

Funding the Future

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In a comment made during an interview about his new autobiography, [Bill Gates is reported to have said](#):

Artificial intelligence will likely replace doctors, teachers and more professionals within the decade.

The report added:

While sharing his vision for the future of artificial intelligence (AI) on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon last month, the Microsoft co-founder — who is one of the world's most famous businessmen and philanthropists — said that soon, humans won't be needed "for most things."

It is an interesting idea that humans won't be needed for 'most things', because, for a start, it presumes that we only exist as economic entities. That may be what Gates views most of the rest of the human population as, but maybe we don't share that view. It takes a particularly warped perspective on life to presume we only exist as producers.

Second, indisputably, AI is going to disrupt many processes. It already is my own. I find it useful. But I question Gates' observation. It presumes that answers are required within a paradigm. AI is programmed to find answers within such frameworks, and will always have problems working outside them. So, it can, for example, most likely work out a course of treatment for type 2 diabetes within the existing framework of thinking on that issue. But given that those treating this disease do not usually point out that it is entirely reversible in most cases - as it, as a matter of fact, is - because to prevent this disease would deny big pharma and the medical profession the massive gravy train of income that this form of diabetes currently provides to them, don't expect AI to disrupt the status quo any time soon. It will not be programmed to do that.

Thirdly, not every job is algorithmic in a fashion that AI can handle. Many are. But a great many are not. Maybe Gates is not aware of that.

This whole issue needs deeper consideration than these few observations provide, and maybe Gates really has given them the necessary thought. His comment does not, however, suggest that he has. Unpacking it, what he is saying that those who now use

human logic to undertake what is essentially algorithmic activity - and a great deal within finance and medicine might, for example, fall within these spheres - are at considerable risk of having their roles replaced by AI, unless that is they can up their games.

They could do that.

They could interpret the algorithm.

They could question it.

They could reassure those who interact with it.

They could develop a new algorithm.

They might even say that the wrong algorithm is being used.

And they might then do something useful, like suggest people fundamentally change their diets, which is the answer to type 2 diabetes in a great many cases, as it might also be with alzheimers' disease, which many now think to be type 3 diabetes. They could, in other words, break the algorithm, which is how change always happens in life.

So, are humans going to have nothing to do? I seriously doubt it. Only the complacent or compliant, and those who do not want to engage, will be left with nothing to do. Those who actually see it as their role to think and interpret will have ample to do, as ever. Professionals will, in other words, have to profess when AI can manage the algorithms. There may be no harm in that, but many might find that a disruptive shock to the system. That, though, might be what many professions and professional people require.