The Intellectual Extinction of Humanity: Artificial Intelligence, the Reversal of Civilization, and the Animalization of Human Existence

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In recent years, the debate over whether artificial intelligence could bring about the extinction of humanity has grown increasingly intense. In September 2026, Evan Hubinger, a researcher at Anthropic, publicly stated that, in his personal assessment, there was more than a 10 percent chance that artificial intelligence could cause human extinction within the next decade. Geoffrey Hinton, one of the pioneers of artificial intelligence, has expressed similar concerns. Such predictions have attracted widespread attention, but they have also been publicly challenged by NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang and U.S. President Donald Trump.

Yet this debate may be overlooking a more fundamental question: **Does artificial intelligence really need wars, biological weapons, or other catastrophic means to destroy humanity?**

I believe that the deeper danger facing humanity may not be physical extinction, but intellectual extinction. Artificial intelligence may not need to destroy human bodies to gradually erode our capacity for independent thought, knowledge creation, and the recognition of our own value. Ultimately, humanity may continue to exist biologically while declining intellectually, spiritually, and civilizationally.

I. When Machines Begin to Think for Humanity

Jensen Huang holds an optimistic view of the future of artificial intelligence. In his vision, AI can free human beings from repetitive tasks, allowing them more time and opportunities to think, create, and engage in activities of greater value.

Such an expectation may well apply to Huang himself. He is a corporate leader who commands enormous technological and commercial resources, possesses clearly defined strategic objectives, and operates within an organizational system capable of transforming technology into wealth and influence.

But the question is: Can Huang's personal experience and way of thinking represent those of the overwhelming majority of ordinary people?

For thousands of years, the development of human society has been closely intertwined with labor. Through repetitive daily work, people acquire skills, accumulate experience, establish social relationships, and gradually discover their place within society. Labor is not merely a means of survival; it is also an important source of personal worth and social recognition.

Artificial intelligence is now transforming this historically established structure. As machines become capable of performing an increasing number of tasks requiring human skills, knowledge, and labor, what will happen to those who have long derived their sense of purpose and identity from their work?

Technological elites may be able to use artificial intelligence to further enhance their creativity, but ordinary people will not necessarily gain the same opportunities. **Freeing humanity from labor does not automatically elevate humanity to a higher level of intellectual existence.**

When an ordinary person discovers that the knowledge and skills accumulated over decades are no longer needed, that their labor no longer provides meaningful social recognition, and that even independent thinking has lost much of its practical necessity, will that person still possess the motivation to learn, create, and explore?

I have serious doubts.

II. From Written Civilization Back to Visual Civilization

The history of human civilization is, to a considerable extent, also the history of the changing ways in which knowledge has been preserved and transmitted.

From prehistoric cave paintings to the earliest writing systems of Mesopotamia and the oracle bone inscriptions of ancient China, and subsequently to stone inscriptions, bamboo slips, paper, printed books, newspapers, and the internet, humanity gradually developed systems for recording and transmitting knowledge in which written language played a central role.

Although the media of communication have continuously evolved, writing has remained essential to preserving experience, organizing thought, and sustaining civilization across generations.

Even with the rise of the internet, this fundamental structure did not undergo a complete transformation. Knowledge simply moved from paper to electronic screens, and from physical books into digital databases. Human beings still needed to read, understand, remember, and reflect in order to transform external information into knowledge of their own.

However, the rise of short-form video and the development of generative artificial intelligence are now changing this process.

Although they are not the same technology, the two may reinforce a common cultural tendency: the acquisition of knowledge is becoming increasingly immediate, visual, and fragmented. People are growing accustomed to receiving images, sounds, and machine-generated answers directly, rather than personally reading, searching for information, and organizing complex ideas.

In this sense, humanity's approach to acquiring knowledge appears to be undergoing a kind of reversal: from written language back toward images, and from sustained reading toward immediate sensory consumption.

An even more profound transformation lies in the fact that artificial intelligence no longer merely supplies information. It increasingly performs the tasks of organizing knowledge, generating explanations, and even structuring reasoning.

In the past, human beings had to read, memorize, and think for themselves in order to accumulate and transmit knowledge. Today, these intellectual activities can increasingly be delegated to artificial intelligence.

If knowledge no longer needs to be personally retained by human beings, and if ideas can be generated without sustained individual intellectual effort, are we gradually surrendering our position as the subjects of knowledge?

The question is not whether writing will disappear, but whether human beings will still need to undergo the intellectual process through which thought itself is formed.

III. The Animalization of Humanity After the Loss of Social Value

What concerns me most is the possibility of the animalization of human spiritual and intellectual life.

What distinguishes human beings from other animals is not simply our higher intelligence, but also our ability to give existence meaning beyond immediate biological needs through labor, thought, creativity, and the transmission of civilization.

Yet when machines become better than human beings at thinking and creating, and eventually become capable of performing most socially productive activities, the foundations upon which ordinary people construct their sense of identity may gradually disintegrate.

Perhaps a small minority, supported by wealth, power, education, and technological resources, will continue to explore science, art, philosophy, and the mysteries of the universe with the assistance of increasingly powerful artificial intelligence.

But what about the overwhelming majority of ordinary people?

Will they truly become philosophers, artists, and thinkers simply because they are no longer required to work?

Or will they gradually lose the motivation to pursue a higher intellectual and spiritual life when their skills no longer possess economic value, their labor no longer provides social status, and the accumulation of knowledge no longer offers any meaningful personal advantage?

Under such circumstances, human life may increasingly revolve around the most elementary biological needs: seeking food when hungry, sexual satisfaction when desire arises, companionship when lonely, and immediate stimulation when bored.

People may continue to live, consume, entertain themselves, and reproduce, while gradually losing both the ability and the perceived necessity to create meaning in their own lives.

This possibility reminds me of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Although these two novels portray different social arrangements, both raise a disturbing question: when individuals lose the ability to exercise independent judgment and determine the course of their own lives, how much genuine freedom can they retain?

The future of humanity may not reproduce the exact totalitarian structures described in Orwell's novels. Yet a society in which a small minority controls technology, knowledge, and decision-making, while the majority depends on machines to provide answers, organize their lives, and satisfy their needs, could produce an equally troubling form of intellectual dependency.

This is not to suggest that artificial intelligence will inevitably turn human beings into animals. Rather, when independent thought, the social value of labor, and human agency are continuously weakened, humanity may gradually retreat, at the intellectual and spiritual level, toward a form of existence increasingly dominated by instinct and immediate gratification.

IV. True Extinction May Not Require Death

Contemporary discussions about the existential risks of artificial intelligence tend to focus on scenarios involving uncontrolled superintelligence, biological attacks, military conflicts, and other catastrophic events.

These risks deserve serious attention. Yet I believe there is another possibility that has not received sufficient consideration.

Suppose that, in the future, artificial intelligence becomes capable of performing the overwhelming majority of knowledge production, social administration, and economic activities. Human beings may still have access to food, shelter, entertainment, and material security, but no longer need to think independently, accumulate knowledge, or create social value.

Would this not also constitute a form of human extinction?

Such an extinction would involve no wars, no corpses, and no collapse of civilization in the conventional sense.

Cities would continue to function. Machines would continue to produce. People would continue to consume and live their everyday lives.

Yet humanity might gradually lose its significance as an independent thinking subject, becoming a biological population sustained, managed, and organized by systems of superintelligence.

Humanity may create an intelligence greater than its own, only to discover that it no longer needs to exercise its own intelligence.

This may be the most troubling paradox of the age of artificial intelligence.

The fundamental question has never been merely whether artificial intelligence will kill human beings. Rather, as AI becomes capable of replacing an ever-growing range of human abilities, will people still have the reason, the motivation, and the opportunity to think independently?

If the answer eventually becomes no, then humanity may face another form of extinction, even if it succeeds in avoiding physical annihilation: a slower, quieter, and more profound ending.

This would not merely be an unintended consequence of technological revolution. It could become one of the greatest tragedies in the history of human civilization.

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