

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

by
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Two Human Impacting Scenarios: Will They Ever Meet?

Here is a scenario that may have a huge impact on human lives in the near future. In a recent New York Times article titled "Will Robots Take Our Children's Jobs?", it describes a number of careers that our children would love to pursue but may be taken by robots. A position as a medical radiologist may be replaced by a start-up, Arterys, which can read an MRI scan in 15 seconds that may take a radiologist 45 minutes. Does your child want to become a surgeon? Last year, a prototype robotic surgeon called STAR (Smart Tissue Autonomous Robot) outperformed human surgeons in a test in which both had to repair the severed intestine of a live pig. Even if your child wants to become a lawyer, there are already computer programs that can scan legal documents to select what may be relevant for a particular situation.

People like Elon Musk, Bill Gates and the late Stephen Hawking have become very concerned because of the development of these invincible machines. Their concern is that robots have the potential to outsmart the people and eventually destroy the human race. The development of artificial intelligence (A.I.) is a precursor and may be giving us a signal of what is to come. We all know how robots are now building automobiles because it is a repetitive mundane job, and the robots do it without error. But it seems that they are intruding in fields that years ago we thought would not be vulnerable. The Associated Press has already used a software program to produce articles about Wall Street earnings or even report on a sports event. A robotic co-pilot recently flew and landed a simulated Boeing 737.

What is the future for our children? A five-year-old report by the University of Oxford Department of Engineering Science predicted that 47% of the current jobs will be replaced by automation. A more recent report by McKinsey Global Institute predicted that one-third of the current workers will need to find other jobs because of A.I. So if there will be no jobs for the people, how will they earn an income? Some have proposed a Basic Income Guarantee, or as another name Universal Basic Income, which provides welfare for everyone thanks to the robots doing all the work. Is this where we are heading?

But then we need to consider another scenario, that dealing with our environment. Over 30 years ago, James Hansen stated that the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which had historically been 280 ppm (parts per million) for centuries, cannot go above 350 ppm or else we will be in big trouble. Well, in 2016 we hit 400 ppm and last month reached 410 ppm. The Global Footprint Network (GFN) has been measuring the consumption of our natural resources for the past 30 years, and in its most recent report shows that we are consuming 70% more than the earth is generating. A few years ago, the

GFN started reporting Earth Overshoot Day, that day in the year when we will have consumed all the natural resources that will be generated in that calendar year. The most recent Earth Overshoot Day was August 3, 2017 but this year it will probably be something like July 28, 2018. (Look for it.) The biggest environmental issue, however, is water quality and quantity. Cape Town, South Africa has run out of water and many other large cities are having similar problems. And what is contributing to these environmental problems is the exploding human population. While man has been on this earth for thousands of years, we have added over five billion people in just the past 70 years and adding about 10 million people every six weeks.

Paul Ehrlich, a renowned Stanford biologist, published a book 50 years ago titled “The Population Bomb”. In his book, he predicted that the world population would plunge primarily due to toxification and over consumption of our natural resources. While some of the details and timing were wrong in his book, today he believes the overall prediction is still correct. There is a need for the redistribution of wealth, a reduction in the consumption per capita, and a population reduction. In fact, he believes an optimum global population to be between 1.5 and two billion people. Is this where we are heading? Have we overshot the capacity of the earth and heading for a collapse?

If our population starts to decrease rapidly, who is going to do all the work? Is this God’s plan?