SHAPING THE
FUTURE OF WORK

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Definitions for Key Terms used in
Power and Progress

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What is the *productivity bandwagon*?

The *productivity bandwagon* is the idea that technological progress automatically
leads to increased productivity, and that all members of society will consequently
benefit. However, this metaphorical "rising tide" that "lifts all boats" is by no
means guaranteed and certainly is not an automatic process. When this promise
has come to fruition throughout history, its success has been the product of a
concerted regulatory effort and effective action by countervailing powers (such
as trade unions and civil society).

What is *techno-optimism*?

Techno-optimism is the philosophy that new (AI-driven) technology will inevitably
improve lives, increase productivity, and provide a better future. Coupled with this
optimism is the complementary assertion that we should promote an unbridled
and unquestioned heave toward any and all innovation. The point is that even if
we succeed in slowing down the process, the path of development will remain the
same, so we should instead move quickly and boldly toward that better future.
Techno-optimism says that even if a new technology won't be perfect the first
time around—and may, indeed, harm some people—the path of technological
development is inexorable, so it is frivolous and wasteful to delay progress.

What is your definition of "progress" for society?

Our vision of progress comes down to the idea of *shared prosperity*. We believe
that true progress requires that all members of society benefit from the gains
generated by technological advances.

What is the difference between *machine intelligence* and *machine usefulness*?

Machine intelligence is the effort to recreate, or even surpass, human intelligence
and decision making with algorithms. We propose the focus should instead be on

machine usefulness: technologies intended to augment human capabilities and generate new, productive tasks rather than primarily eliminating human work.

What is *so-so automation*?

So-so automation describes the transfer of a task from human to machine without significant gains in productivity. One example is self-checkout kiosks in grocery stores. These kiosks do not lead to a vastly more efficient checkout process. Rather, they simply shift labor from cashiers to customers, eliminating paid work while offering little by way of productivity gains. Other examples include automated customer support, which is often rigid and leads to frustrated and deterred customers instead of desirable service improvements.

What is a *vision oligarchy*?

A *vision oligarchy* exists when there is one dominant opinion for how technology should be developed and used. In particular, the "oligarchy" suggests a small group of people who initially develop the vision, but through the power of persuasion, they propagate their views, build popular support, and eventually determine the direction of technological change. The most successful "vision oligarchs" will advance their message in terms of what is "good for society"—which just so happens to also be good for them.

What is a good framework to understand *skills*, *tasks*, and *jobs* as they relate to workers and automating technologies?

Consider a *job* to cover the entirety of a worker's role for their employer—that is, the collective responsibilities of their job description. Meanwhile, a *task* refers to the more granular responsibilities within that role. Examples of specific tasks in a supermarket could include stocking merchandise, tracking inventory, scheduling shifts, answering customers' questions, etc. A worker will need certain *skills* to perform these *tasks*, such as understanding supply chain systems, communicating among team members, or intuiting a customer's needs. Within this framework, AI, robotics, and other automating technologies do not replace *jobs*, per se, but instead take discrete *tasks* away from humans. This raises important questions such as, "how can we repurpose workers' *skills* that were previously used to perform those *tasks*?" and "what new *skills* are necessary to perform a particular *job* after the introduction of new technologies automates some *tasks* and leaves others in the hands of humans?"