

Robots Don't Need Billionaires

by Cooper Taylor

Technology is pushing our species to the threshold of an entirely new kind of civilization. Problematically, the very system that inches us closer is the same one that enables grotesque concentrations of wealth and power. At the center of this imbalance is the parasite class—a handful of individuals willing to extract, exploit, and devour the life force of their fellow people for authoritarian control. This dominance is not a sign of progress; it is a sign that our societal foundations have been broken and corrupted. Modern-day capitalism as our economic structure for this emerging Autopia delivered by AI and robotics would result in a post-scarcity world where people still starve. An academic study from Holt-Gimenez and colleagues confirms that the world already produces enough food to nourish 10 billion people adequately, yet systemic economic inequalities leave 800 million people hungry yearly (Holt-Gimenez et al. 596). This is not science fiction; it is our generation's fork in the road.

Capitalism was designed to manage shortages, not to navigate a world where machines can generate limitless abundance with almost no human input. Automation breaks these old-world economic equations by severely devaluing human labor. A 2017 McKinsey report estimated that up to 800 million jobs could be displaced by automation by 2030—yet we still treat work as the primary gateway to survival (Manyika et al.). Economists Acemoglu and Restrepo demonstrate that automation disproportionately benefits the owners of capital, significantly increasing economic inequality and undermining wages for workers (Acemoglu and Restrepo 1975). Machines will mass-produce food, housing, and knowledge but still be restricted by archaic systems in the name of profit. In this reality, pricing and markets become absurd, like inventing infinite water and selling it by the drop. If we do not act soon, liberation is not our future. Automation will concentrate even more wealth. Ownership of the machines will decide the 21st century.

If technology can potentially free humanity from the survival struggle, the real threat is not our tools but those who abuse them. Companies developing artificial intelligence and robotics are not working toward collective freedom; they are consolidating power. Amazon's warehouses grow more automated yearly, but instead of sharing the benefits with their workers, they fire, surveil, or force them to compete with machines for survival. Legal scholar Eric Posner warns explicitly of a growing "AI oligopoly," where a tiny handful of corporations increasingly monopolize AI's revolutionary infrastructure, leaving society without democratic control (Posner). OpenAI began as a nonprofit promising transparency and public benefit—but today, its most powerful tools are closed-source, monetized, and steered by corporate partners like Microsoft. Google's DeepMind makes breakthroughs that could change the world, but it operates behind a corporate curtain closed to democratic input. Nvidia doesn't just build chips—it provides the core infrastructure for nearly all AI development, quietly selling the tools of the future to the highest bidder. Boston Dynamics creates eerily lifelike robots that could transform labor forever, yet their development remains locked within a corporate ecosystem that answers to shareholders, not society. Palantir

specializes in automating surveillance and merging private data with potent AI to build tools that place unmeasurable power into the hands of billionaires. If the tools of liberation remain privately owned, they will be used for domination.

Initially, the idea of one person controlling significant resources appears logical. One could imagine billionaires using their wealth to contribute meaningfully towards a humanitarian society within a capitalist economy. The problem is they're not just useful; they are crucial. When instead, they hoard wealth, inflate hazardous work environments, slash wages to save pennies, and pay lower effective tax rates than ordinary workers; despite having more money than one could spend in a lifetime, they threaten something fundamental: hope. Hope that life can improve. Hope that, if nurtured, could blossom into genuine freedom. How many lives end before they reach their dreams? How many dreams have been shattered, scrambled, and lost? How many shivering souls will it take?

Billionaires are entirely incompatible with Autopia. According to a 2021 *ProPublica* investigation, America's wealthiest individuals, including Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, paid an effective federal tax rate of only about 3.4%, significantly lower than the typical American worker (Eisinger et al.). Rather than redistributing wealth or investing meaningfully into society, billionaires fortify barriers around their wealth, depriving critical public services like education and healthcare of necessary resources.

Tax avoidance has become a sophisticated industry. The ultra-wealthy effectively shields vast fortunes from taxation through complex networks of offshore accounts, shell companies, and strategic legal structures. This practice drains public treasuries of resources that could otherwise fund critical social infrastructure like education, healthcare, and public transportation. The same financial power enables outsized political influence through campaign contributions and lobbying operations that shape legislation favorable to their interests, effectively undermining democratic principles of equal representation.

Billionaires corrupt democracy itself. In 2014, a Princeton study found that U.S. government policies almost exclusively align with the interests of the wealthiest citizens, virtually ignoring average voters (Gilens and Page 564). Through outsized political donations and influence, billionaires mutate society's laws, policies, and even cultural narratives to serve their interests, preventing society from responding democratically to technological and economic challenges.

Billionaire-controlled corporations often exploit the regulatory environments they have helped create. Environmental regulations are circumvented through legal maneuvering and political pressure, allowing pollution and resource extraction that disproportionately harm disadvantaged communities (Bullard and Wright). The ecological damage from these practices frequently falls hardest on those least equipped to address it, creating environmental injustice and economic inequality.

The marketplace itself becomes distorted through monopolistic and anti-competitive practices. When billionaires and their corporations achieve dominant market positions, they can crush emerging competitors, stifle innovation, and manipulate pricing. This power extends to labor relations, where union-busting tactics, wage suppression, and the strategic use of automation threats keep workers' bargaining power minimal. The resulting downward pressure on wages contributes significantly to widening inequality.

The parasite class maintains artificial scarcity because it safeguards their profits. Pharmaceutical billionaires dramatically increase prices on life-saving medications—not due to rising costs, but because maximizing profits matters more than saving lives. Insulin prices have increased 1,200% over 20 years despite minimal production-cost changes (Dorrell). “Pay-for-delay” agreements where brand-name manufacturers pay generic competitors to delay market entry (Federal Trade Commission) and patent exploitation through “evergreening” - minor modifications to extend exclusivity periods (Gaudry). RAND Corporation's 2021 analysis highlights that prescription drug prices in the U.S. average 256% higher, and brand-name drugs 344% higher than in comparison with OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, directly due to billionaire-controlled pharmaceutical monopolies (Mulcahy et al.)

This logic of artificial scarcity reaches beyond medicine. Housing developers funded by billionaire investors intentionally keep homes vacant to drive up market prices, even as thousands remain homeless. The United Way recently found nearly 16 million vacant homes in the United States, a shocking figure given that only around 580,000 people remain homeless (United Way NCA). Billionaires create and sustain scarcity to protect and expand their already excessive wealth, prioritizing profit margins over human lives and dignity. Their existence is fundamentally incompatible with the abundant, equitable world Autopia represents.

Private equity operations represent another troubling mechanism, as billionaire-backed firms acquire companies not to improve them but to extract maximum value through debt-loading and asset-stripping. These practices often culminate in massive layoffs, pension reductions, and sometimes complete business collapse after executives and investors have extracted their profits. Similar dynamics play out in housing markets, where the financialization of residential real estate treats homes as investment vehicles rather than essential shelter, driving housing costs beyond the reach of average earners.

Perhaps most insidiously, billionaires have strategically invested in media ownership, educational institutions, and philanthropic ventures that shape public discourse and policy without democratic accountability. This influence machine helps normalize extreme wealth concentration while directing attention away from systemic reforms that might address inequality. Even charitable giving, while sometimes beneficial, often serves as both a tax shield and a mechanism for the wealthy to exercise social control by deciding which causes deserve funding, effectively privatizing what should be democratic decision-making about social priorities.

The possibility of producing more than enough for everyone is locked in a system that doesn't require those who have the most to distribute abundance. I will make it clear once more: capitalism cannot coexist peacefully alongside prosperity. Homes sit vacant while thousands go unhoused, not because of a housing shortage, but because real estate is more valuable as an investment than as shelter. Grocery stores throw out literal tons of edible food daily to protect prices. Scientific research and education are locked behind paywalls, even though they could be freely accessible with today's technology. Capitalism doesn't just fail to solve these problems; it preserves them. Abundance breaks the price system, and without prices, profit collapses. So, instead of using automation to eliminate need, we use it to automate exclusion. In a world of plenty, scarcity has become a business model.

Postcapitalist systems aren't fiction; they already exist, quietly proving that another way is possible. Universal Basic Income has been piloted in Finland and Stockton, California, showing improved well-being and no drop in motivation to work (West et al. 78; Baker Institute 12). Open-source projects like Linux and Wikipedia function without profit, creating global infrastructure through cooperation, not competition. Worker-owned cooperatives like Spain's Mondragon prove that democratic workplaces can scale while staying productive (Tremlett 56). Even decentralized technologies like DAOs and DeFi point toward new models of governance and ownership, free from centralized control. These systems succeed because they prioritize access over accumulation and collaboration over exploitation. They challenge capitalism's core lie: that profit is the only thing that drives progress. The next civilization is not just a dream; it is already being built in pieces.

Capitalism is not the future. It is the anchor slowing humanitarian progress. We are no longer bound by scarcity and no longer reliant on human labor to keep society functioning. The only thing keeping billions in struggle is an outdated economic system designed to hoard, exploit, and control. Billionaires will not save us. The banks will not save us. If we want a future where technology serves people, not profits, we must build it ourselves. Journalist Sophie Atkinson emphasizes that worker-led cooperatives have already successfully demonstrated scalable, democratic economic alternatives, proving competitive even within capitalist markets (Atkinson). We are standing at a fork in the road: one path leads to artificial paradise, the other to automated oppression. Autopia is within reach. But first, we must decide who it's for.

If automation were liberated from the grip of capital, we could build a world where survival isn't tied to labor, and dignity isn't bought with a paycheck. In Autopia, mornings unfold gently, not defined by alarm clocks but by sunlight filtering through wide, clean windows into homes provided as a basic human right. Streets aren't congested with exhausted commuters; they are calm and vibrant community spaces. Automated vehicles silently glide along, transporting food, medicine, and supplies effortlessly wherever needed. Parks, libraries, and centers of art and science flourish, accessible to anyone, and sustained by decentralized, democratically owned AI systems that manage logistics transparently. Education isn't locked behind paywalls; it is a lifelong journey of curiosity. Work isn't mandatory for survival; it's meaningful participation driven by personal passion, community spirit, and creativity. People spend their days pursuing dreams- painting

murals, exploring forests, inventing freely, and connecting deeply. There is no rent to scrape together, no healthcare bill to fear, and no barriers between people and their dignity. This is not a utopian dream; it's what can happen if we harness innovation for human liberation. This future is not impossible; it's just incompatible with capitalism. Economist Paul Mason clearly articulates capitalism's inherent contradiction, stating, "Capitalism struggles when goods become abundant," reinforcing that genuine prosperity requires a fundamentally different economic approach (Mason). We have the tools to build Autopia. What we don't have is permission. A permission from those who profit by keeping the door locked. Autopia could be heaven, but only if we burn our inherited blueprints.

Philosopher David Graeber proclaims, "The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something we make and could just as easily make differently" (Graeber 89). Billionaires represent a moral failure. They are a symptom of society's acceptance of exploitation. Autopia demands that wealth serve humanity, not enslave it. If we wish to create a truly equitable, abundant society, we must dismantle the billionaire class. Their existence is fundamentally incompatible with genuine human prosperity. Robots do not need billionaires. Autopia is already waiting; we need only to choose it.

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