

Humans and the Road from Asset to Liability

A Troubling Parallel

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Introduction – A Question We Are Avoiding

Much of the current discussion about artificial intelligence focuses on power: how capable machines will become, how fast they will improve, and whether they will threaten us. I want to shift the question in a different direction—one that is quieter, less dramatic, and far more uncomfortable.

What happens when humans themselves cease to be necessary?

Not morally necessary. Not symbolically important. But *functionally* unnecessary for the continuation of human civilization.

This essay is about that transition: the possibility that humanity may cross from being an asset to becoming a liability—not to machines, but to itself.

Part I – When Assets Quietly Become Liabilities

Assets do not usually become liabilities through catastrophe. More often, the transition is silent. An asset becomes a liability when its marginal contribution drops to zero, yet its cost—economic, structural, or cognitive—continues to accumulate. At that point, maintaining the asset no longer strengthens the system; it burdens it.

We tend to miss these transitions because we rely on extrapolation. We assume that what has always been useful will remain useful, that growth curves extend smoothly, that relevance persists simply because it once existed.

History suggests otherwise.

A striking modern example—recent enough to still feel unsettling—comes from nuclear weapons. During the Cold War, plutonium stockpiles were treated as existential assets. Entire industrial ecosystems were built to produce them. Experts projected ever-growing needs, year after year. Then, abruptly, production stopped. Not slowed. Stopped.

The material had not changed. The physics had not changed. What changed was its *utility*. The asset crossed an invisible threshold and became a liability—politically, economically, and environmentally. From that moment on, additional plutonium no longer increased security; it increased risk.

This is not a story about nuclear weapons. It is a demonstration of a general rule: **assets do not announce when they have outlived their usefulness.**

Part II – The Human Asset (Until Now)

For all of recorded history, humans have been an unquestioned asset. Remove people, and civilization collapses. Knowledge, production, coordination, creativity—all required human participation. Even the most advanced tools were extensions of human effort.

In short, people needed people.

That assumption has shaped our economics, our ethics, and our self-image. Human value was inseparable from human necessity. We mattered because we were required.

Artificial intelligence challenges this foundation—not by malice, but by competence.

As AI systems take over industrial design, manufacturing, logistics, agriculture, and even large portions of intellectual labor, human participation in the physical maintenance of civilization begins to shrink. Not gradually in the historical sense, but structurally. Entire sectors no longer need human input to function at scale.

This leads us toward what I will call the *Humanity inflection point*: the moment when human labor ceases to be a necessary input for the physical continuation of human civilization.

This is not a dystopian scenario. There is no hostile AI, no rebellion, no enslavement. On the contrary, I assume that AI remains under human control. Structural limits identified by Gödel and Heisenberg alone ensure that artificial systems cannot become closed, self-justifying authorities. AI will remain dependent on human-defined goals.

And that is precisely what makes the situation troubling.

Part III – Becoming Optional

The danger is not that machines will overpower us. The danger is that they will *replace our necessity*. When food, shelter, goods, infrastructure, and entertainment are produced in abundance by automated systems, the survival of humanity no longer depends on the participation of humanity. A small technical elite may still be required, but the majority becomes economically redundant—not unemployed, but *unnecessary*.

At that point, humanity undergoes the same transition plutonium once did.

Not because humans are harmful.

Not because they are inferior.

But because their marginal contribution approaches zero while their cost—resource consumption, coordination, political complexity—remains.

This is the moment an asset becomes a liability.

And unlike plutonium, humans cannot be quietly mothballed.

Historically, humanity has never faced such moments without appealing to something beyond itself.

Part IV – A Reference Beyond Utility

For most of human history, the question of human worth was never answered solely in economic or functional terms. When usefulness weakened—when survival was no longer the immediate measure—human societies did not attempt to justify themselves in isolation.

They appealed outward.

God, in different religions throughout history, occupied a central position in how human existence was understood beyond necessity. Whether framed theologically, philosophically, or symbolically, this dimension provided a reference point that did not depend on productivity, efficiency, or contribution.

Human beings mattered not only because they were needed, but because they were *accounted for*—created, observed, judged, or endowed with meaning beyond themselves.

This was not merely belief. It was structure. It shaped law, morality, restraint, responsibility, and dignity. Even societies that disagreed profoundly about the nature of God shared a deeper assumption: that human worth did not originate entirely from human systems.

The modern discussion surrounding AI and post-labor society rarely acknowledges this inheritance. Purpose is now framed almost exclusively in secular terms—well-being, creativity, leisure, self-expression—concepts that quietly assume a closed, internal loop of justification.

That assumption is historically new.

For the first time, humanity may approach a condition in which it becomes functionally unnecessary *while simultaneously setting aside the very framework that once answered what came next.*

This does not argue for belief, nor does it deny it. It simply observes that a dimension which accompanied human society from time immemorial is no longer present in the conversation—precisely at the moment when it may be most needed.

Part V – Liability to Whom

It is tempting to ask: a liability to whom? To AI? To the state? To elites? Or, perhaps, to nothing beyond ourselves?

Those questions risk missing the deeper issue.

The most consequential liability may not be external at all.

What does a human society become when it no longer needs itself—and no longer grounds its worth in anything outside its own constructs? When meaning, dignity, and justification can no longer be anchored in necessity *or* in a reference beyond humanity?

For thousands of years, usefulness and worth were intertwined, but they were not identical. Work was not merely economic; it was existential, moral, and often sacred. Contribution justified existence, but it did not fully define it.

Remove both necessity and transcendence, and something fundamental breaks.

A population that is no longer required must invent a new reason to exist. That reason cannot be economic. It cannot be productive. It cannot even be competitive. And if it is entirely self-referential, it becomes unstable by definition.

We are profoundly unprepared for that condition.

Conclusion – The Uncomfortable Mirror

Nuclear weapons provide a recent, concrete example of how quickly an unquestioned asset can cross into liability once its role changes. They are not the subject of this essay. They are the warning.

Humanity is approaching a similar threshold—not because we failed, but because we succeeded too well in building systems that no longer require us.

The troubling question is not whether AI will treat us well.

The troubling question is whether we will still know how to justify ourselves once we are no longer needed—by anyone, or by anything beyond ourselves.

What will humans become to themselves—viewed in their own eyes, defended in their own minds—when necessity is gone?

That question deserves attention **before** the transition is complete.