

Case 9: Jobs? What Jobs?

Jobs. Families depend on them. Economies thrive or decline based on their number and the salaries they pay. Political elections are contested and won on the basis of which candidate or political party will produce the most of them.

Alas, jobs are under attack on many fronts. Globalization and trade agreements have contributed to the flight of manufacturing to countries with the lowest labor costs. Automation and technology have eliminated many jobs while at the same time creating new ones, but there is not enough data to say for sure if that means there is a net gain or a net loss in jobs.

However, a study by Carl Frey and Michael Osborne, two professors at the University of Oxford, concluded that about 47 percent of total US employment is in danger of being eliminated by computerization. Self-driving cars could put taxi drivers out of work. The work of paralegals and researchers and many more could be wiped out by artificial intelligence.

For more and more workers, the future is looking less and less secure. A White House Study at the end of the Obama administration predicted that, because of automation, there would be fewer and fewer jobs and those jobs that remained would require more education and new skill sets.

In the book, *The Second Machine Age*, Andrew McAfee and Erik Brynjolfsson, professors at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, looked at the future of work in the age of intelligent machines. Their prediction: Massive unemployment and increasing income inequality. What's more, they do not believe that past remedies like government-funded job training or more education is going to be enough to correct the situation.

Case from the 2018 National Ethics Bowl. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. © 2017 Robert Skipper, Peggy Connolly, Robert A. Currie, Cynthia Jones, and Heather Pease.