

IELTS Reading Practice Passage

The Ethics and Economics of Artificial Intelligence

Few technological innovations in human history have provoked as much debate as artificial intelligence (AI). While earlier inventions such as the printing press, electricity, or the internet fundamentally changed societies, AI is unique in its potential to replicate aspects of human cognition itself. The discussion surrounding AI is not limited to technical feasibility or economic efficiency; it extends into ethics, governance, and even the philosophy of what it means to be human.

From an economic perspective, the benefits of AI appear undeniable. Automation has already reduced costs in industries ranging from manufacturing to financial services. Algorithms can process data with a speed and accuracy unimaginable to humans, leading to more efficient logistics, medical diagnostics, and energy management. Supporters argue that AI could liberate humanity from repetitive labor and enable new forms of creativity. In fact, some economists claim AI might trigger a productivity boom comparable to the Industrial Revolution.

Yet, critics highlight the dangers of over-reliance on intelligent systems. The displacement of workers is an immediate concern: millions of jobs, particularly those involving routine tasks, are vulnerable to automation. While optimists predict that new industries and professions will emerge, historical evidence suggests that transitions are rarely smooth. Inequalities may widen if benefits of automation accrue mainly to corporations and highly skilled elites, leaving low- and middle-income groups behind.

Beyond economics, AI raises profound ethical dilemmas. One frequently cited issue is algorithmic bias. Because AI systems are trained on human-generated data, they may reproduce existing prejudices in hiring, policing, or lending decisions. The opacity of machine-learning models makes accountability difficult: who is responsible when an algorithm discriminates? The programmer, the company, or the AI itself? Another question concerns autonomy and decision-making. Should machines be allowed to make life-and-death decisions in warfare, medicine, or law enforcement? For many ethicists, such delegation risks undermining fundamental human values.

Governments worldwide are struggling to regulate AI without stifling innovation. The European Union has proposed strict guidelines requiring transparency, risk assessment, and human oversight. In contrast, other regions adopt a more laissez-faire approach, prioritizing economic competitiveness over ethical safeguards. This divergence raises the possibility of a global “AI arms race,” where states compete to develop increasingly powerful systems without adequate consideration of long-term consequences.

Philosophically, AI challenges humanity’s self-image. For centuries, humans have regarded rational thought, creativity, and language as uniquely ours. If machines begin to demonstrate these abilities, does that diminish our distinctiveness? Some thinkers even suggest that advanced AI could one day possess forms of consciousness, though this remains speculative. Whether or not such a

scenario unfolds, the very possibility compels us to reconsider assumptions about intelligence and personhood.

In conclusion, artificial intelligence represents both an extraordinary opportunity and a formidable challenge. Economically, it promises efficiency and innovation, yet it risks exacerbating inequality. Ethically, it forces us to grapple with accountability, fairness, and human dignity. Politically, it demands careful governance on a global scale. And philosophically, it touches the core of what it means to be human. The trajectory of AI will depend not merely on engineers and entrepreneurs but on collective decisions about values, priorities, and the kind of future we wish to create.

Questions

1. Gap Filling (Complete the sentences)

Use NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS from the passage.

1. Some economists believe AI may spark a _____ similar to the Industrial Revolution.
 2. One immediate concern is the _____ of workers.
 3. AI systems can unintentionally reproduce existing _____.
 4. The European Union demands _____ and human oversight in AI systems.
 5. Philosophers question whether AI might one day possess forms of _____.
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2. True / False / Not Given

6. AI is the first technology in history to raise ethical concerns.
 7. Algorithms may replicate prejudices present in human data.
 8. Governments around the world have identical approaches to AI regulation.
 9. Some thinkers argue that AI could potentially achieve consciousness.
 10. The text claims that advanced AI will certainly replace human creativity.
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3. Multiple Choice (Choose ONE option)

11. What is presented as a major economic advantage of AI?
 - A) It eliminates inequality.
 - B) It increases efficiency in multiple industries.
 - C) It creates new jobs instantly.
 - D) It reduces global competition.
12. According to critics, what is one danger of automation?
 - A) It forces companies to raise salaries.
 - B) It eliminates demand for all skilled work.
 - C) It threatens employment for millions in routine jobs.
 - D) It makes governments completely powerless.
13. What is a difficulty with algorithmic bias?
 - A) Algorithms are always programmed by the military.
 - B) The responsibility for discrimination is unclear.

- C) Bias can only occur in medical applications.
D) It has already been completely solved.
14. What risk is associated with a global “AI arms race”?
A) It could limit access to the internet.
B) It may prioritize speed over ethical considerations.
C) It guarantees peaceful cooperation between states.
D) It will reduce competitiveness worldwide.
15. According to the passage, what fundamental issue does AI raise for philosophy?
A) Whether intelligence is only about mathematics.
B) Whether machines can store enough data.
C) Whether human uniqueness might be challenged.
D) Whether people will stop reading books.

4. Matching Headings (Paragraphs 2–6)

Headings:

- A) Ethical concerns: bias and accountability
B) Philosophical challenges to human uniqueness
C) Political regulation and global competition
D) Economic opportunities and risks
E) Historical inventions compared to AI

16. Paragraph 2 →

17. Paragraph 3 →

18. Paragraph 4 →

19. Paragraph 5 →

20. Paragraph 6 →