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# The triple threat of artificiality: artificial intelligence, artificial wealth, and artificial ethics

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## A new digital geography

The future of work in the new post-pandemic economy suffers from a triple threat: artificial intelligence, artificial wealth, and artificial ethics. Job automation and remote work are writing a new page of globalization where distances are reduced to zero in virtuality. Trade in services is gaining more and more weight compared to trade in goods.<sup>1</sup> The exchange of products produced in factories and transported in containers coexist with the instantaneous exchange of data in a hybrid physical and digital model.

In a first phase, companies relocated their production where they found cheaper workers. In the next stage, relocation is more frequent where there are indispensable workers, with the right skills and irreplaceable presence. Production becomes extremely decentralized. In the new economy, services can be aggregated at zero marginal cost in a supply that takes shape globally and tends to infinity. For example, in a social network, millions of users can

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1 Without considering the effect of the pandemic, which had a particular impact on trade in tourism services, in recent years, while trade in goods remained stagnant, trade in services increased by 12%. This trend is in addition to a “servicification,” the increasing participation of services as intermediate inputs in the production of material goods. See: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Informe sobre el comercio y el desarrollo 2020 de la pandemia mundial a la prosperidad para todos: Evitar otra década perdida*, New York 2020.

read a message at the same time without additional costs for the source. This was not the case for newspapers or other traditional communication channels. In this hyperconnectivity, there is a dematerialization that allows demands to be satisfied immediately.

For the future of work, the new economy brings both advantages and challenges. Among the positive aspects, it is possible to reduce the most routine tasks or those of greater physical risk, thus reducing occupational accidents and increasing productivity.

New professions are being created where jobs are growing up to three times faster than traditional jobs.<sup>2</sup> This is the case of jobs linked to biotechnology, the care economy, cybersecurity, big data, digital payment, robotics, e-commerce, clean energies, electromobility, or green jobs such as forestry and recycling, to mention just a few.

The negative aspects take the form of a triple threat of artificiality, trickily presented as modernity. Their harmful effects need to be counteracted with concrete public policies designed under principles of solidarity, with the ultimate goal of social inclusion through work.

## Artificial versus real

### First threat. Artificial intelligence and technological unemployment

The final outcome of the use of each new technology will always depend on the set of shared values. The same tool, such as social networks, can serve to educate and include, or amplify bullying and hate. In the past, technological disruptions occurred over decades, giving workers and new generations of students time to adapt. Today, significant transformations take place in just a few years. Creating a paradox, technological unemployment coexists with the difficulty that several industries have in finding qualified workers. While new professions expand, many jobs cease to exist. Useful occupations suddenly look prehistoric, as happened with movie attendants or telephone operators.<sup>3</sup>

2 *Robot-lución. The future of work in Latin America Integration 4.0*, "Integration and Trade" 21 (2017) no. 42, pp. 1-339.

3 In recent years, the work of librarians, translators or travel agents, professions that implied having a great deal of training and experience, has been reduced by more than 20%. On the subject,

The impact is not homogeneous. We are going through a process of hollowing out or polarization of employment.<sup>4</sup> High and low-skilled jobs are the most in demand, while those with intermediate qualifications are the first to be replaced by machines.<sup>5</sup> The result is a middle class in danger of extinction.<sup>6</sup>

## Second threat. Artificial wealth and new forms of slavery

In the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis encourages us to confront the effects of the “empire of money,” to fight together with popular movements against the structural causes of poverty, the lack of work, land, and housing. He invites us to struggle against the rejection of social and labor rights and to incorporate the poor in “the construction of a common destiny.” The transformation of the labor market is accompanied by new forms of slavery that are particularly cruel to migrants without work permits, who are victims of the abuse of organized groups that profit from this fragility.

Francis also warns that the throwaway culture is “expressed in multiple ways.” One of them is the “obsession with reducing labor costs” in order to obtain excessive revenues, without realizing the serious consequences it causes in terms of employment and poverty. In the digital age, global workers are unprotected by outdated laws that need to be adapted to the new times. But the often well-founded fear of unions losing rights can paralyze the necessary renewal of labor standards.

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see the studies in: M. Rhisiart, R. Miller, S. Brooks, *Learning to Use the Future: Developing Foresight Capabilities Through Scenario Processes*, “Technological Forecasting and Social Change” (2015) no. 101, pp. 124-133; and also: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Robots and Industrialization in Developing Countries*, UNCTAD Policy Brief, 2016, No. 50.

4 McIntosh describes early fragmentation trends. See: S. McIntosh, *Hollowing Out and the Future of the Labour Market*, London 2013.

5 On the impact of innovation on the labor market and wage disparity, see the articles: D. Acemoglu, D. Autor, *Skills, Tasks and Technologies: Implications for Employment and Earnings*, “Handbook of Labor Economics” Vol. 4, Part B, 2011, pp. 1043-1171, and also: D. Autor, *Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Inequality Among the ‘Other 99 Percent’*, “Science” 344 (2014) no. 6186, pp. 843-851.

6 Frey estimates that, in the first industrial revolution, labor productivity grew by 46% but real wages grew by only 12%. As a result, income inequality worsened. See: C. Frey, *The Technology Trap: Capital, Labour and Power in the Age of Automation*, New Jersey 2019.

### Third threat. Artificial ethics and individualism

With an artificial ethics, if greed is the only force that moves the invisible hand of the market, the society of the future will be full of unemployment and exclusion. The digitalization of daily life can affect perceptions of what is fictitious and what is real, diminishing the capacity to pay attention to the flesh-and-blood people around us and their needs.

Thirty years ago, David Card, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2021, debunked false myths about the labor market, such as that an increase in the minimum wage generates unemployment or that immigration means fewer job opportunities for natives.<sup>7</sup> But other myths persist and seem difficult to dismantle. One of them says that any regulatory action taken by a state violates individual freedom. Another myth assumes that any redistributive action, even though legitimate taxation, represents an act of injustice to the fair winners of a market economy. Without a fraternal worldview and a holistic perspective that considers the common good, the walls of prejudice that separate us will remain, and many societies will continue to be divided in two.

## Politics of the concrete

### Algorithms of hate versus algorithms of life

We must put before artificial intelligence a conception of work centered on people, on each worker, on their inalienable rights, and on the value of each individual contribution to social wellbeing. The automation of tasks and technological unemployment can only be faced with a true revolution in education at all levels, where the State must have a leading role. Education related to the jobs of the future, cutting-edge education linked to innovation, education for inclusion, education for reskilling, and education to democratize knowledge.

We need to implement ambitious citizen digital literacy programmes to have a modern and specialized working class. Cultivate soft skills, emotional intelligence, empathy, creativity, problem-solving, and discovery of new

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7 The work was concerned with empirically overturning some previously held assumptions about the labor market. See: D. Card, A. Krueger, *Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania*, "American Economic Review" 84 (1993) issue 4, pp. 772-793.

problems. Nurses, psychologists, social workers, and teachers are tasked with a vast human-centered content that cannot be robotized. Conditional cash transfers were responsible for much of the reduction in inequality in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Those programmes can be linked to training processes in green jobs, the care economy, big data, and basic programming for the digital economy. These will lead to this gradual citizen literacy and prepare us for cobotization, interaction with robots, and virtual assistants, increasingly common in the platform economy.

Not everyone has the ability to reinvent themselves immediately. Certain companies have done it successfully; for example, Kodak has refocused its business on digital printing. Others have failed or have been overtaken by some technological disruption, with Blockbuster being the paradigmatic case. But people are not companies. They have other cultural, age and mental obstacles. Labor market reinsertion requires patience, support, follow-up and continuous training. Educational systems need to be updated to offer instruction in the new skills required. It is up to public policies to ensure that technological changes promote more quality employment and not less. An inclusive offer of updated educational content is the best guarantee we have to make this happen.

## Dignity of work and spiritual wealth

To the artificial wealth proposed to us by materialistic worldviews, we need to place a spiritual wealth made up of relational goods.<sup>9</sup> With the sense of belonging to a community, to a multidimensional family that is social and ecological, and with the joy of serving others while loving our work. The most precious goods are always those we share. This dignity, which is found in the daily work of feeling useful to others, suffers today from the attack of two extreme distortions.

On the one hand, about 30% of the world's labor force works more than 48 hours per week, a duration that is associated with an increase in domestic

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8 Almost 30% improvement in indicators such as infant mortality, malnutrition, school attendance and the Gini index, which measures income inequality. See: L. Bértola, J. Williamson, *La Fractura. Pasado y presente de la búsqueda de equidad social en América Latina*, Buenos Aires 2016.

9 For a conceptual analysis of relational goods see: P. Donati, *Los bienes relacionales y sus sujetos: el germen de una nueva sociedad civil y democracia civil*, "Recerca: revista de pensament i anàlisi" (2014) no. 14, pp. 19-46.

violence, a lack of attention to other aspects of life, and a greater risk of accidents, injuries, and illnesses. This raises new issues such as the right to disconnect from remote work and its effective regulation. On the other hand, this global trend coexists with unemployment, which in many developing countries exceeds double digits, or with underemployment due to insufficient working hours.

Due to legal gaps found through the misuse of new technologies, working hours are reduced in order to lower the potential cost of layoffs. It is essential to establish new legal frameworks that guarantee the social rights of new types of work, freelance workers, teleworkers, and workers of large platforms that provide their own capital as tools.

A regulatory update should serve to expand rights, and not to restrict them. It should protect workers against the throwaway culture that finds its breeding ground in the digital economy and anticipate the fiscal problems arising from the underfunding of pension systems. Many countries still allocate significant amounts of their budgets to social assistance plans which, although they represent an essential safety net, should tend to be converted into formal jobs. Trade unions have a fundamental role to play in bridging the gap between transitory social aid and the dignity of work.

The Social Doctrine of the Church pays special attention to unions as an expression of solidarity among workers. The Magisterium recognizes their fundamental function, considering them a constructive factor of social order and an indispensable element of social life, but it also calls on them to “overcome the temptations of corporatism.” In order to advance in these reforms, we need a solid career in the public sector and public servants who can face the challenges caused by the new technologies for employment.

## Global ethics of solidarity

To the artificial ethics proposed by individualism, we must confront an ethic of solidarity. Frey estimates that, in the first industrial revolution, labor productivity grew by 46% but real wages grew by only 12%. As a result, income inequality worsened. See. C. Frey, *The Technology Trap: Capital, Labour and Power in the Age of Automation*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2019. We need to globalize workers' rights with a multilateral effort to harmonize regulations and standards between countries. A technological social contract

that strengthens genuine jobs as the true pillar of development, innovation, environmental protection, and the strengthening of democracies. A pact that leads to a fusion of development policies and social policies. But as long as 19<sup>th</sup>-century working conditions coexist with 21<sup>st</sup>-century technologies, social conflict will be just around the corner, and democracies will continue to be easy prey to extreme and populist speeches. Science and conscience are the engines for deploying public policies based on one of the great lessons of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the fragility of non-inclusive democracies. Decisions such as the tax on large corporations and a greater emphasis on fighting tax havens enable a more equitable distribution of digital dividends. They also allow countries to have the necessary resources to implement high-impact public policies to reduce poverty and inequality.

There are many other examples of international cooperation underway for improving the global financial architecture, the defense of migrants, and the fight against terrorism. There are even proposals to finance social policies by taxing robots, not to slow down technological progress, but to better distribute its costs and benefits.

While distances are disappearing in cyberspace and globalization is entering a phase where borders are vanishing, worker defense rules have only national scope. The collaborative economy and transnational platforms, where the figures of entrepreneur and worker are mixed, need clearer regulations. A new generation of workers' rights should also be at the core of a global post-pandemic agenda to reach consensus. To achieve that goal, we need to build solid and permanent channels of multisectoral dialogue between the private sector, workers, civil society, academia, and scientific and technological systems. We need to sit at the same table. Joint solutions, in a coordination that is both regional and global, will always provide a fairer and more equitable result than the selfish pull-out of individual interests. This is the most important job for good politics. Detoxify ourselves of hostility and artificial divisions to recover the sense of communion and fraternity based on shared values.

## Abstract

*The triple threat of artificiality: artificial intelligence, artificial wealth, and artificial ethics*

The article addresses the issue of work in the new, post-pandemic reality, which is triple-threatened: artificial intelligence, artificial wealth, and artificial ethics. The author analyses these threats, especially in the context of work, and attempts to indicate how to act against them. It calls for the globalisation of workers' rights through multilateral efforts to harmonise regulations and standards between countries, as well as the establishment of lasting and effective channels of dialogue between the private sector, workers, civil society, academia, and scientific and technological systems. Collective solutions, both at regional and global levels, will always produce more equitable and beneficial results than selfish actions in the interests of the individual.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, artificial wealth, artificial ethics, globalization of workers' rights, global ethics of solidarity

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**Gustavo Beliz** – is an Argentine politician and expert in global governance. He is a graduate of the School of Law at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (1989) and pursued postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics (1994) after winning a British Council scholarship to research globalisation and state reform. He was a professor at the School of Information Science at Universidad Austral between 1995 and 2001, and a professor at the Master’s in Organisational Communications and an associate researcher at the Institute of Advanced Business Studies between 2000 and 2001. In 1987, he won a scholarship to Japan, as part of the cultural agreements signed by President Alfonsín and Prime Minister Nakasone. He was named one of the 10 Outstanding Young People of Argentina by the Junior Chamber of Buenos Aires in 1992. In 1999, Time magazine and CNN included him in their list of 50 Latin American Leaders for the Third Millennium. He is the author and editor of 22 books that analyse the relationship between technological change and the future of work; the new challenges of Artificial Intelligence; the transparency of democratic institutions; and Climate Change in the Latin American context in the light of Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, among others.

