

In the name of God

Review of the book " Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity " (2023)

By Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson

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Authors of this book are who shared the 2024 Nobel Prize in economics for their works on the gaps in prosperity between nations and research on how institutions affect economic progress. Acemoglu is Institute Professor of Economics at MIT, the university's highest faculty honor. Also, Johnson is the Ronald A. Kurtz Professor of Entrepreneurship in the Sloan School at MIT, where he is also head of the Global Economics and Management group.

I would like to present my discussion in two parts: first, under *an introduction to the book*, I try to show fundamental ideas of the book. Second, includes my review about the book.

I. A: An introduction to the book; the fundamental ideas of this book

1. The main idea of the book

We can see the main idea of the book in these sentences:

The authors about the main idea of their book says: Despite what history teaches us, the predominant narrative today has shifted back toward something remarkably close to what was prevalent in Britain 250 years ago ... We wrote this book to show that progress is never automatic. Today's "progress" is again enriching a small group of entrepreneurs and investors, whereas most people are disempowered and benefit little.

2. Criticism of the Panopticon approach

The author's view in this regard is: the panopticon was not just about efficiency or the common good, however. Surveillance in factories implied inducing workers to labor harder, and without the need to pay them higher wages to motivate greater effort.

3. *Criticism of the utilitarianism approach*

4. *Marx's idea of alienation regarding the capitalist order:*

Regarding this idea, they said: no man would like to work in a power-loom, they do not like it, there is such a clattering and noise it would almost make some men mad; and next, he would have to be subject to a discipline that a hand-loom weaver can never submit to.

5. *The book is also related to Thomas Piketty's idea that the capitalist system, despite its claims, has not led to a reduction in inequality but has deepened it; Capital in the Twenty-First Century (2013)- Thomas Piketty.*

Actually, capitalism claims to have reduced inequality and poverty through its production and trade system. However, Piketty shows in this book, based on evidence and data, that not only has inequality not decreased, but economic and social gaps have also widened. Also, a huge portion of capital has accumulated in the hands of a small number of people.

6. *The growth of technology without regard to its moral and human foundations will have dire consequences.*

7. *The positive consequences of technological growth are the result of this mechanism:*

The authors of the book believe that the mechanism by which technology has achieved positive results for humans is: most people around the globe today are better off than our ancestors because citizens and workers in early industrial societies organized, challenged elite-dominated choices about technology and work conditions, and forced ways of sharing the gains from technical improvements more equitably.

Or in other page they said: Rather, shared prosperity emerged because, and only when, the direction of technological advances and society's approach to dividing the gains were pushed away from arrangements that primarily served a narrow elite. We are beneficiaries of progress, mainly because our predecessors made that progress work for more people.

8. *The normative idea of the book is the achievement of class consciousness and a critical look to expose the unusuality and abnormality of what appears usual and normal. An attempt to reveal the role of various forces in the ugliness of a situation (here the growth of technology):*

Most people around the globe today are better off than our ancestors because citizens and workers in early industrial societies organized, challenged elite-dominated choices about technology and work conditions, and forced ways of sharing the gains from technical improvements more equitably. *Today we need to do the same again.*

II. B: Criticisms

After implying to the main ideas of the book, now, I try to review the text of the book focusing on AI chapter.

1. From *methodological aspect* I want to say he data, evidence, and claims are not based on a specific theoretical framework, so the analyses are more like personal approaches and perspectives and do not have a deep analytical and explanatory aspect. While most of the perspectives presented have specific theoretical foundations. Whereas in Piketty's work we can see more sufficient evidences (Statistical data and so on) and powerful relationship theoretical.

2. While I accept the book's criticisms of artificial intelligence, but I believe that these criticisms are not very comprehensive and can and should be deeper and encompass different dimensions. For example, the book believes that humans are a creative species and creativity is something that artificial intelligence is weak in. Or is the ability to solve problems what gives humans an advantage over artificial intelligence? But it should be noted that these are not things that can be considered to criticize artificial intelligence because, given the speed of development and progress in this field, these fragile advantages will probably soon disappear.

I think that writers should point out other aspects of criticizing artificial intelligence that are more powerful and solid. For example, Thomas Nagel, in his book "Mind and Cosmos," pointed out three areas that are more specific to humans than to artificial intelligence: consciousness, cognition, and values. That is, areas that are essentially distant from artificial intelligence and can be the distinguishing feature and superiority of the human species over machines.

3. Also, the issues of ethics are presented in a general way and their levels and dimensions are not addressed in depth and comprehensively. For example, it does not pay much attention to the spread of inequality at different class, regional and global levels. Or it does not address the criticisms regarding the loss of job opportunities, and if it does, it is so lost in the text that its examples cannot be seen clearly. It would have been better if these

criticisms had been systematically allocated important parts of the text of the book. Also, these cases were explained by relying on theoretical foundations.

For example, one of the most important ethical considerations regarding AI can be summarized as the elimination of jobs from disadvantaged groups in society and the reproduction and deepening of inequality. This is true both among socio-economic groups and internationally and between developed and developing countries. In explaining this, it should be said: In order to accept the famous statement that “AI, although it destroys jobs, creates others” requires certain preconditions: First, that people who have lost their jobs due to the growth of AI have the necessary educational background and skills to obtain new jobs. In most cases, this is not the case because these people belong to segments of society that are not well-off in these areas. Second, there must be equal opportunities for skills training, education, access to tools and technological infrastructure to acquire the necessary prerequisites for finding alternative jobs. Given the structure of inequality that exists in almost all societies in various fields, the likelihood of both prerequisites being fulfilled for most people who have lost their jobs due to the spread of artificial intelligence is very small.

These inequalities exist both within different societies and are also prominent at the international level between the North and the South or developed and developing countries. In other words, within each society, there are no more or less equal opportunities and fair conditions for different socio-economic groups to receive high-level education and access to the necessary infrastructure and tools to use artificial intelligence, and injustice and inequality are always more prominent. At the global level, traces of these inequalities can be seen between developed countries and less developed societies. Also, the commercialized education system, as one of the examples of neoliberalism, has increasingly expanded this inequality and injustice.

Therefore, when such a basic prerequisite is not fulfilled, one cannot hope that artificial intelligence can provide new jobs for the unemployed! Because most of these people do not have the conditions, resources, skills and expertise necessary to obtain jobs in this field. As a result, these will be victims of artificial intelligence. On the contrary, groups and countries with more access to the benefits of this technology can benefit more and the process of inequality will be increasingly reproduced. As the economic, security, environmental, etc. achievements of the Internet and computers have been more for developed societies and socio-economic groups with higher status than for lower status. This situation causes considerable moral concern about the increasing spread of artificial intelligence for people of knowledge.