future



Synopsis

In a world of self-driving cars and big data, smart algorithms and Siri, we know that artificial intelligence is getting smarter every day. Though all these nifty devices and programs might make our lives easier, they're also well on their way to making "good" jobs obsolete. A computer winning Jeopardy might seem like a trivial, if impressive, feat, but the same technology is making paralegals redundant as it undertakes electronic discovery, and is soon to do the same for radiologists. And that, no doubt, will only be the beginning. In Silicon Valley the phrase "disruptive technology" is tossed around on a casual basis. No one doubts that technology has the power to devastate entire industries and upend various sectors of the job market. But *Rise of the Robots* asks a bigger question: can accelerating technology disrupt our entire economic system to the point where a fundamental restructuring is required? Companies like Facebook and YouTube may only need a handful of employees to achieve enormous valuations, but what will be the fate of those of us not lucky or smart enough to have gotten into the great shift from human labor to computation? The more Pollyannaish, or just simply uninformed, might imagine that this industrial revolution will unfold like the last: even as some jobs are eliminated, more will be created to deal with the new devices of a new era. In *Rise of the Robots*, Martin Ford argues that is absolutely not the case. Increasingly, machines will be able to take care of themselves, and fewer jobs will be necessary. The effects of this transition could be shattering. Unless we begin to radically reassess the fundamentals of how our economy works, we could have both an enormous population of the unemployed—the truck drivers, warehouse workers, cooks, lawyers, doctors, teachers, programmers, and many, many more, whose labors have been rendered superfluous by automated and intelligent machines.

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Customer Reviews

I have taught Artificial Intelligence (AI) for 3 decades at a major university. Until about 10 years ago, whenever someone worried about the effect of intelligent software/hardware destroying future jobs, I would always give my "buggy whip" argument, which goes like this: "When the automobile was invented it DID destroy many jobs. Makers of buggy whips and horse troughs were put out of business. But many more NEW jobs were created to replace those older jobs. Witness all the gas stations, auto mechanic shops, car factories, etc." About 8 years ago I lost faith in the buggy whip argument. I realized that, as the technology of AI advanced, a point would be reached in which intelligent software and general-purpose robots could perform all tasks (both mental and physical) that are currently achievable only by highly educated humans. Once one intelligent robot exists with a high level of general intelligence, it can be mass produced. There have been many advances in AI in recent years (in neural networks, planning and learning systems). Machine learning systems can now learn a number of complex cognitive tasks simply by observing the past performance of human experts. I have always been an admirer of the combination of modern capitalism and (relatively) free markets as the major drivers of wealth. However, modern capitalism (with its corporations, stock and dividends) is less than a few centuries old. There is no reason to believe that it must last forever. Its "reign" over older economic systems may well end abruptly in the near future. At one time I toyed with writing a book about my concerns regarding intelligent automation and its future effect on political and economic systems but Martin Ford has done a 100-times better job that I could have ever done. His book is very persuasive in pointing out why the "buggy whip" argument will cease to remain persuasive. I only have two complaints about Ford's book: (a) the title sounds a bit too much like a title for a pulp-fiction work and so I fear that not enough people will read it and (b) the first 75 pages consist of a standard summary of current economic facts and principles and so I fear that some readers may quit reading his book before they get to the really interesting parts, which in my opinion, start after page 75.

This is a very well-researched book - the author has thought through a number of angles on this. Much better in my mind than several authors who have made sweeping statements about job losses (or the replacement of jobs by industries that have yet to be invented). The author has done a nice job integrating details of technology in robotics and AI with economic impacts. A must read for

anyone who is thinking about this topic, and for young people who are just starting out in the job market.

This is a must read book. While our politicians are distracting us with issues like bathroom laws, automation has, is, and will change our society in ways that most people are unaware of. Children in school today, at every level, are being prepared for jobs that do not or will not exist when they graduate. I've bought several copies of this book to share with friends and colleagues. The writing is clear and concise. The title is unfortunate. The book is not about the rise of robots. The book is about automation and the economic, social, and political issues it is already creating and will become greater over time (The very near future).

Many years ago I realized that economic rationalism, if carried thru to it's ultimate conclusion, would bring us all back to the middle-ages. The vast majority would live in squalor, a tiny minority would be fabulously rich. That would be the rational outcome of economic rationalism, so much so that I have since taken the view that an essential function of government is wealth re-distribution, because the alternative leads to societal collapse. This view is also taken by the author, but, is disputed by some well known economists including the redoubtable Paul Krugman. I fear that this may be due to some intellects simply being unable to join the dots & therefore, unable to slot the picture into both human history & human future. Current social values such as respecting saving over spending, exporting over importing, producing over consuming ... need to be re-thought. The key to economic growth lies in mass consumption. Anything, (be it robots or workers doing 70 hour weeks for low wages) which undermines this scenario, should generally be regarded as an evil & given limited tolerance only. Consumption is king !

This book deserves to gain way more relevance in economic circles than it currently has. Before reading this volume I've never seriously looked into this matter and assumed that the traditional mathematical tools used to model the effects of technological innovation in neoclassical or Austrian economic theory were quite adequate (I am an economist). I was thus unconcerned about the effects that modern automation would have in the near future. Yet... this volume raises numerous questions that current models are unable to address. Moreover it states what in political circles is still a taboo: that society as it is must be reconsidered. By no means comprehensive, still this book is one of the best starting points on understanding the forces shaping the future of economics and society. A must read.

Once you grasp how computer driven advances have been steadily eliminating and distilling jobs, you start to see it's affects everywhere you look. Computer programs reduce occupations like tax prep double column accounting to data entry jobs. Buyers for retail operations are replaced by bar code scanners. Our schools deteriorate, because the need for educated low level employees has been reduced iby machines that will cipher and figure for them. Once a simple and pleasant person could earn a living directing calls. Today you push one for this and two for that, but no option tells you what happened to the receptionist. If you ever wondered why you have to support your college educated child while she works as an unpaid intern at a very profitable company, this book will explain it.

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