Debate Ammunition: The AI con trick

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THE RICHARD J MURPHY YOUTUBE CHANNEL

DEBATE AMMUNITION

THE AI CON TRICK

Funding the Future | May 2026

TODAY'S TOPIC

AI Is an Economic Con-Trick. **The video relating to this content is here.**

THE CORE ARGUMENT

Artificial intelligence companies have built their businesses by scraping vast quantities of other people's content without permission and without payment and they then charge fees to access it. That is not innovation; it is rent extraction in its most classical form. Unless governments act now to regulate AI charges, tax AI profits where the economic impact arises, and enforce the property rights of content creators, a tiny number of corporations will hold permanent, unchallengeable power to charge the rest of the world for access to what might be their own knowledge.

KEY STATISTICS

Statistic Figure Source

Number of blog posts written by Richard Murphy over approximately 20 years, all potentially scraped by AI companies without permission or payment More than 25,000 Video script (approximate figure stated by Richard Murphy)

Number of videos produced by Richard Murphy, whose transcripts are freely available online and similarly exposed to scraping More than 1,000 Video script (approximate figure stated by Richard Murphy)

Amount of compensation received by Richard Murphy from any AI company for use of his content as training data Zero Video script

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Permission sought by any AI company from Richard Murphy before using his content for commercial training purposes None Video script

THE ARGUMENT STRUCTURE

Step 1 — The business model is extraction, not creation

Large language models do one thing well: they take vast quantities of other people's data without paying for it, process it, and sell access to the result. The output may appear coherent, but the underlying model is one of appropriation, not genuine origination.

Step 2 — This is a breach of copyright and licence conditions

Richard publishes under a Creative Commons licence that permits non-commercial use but requires permission for any commercial application. AI companies appear to have used his work with the clear intention of making a profit, without seeking that permission. He argues this constitutes a breach both of copyright and of the explicit licence terms under which his material is made available.

Step 3 — The correct name for this in political economy is rent extraction

A rent is an access fee charged for an asset by someone who claims the right to own it, regardless of whether they created it. AI companies scraped the web voluntarily, assembled databases from other people's work, and now charge subscriptions to access them. The analogy is precise: the content creators stand in the same position as the land in a tenancy arrangement, the asset that generates all the value receives none of the return. Those who enclosed the property collect everything.

Step 4 — The political stakes are without precedent

Tony Blair's vision of AI as our economic future means a massive redistribution of wealth away from ordinary people and towards the owners of AI platforms. The inequality that unchecked AI rent extraction could produce may dwarf everything that has come before it, including tax injustice, financialisation, and wage suppression. This is why democratic accountability, fair taxation of AI profits at source, and enforceable creator rights are urgent, not aspirational.

THEIR ARGUMENT → YOUR REBUTTAL

They Say Your Response

AI companies add enormous value through their processing and engineering. They are not simply reselling other people's work; they have built something genuinely new. Nobody disputes that processing has a value. The question is whether the underlying data they process was theirs to use. It was not, always. A landlord who builds a house on land they have enclosed without consent is still guilty of enclosure, whatever they build on top of it. The value of the processing does not extinguish the claim of the person whose raw material was taken without permission.

Web scraping is legal, and the courts have consistently found it falls within fair use or equivalent exceptions. There is no copyright violation here. The legality of scraping in general is one question; whether using scraped content for commercial profit without licence permission is a separate and much live one. Richard publishes under a Creative Commons licence that explicitly prohibits commercial use without permission. No AI company sought that permission. Legal cases are already before the courts for precisely this reason, and the outcome is not settled. Law has always been written to protect established property interests; that does not make the arrangement just.

If you do not want your content used, you should not publish it on the open web. Publishing online is an implicit consent to its use. Publishing under a Creative Commons licence is the opposite of blanket consent. It is a carefully specified set of conditions, including the explicit restriction on commercial exploitation. The argument that publication implies consent to any use someone can find technically possible is the same argument enclosers made about common land: that unused land was, by implication, available for private appropriation. We know how that story ended.

AI will create enormous economic growth and new jobs. We should not strangle it with regulation before it has had the chance to deliver those benefits. The promise of future general prosperity is the standard argument made for every new form of enclosure and rent extraction throughout economic history. The distributional question is not whether AI generates aggregate output; it is who captures that output. A system in which a handful of corporations hold the rights to charge the rest of the world for access to knowledge is not a growth story. It is a monopoly story, and it demands urgent regulatory action, not patient deference.

THE ONE-LINER

"AI companies scraped the web without permission, built databases from other people's work, and now charge us all to access it: that is not innovation, it is enclosure, and we should say so."

FURTHER READING

Post Title Date Relevance

[Debate ammunition: The Pope's AI encyclical] **May 2026 Companion briefing on Pope Leo XIV's encyclical Magnifica Humanitas, which frames AI as a question of power and democratic accountability, directly complementing this video's political economy argument.**

[Blair is claiming TINA. I am sure there is TIARA] **May 2026 Richard's critique of Tony Blair's AI essay, which this video references directly as representing the pro-AI redistribution-upwards agenda.**

[The problem with AI is it just does not care] **Jan 2026 Argues that AI developed primarily as a private asset will deepen inequality, extract rents, and undermine democratic control, echoing this video's central thesis.**

[Will AI create a new digital divide and drag the economy down?] **Jan 2026 Examines the distributional and macroeconomic consequences of AI's dominance, including the subscription rent model and its effect on those without regular income.**

[When AI, unemployment, and inflation collide] **Jan 2026 Identifies systemic risk from overinflated AI company valuations and the macroeconomic consequences of job displacement driven by AI rent-seeking behaviour.**

[AI won't save us] **Oct 2025 Directly challenges the mainstream narrative that AI will deliver broad economic salvation, supporting the argument that AI's benefits are concentrated in very few hands.**

[The problem with AI] **Aug 2024 Earlier formulation of Richard's core concern that AI represents a form of extraction rather than genuine value creation,**

with regulatory failure at its heart.

[We can use AI in the economy but only if we are willing to tax capital more heavily]() May 2023 Early statement of the tax justice principle applied to AI: that any economic gains from AI must be redistributed through heavier taxation of capital, or inequality will compound.