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Post-Labor Economics Survey: Contemporary Voices, Convergence, and Divergence

1. List of Economists and Thinkers

- **David Autor** – A leading labor economist, Autor initially documented how automation polarizes job markets by replacing routine middle-skill work [1] [2]. In recent commentary, he acknowledges that while AI will disrupt tasks, historical precedent shows labor markets adapting through new, complementary roles for humans [3] [4]. Autor suggests many jobs will *evolve* rather than vanish – e.g. workers using AI to boost productivity – and that a fully "post-labor" economy (if it ever arrives) is likely far in the future [3] [5].

- **Paul Krugman** – Nobel laureate Krugman is skeptical that we are on the brink of mass unemployment from AI. He argues that past technological revolutions (steam, electricity, etc.) took decades to translate into large productivity gains, and **history suggests AI's big economic effects will similarly "take longer to materialize" than many expect** [6]. Krugman supports strong social safety nets, but he does not view automation as imminently eliminating most jobs – instead, he warns against alarmism and emphasizes gradual adjustment over time [6].

- **Tyler Cowen** – An influential economist and author of *Average Is Over*, Cowen foresees a highly unequal future labor market: a small elite thrives by working with intelligent machines, while many others settle into lower-paid service roles. He downplays the likelihood of a complete end-of-work scenario, predicting AI will boost annual GDP growth only modestly (perhaps 0.25–0.5 percentage points) [6]. Cowen is **critical of Universal Basic Income (UBI)** as a remedy – he argues an unconditional payment could erode the work ethic and fail to address root problems like declining male workforce participation [7] [8]. Instead, he favors policies that encourage work and productivity, not ones that presuppose a jobless society.

- **Anton Korinek** – Breaking from many peers, Korinek warns that advanced AI could fundamentally **upend labor markets**. His models assume that if there is a finite set of tasks humans can do, sufficiently powerful AI will eventually perform all of them better or cheaper. In that case, *"wages collapse"* and labor income vanishes [9]. Korinek (often with Joseph Stiglitz) explores how such "runaway" automation could drive extreme wealth concentration if left unchecked [10] [11]. He argues that this outcome is not inevitable – AI can be *steered* to complement human workers – but he urges policymakers to take the threat of widespread job obsolescence seriously and begin planning redistribution strategies now [12] [13].

- **David Shapiro** – A technologist and PLE commentator, Shapiro embraces automation's potential to *liberate* people from work, but insists that society must radically redesign income distribution in response. He advocates **aggressive measures like UBI combined with new forms of broad asset ownership** (e.g. tokenized shares in productive capital) so that everyone benefits from AI-driven gains [14] [15]. In Shapiro's view, simply hoping that new jobs will appear is naive; instead, he calls for

"decentralizing" economic power – for instance, through social wealth funds or crypto-token systems – to give the public a direct stake in an automated economy [14]. UBI, he argues, is necessary but not sufficient – it must be part of a larger rethinking of the social contract to maintain broad prosperity when human labor is no longer essential.

- **Daniel Susskind** – Susskind, author of *A World Without Work*, argues that this time **is** different: increasingly capable AI may eventually render even skilled human labor unnecessary on a large scale [16] [17]. He notes that past technological waves created new professions, but worries that modern AI can encroach on *both* "routine" and traditionally high-skill tasks (from trucking to medical diagnostics) [16]. Susskind believes society should prepare for a future with considerably less paid work. He suggests a stronger role for the state ("Big State") in managing the transition [18] – for example, a form of basic income (potentially **conditional**, targeting those in need) funded by taxes on capital, a shorter working week to spread remaining jobs, and heavy investment in education and "leisure policies" to help people find purpose beyond employment [19]. While he acknowledges the psychological and social challenges of less work, Susskind remains cautiously optimistic that a prosperous, equitable, meaningful post-work society is achievable with the right policies [20].

- **Erik Brynjolfsson** – A prominent digital economy scholar, Brynjolfsson highlights AI's **dual nature**: it can displace workers, but it also *augments* human capabilities and creates new tasks. In works like *The Second Machine Age* and more recent essays, he observes that automation so far has tended to *reshape* jobs rather than abolish them outright – most occupations consist of bundles of tasks, some of which machines take over while other tasks remain for humans [21] [22]. However, Brynjolfsson warns that if AI development follows a path of imitating human capabilities too closely (what he calls the "Turing trap"), it could lead to excessive substitution of machines for people [23] [24]. He advocates instead for technologies that complement human skills. Brynjolfsson agrees that inequality is a major concern – many workers have seen stagnant incomes as routine jobs vanish [25] [26] – and he supports active interventions (like retraining programs and **expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit**) to raise worker incomes [27]. Notably, he is *skeptical of UBI* as a first resort, arguing that encouraging employment (through wage subsidies, education, and innovation that creates human-centric roles) is better for both economic and social well-being [27].

- **Andrew McAfee** – Brynjolfsson's frequent collaborator, McAfee similarly asserts that **AI-induced job losses** will be counterbalanced by job creation elsewhere, as has occurred historically [28] [29]. He points out that total employment and hours worked have continued to reach new highs in recent years despite rapid tech progress [29]. Like Brynjolfsson, McAfee acknowledges that the nature of work is changing – the labor market is polarizing, with middle-skill jobs declining and lower-paid service jobs growing [30]. To address the downsides (e.g. underemployment and "deaths of despair" in some communities [26] [31]), McAfee advocates policies to create good jobs (such as infrastructure investment and green energy projects) and to raise pay for low-income workers. He has explicitly argued for **expanding wage subsidies like the EITC over adopting a UBI**, on the grounds that society should incentivize participation in the workforce and preserve the dignity and purpose that work can provide [27]. McAfee's stance reflects a faith in adaptation: he believes that while AI will cause pain for certain workers, the economy can adjust *if* we implement smart policies to share the benefits and help workers transition, rather than giving up on work altogether.

- **Mariana Mazzucato** – An economist known for her work on public value and innovation, Mazzucato emphasizes that the gains from automation and AI are *collectively created* and thus should be

broadly shared. She proposes mechanisms like a **"citizens' dividend" or sovereign wealth funds** to distribute the wealth generated by technological progress [32]. For example, since critical technologies (from the internet to AI) often emerge from publicly-funded R&D, she argues that society should earn a return – e.g. via equity stakes, or public trusts that pay out dividends to citizens [32]. Mazzucato sees automation not as a purely market-driven phenomenon but as something that policy and governance can steer: she advocates mission-oriented investments in tech that create good jobs (rather than simply automating for private profit) and social policies like UBI or a **universal basic dividend** tied to natural resources and public innovations [32]. In short, her position is that a post-labor future could be inclusive *if* we redesign who owns the machines – she favors models where workers and the public co-own the automated "means of production," thereby decoupling livelihood from having a formal job without sacrificing equity.

- **Joseph Stiglitz** – Stiglitz, a Nobel-winning economist, has repeatedly warned that *unchecked* automation could exacerbate inequality and unemployment [10]. In collaboration with Korinek and others, he explores scenarios where AI-driven productivity overwhelmingly benefits capital owners, leaving workers behind [10] [11]. Stiglitz's core argument is that market outcomes with AI will not be fair by default – **policy must actively intervene**. He advocates progressive measures: for instance, taxing windfall AI profits or "robot taxes" to fund social programs, investing in education and skill-building, and encouraging technologies that *complement* labor [12] [13]. Stiglitz also supports rethinking social insurance (potentially including basic income guarantees or public employment) to maintain demand if jobs dwindle. However, he shares the view that a fully post-labor economy is not inevitable – by **shaping the direction of innovation** and its ownership, society can ensure AI augments human productivity instead of simply displacing it [12] [33]. His position thus centers on *managed* capitalism in the AI age: harness AI for broad prosperity through strong institutions, rather than allowing laissez-faire automation to hollow out the middle class.

- **Daron Acemoglu** – A leading researcher on technology and labor, Acemoglu argues that the current trajectory of automation is overly focused on *labor substitution* and is thus harming workers. He and Pascual Restrepo document how industrial robots and algorithms have already reduced wages and employment in certain regions and occupations [34]. But Acemoglu emphasizes this outcome is a result of choices – e.g. firms responding to cheap tech and tax incentives – rather than an unstoppable force [35] [13]. He promotes an alternative path of **"directed technological change"**: policy should *nudge innovation toward labor-augmenting applications* (where machines empower workers, raise productivity, and create new tasks) instead of pure automation [35] [12]. Concretely, Acemoglu supports measures like R&D tax credits for technologies that create jobs, removal of tax biases that favor capital over labor, and education to complement technology. He is critical of surrendering to a post-labor fate or relying only on redistribution after-the-fact. In his view, **pre-distribution via shaping technology is key**: we should *steer the economy* so that humans remain an essential input. That said, Acemoglu acknowledges automation *can* greatly benefit society if managed – he is not anti-technology, but rather against the *excessive* automation that diminishes shared prosperity [35] [33].

- **Pascual Restrepo** – Restrepo, Acemoglu's frequent co-author, shares a similar standpoint. Together they have developed task-based models showing that whether automation leads to widespread unemployment or not depends on the balance between **task displacement** and **task creation** [36]. Their empirical work on robotics and AI finds that in recent decades, displacement effects have been significant in certain industries – for instance, each additional robot can directly reduce jobs and pay

in the local area [34]. Restrepo, however, notes that automation also raises productivity, which can create new jobs elsewhere or new demand ("reinstatement effects"). The concern is that lately the creation of new tasks for labor has not kept pace with the tasks automated [37] [38]. He advocates policies to encourage the generation of new complementary roles (through innovation policy and training) and supports Acemoglu's call for slowing *excess* automation. In essence, Restrepo is not a doomsayer about technology – he believes the economy *could* adapt – but he underscores that adaptation won't happen automatically if we prioritize replacing workers over empowering them.

- **Sabine Pfeiffer** – A sociologist of work, Pfeiffer offers a critical counterpoint to sweeping automation forecasts. She argues the popular "automation discourse" often **overestimates AI's capabilities and underestimates the complexity of human labor** [39] [40]. In her research on factory and service jobs, Pfeiffer finds that even jobs deemed routine involve tacit knowledge, improvisation, and human judgment that machines struggle with [41] [42]. For example, an assembly line worker handles small irregularities and adjustments on the fly [42]; service workers deploy emotional intelligence with customers – these facets are hard to fully codify. Thus, Pfeiffer is skeptical that *total* automation is near. She cautions that sensational claims of a workless future can distract from present labor issues (like poor job quality and worker bargaining power) [43] [39]. Her position doesn't deny that technology will change work, but she believes **human labor will remain essential in many domains**, and we should focus on improving conditions for workers rather than assuming they'll all be replaced soon [44] [45].

- **Donghyun Suh** – As Korinek's co-author and a new voice in PLE modeling, Suh has helped quantify the extreme scenario of AI achieving **full human task mastery**. In a recent paper, Korinek and Suh show that if AI can perform essentially any task that humans can (an assumption aligned with hypothesized AGI), then the economic equilibrium would entail a drastic fall in the value of human labor [9]. In plain terms, *humans would earn almost no wage income* because machines can do everything more efficiently [9]. Suh's work underscores the stakes of the "this time is different" argument – it formalizes the conditions under which the lump-of-labor fallacy might no longer be a fallacy [46]. While largely aligned with Korinek's alarm, Suh also explores policy options within these models. The implication of their scenario is that **broad-based capital ownership or redistribution** becomes crucial ("those who don't share in AI's resources would starve" if nothing changes [47]). Suh thus contributes analytically to the case that, if AI's capabilities approach human-level generality, we need new economic institutions to avoid dystopian inequality.

- **Antonio Casilli** – Casilli, a sociologist, provides a reality check on the narrative of seamless automation. He reveals the **"hidden human labor" behind AI**: countless micro-taskers who label data, moderate content, train algorithms, and perform on-demand gigs that make AI systems appear autonomous [48]. In *Waiting for Robots* (2019/2025), Casilli argues that predictions of imminent full automation have repeatedly failed because, in practice, automation *relocates and fragments work* more than it abolishes it [48] [49]. He labels this the *"AI Godot effect"*: the promise of complete automation is always on the horizon but never fully arrives, as new forms of human labor continually arise to fill the gaps [48]. Casilli's position is that even advanced AI is embedded in a social system of labor – for example, AI content filters rely on outsourced moderators, "self-driving" cars still depend on remote operators or huge teams annotating training data. He calls for recognizing and improving the conditions of these digital workers rather than pretending we are approaching a labor-free utopia [49] [50]. In sum, Casilli diverges from both techno-utopians and doomers by

documenting that work is not vanishing but changing form (often into low-paid, invisible work) under platform capitalism.

- **Kiminori Matsuyama** – Matsuyama, a theoretical economist, has investigated how automation might play out in the long run under different assumptions. In the concept of **"conditional post-scarcity,"** Matsuyama (with economist Liang Chen) analyzes models where production can become highly automated yet certain conditions (like ever-evolving consumer preferences or new sectors emerging) keep human labor economically relevant [51]. Their mathematical model (AER 2022) demonstrates that even with near-complete automation of production, outcomes depend on demand and technology interactions. For instance, if automation makes basic goods abundant (near zero marginal cost), the economy could shift toward things that remain scarce – potentially goods or experiences requiring human touch – thereby maintaining a role for labor. Alternatively, if human wants saturate and technology can satisfy all existing needs, a true post-scarcity (and post-labor) state could arise. Matsuyama's work suggests that the end of labor is **not automatic**; it will hinge on factors like how preferences adjust (do people find new things to spend time and money on?) and the elasticity of substitution between human labor and AI. His position is nuanced: he doesn't dismiss the possibility of a largely laborless economy, but he highlights that certain structural conditions must be met for that to happen [51]. This perspective injects caution against both naive optimism and fatalistic determinism, indicating that multiple long-term scenarios are plausible.

- **Iacopo (Liang) Chen** – Co-author with Matsuyama on conditional post-scarcity, Chen contributes to the formal analysis of post-labor economies. Their research explores how **endogenous technology choices and consumer behavior** influence whether automation leads to a labor-less economy or a transformed one. For example, Chen and Matsuyama show that if technologies largely substitute for human work (and if consumers do not continuously demand new, labor-intensive goods), the labor share of income can approach zero [36]. But under different conditions – such as non-homothetic preferences where new goods constantly emerge – automation might drive down the cost of old goods without fully displacing labor, as people devote income to novel products or services that still require human input. Chen's position, aligned with Matsuyama, underscores a point of divergence in the literature: whether the scope of automation is fundamentally limited by human creativity and needs. His contributions help frame *post-labor economics* as a conditional future, dependent on choices and preferences, rather than an inevitability. (Notably, "Iacopo" Chen is referenced in academic contexts as Liang Chen [51].)

- **Pascal Stiefenhofer** – Stiefenhofer's recent work delves into the implications of **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)** on production and distribution [52] [53]. Using extended CES production models, he examines scenarios where AGI functions as a new factor that can either complement or substitute human labor. His findings are stark: in a long-run equilibrium dominated by AI capital, *human wages could collapse to negligible levels*, necessitating robust redistributive mechanisms [54] [53]. Stiefenhofer concludes that without **policy intervention**, an AGI-rich economy might experience soaring inequality and even stagnation due to insufficient consumer demand (since humans earn little) [53]. He therefore calls for an urgent "renegotiation of the social contract" in light of AGI [55]. Stiefenhofer aligns with thinkers who see automation as a structural break requiring new institutions: for example, he suggests that economic stability in a post-labor era will depend on measures like universal ownership of AI-producing assets, heavy taxation of AI-driven profits with redistribution (a form of social dividend), or other ways to grant the public **broad-based claims on**

capital income [53]. His academic modeling reinforces the view that technology's impact on labor is *not* benign by default, and that proactive governance is essential to avert dystopian outcomes.

- **Nassim Dehouche** – Dehouche is the author of a comprehensive 2025 systematic review of Post-Labor Economics, and his work synthesizes the diverse perspectives in this emerging field. He defines PLE as the study of economic structures "*in a future where technological progress – particularly AI and robotics – substantially reduces or even eliminates the need for human labor*" [56]. Dehouche notes that unlike traditional labor economics, which assumes employment shifts but persists, PLE starts from the premise that human labor could largely **disappear** and then asks how society might distribute income and organize itself in that event [56] [57]. Throughout his review, Dehouche highlights key themes (theoretical frameworks, transition mechanisms, distribution in the absence of wages, and governance issues) and reports that there is a range of opinion on both the **inevitability** of a post-labor shift and its **desirability** [58] [59]. While not taking a strong personal stance on which future will transpire, Dehouche underscores that planning for a *potential* transformative economic shift is prudent. He echoes a consensus that if a post-labor economy does emerge, it could be either utopian (with shared prosperity and leisure) or dystopian (with extreme inequality), and the outcome will depend on choices made in the present regarding technology and policy.

2. Three Primary Areas of Agreement

Despite their varied backgrounds, these contemporary thinkers converge on several key points within Post-Labor Economics:

1. Automation Poses a Structural Threat to Wage Labor

Across the board, there is a shared recognition that advanced automation and AI – unlike earlier, more incremental technologies – present a **credible structural threat** to traditional wage-based livelihoods. Even relatively optimistic economists concede that as AI takes on more tasks, the demand for human labor *could* contract in ways that strain the economic system. For instance, Autor and Krugman (normally techno-optimists) have recently acknowledged that the impact of AI on jobs, while likely slower than the hype, is real and could eventually be profound [6]. More starkly, analysts like Korinek and Susskind argue we may be nearing a *"tipping point"* where machines perform a majority of economically valuable tasks, heralding technological unemployment on a much larger scale than previously experienced [60]. Empirical trends support these concerns: job **polarization** and stagnating labor share have been observed over the past decades as automation replaces routine work [1] [2]. All thinkers agree that if current trajectories continue, many workers face displacement or downward pressure on wages. In Korinek's modeling, full AI capabilities would cause wages to **collapse to near-zero**, effectively severing labor from income [9]. Likewise, Stiefenhofer's and Suh's formal results show an economy saturated with AI capital could leave no room for human earnings without intervention [54] [53]. In summary, a broad consensus exists that automation is not just a routine process of task turnover; it has the potential to fundamentally undermine the wage-based distribution of income that industrial economies rely on [9] [61]. This shared view marks a departure from the complacency of the past – virtually all voices now treat the prospect of large-scale **technological unemployment or underemployment** as a serious structural issue, even if they differ on timing. Thus, the need to address the ramifications of *"labor displacing technological change"* is a unifying theme in PLE discussions [35] [62].

2. Broad-Based Capital Ownership and New Distribution Mechanisms Are Essential Countermeasures

Another strong point of convergence is the belief that if human labor's role in production diminishes, **broad-based economic inclusion must be maintained through other means**. Simply put, when wages can no longer distribute purchasing power adequately, alternative mechanisms (social transfers, capital ownership, etc.) will be necessary to prevent societal collapse or extreme inequality. Many propose some form of **Universal Basic Income** as a foundational solution: an unconditional payment to all citizens to guarantee a livelihood independent of employment [63] [64]. The rationale is that UBI can serve as an "automation dividend," recycling the wealth generated by robots and AI back to the people [64] [65]. Susskind, Stiglitz, Mazzucato, Shapiro, and others all endorse versions of this idea – in Susskind's case, a tax on capital could fund a basic income or *conditional* welfare that shares the gains of technological prosperity [19]. Beyond UBI, there is broad agreement on encouraging **widespread capital ownership** or economic agency for individuals. This includes proposals like public sovereign wealth funds investing in automation-heavy industries and paying out dividends (as Mazzucato suggests) [32], employee stock ownership plans so workers benefit directly from productivity gains [66], or even novel ideas like tokenizing AI and data ownership among the populace (as Shapiro advocates) [67] [66]. The specific mechanisms differ, but the underlying principle is widely shared: *decoupling income from labor*. Even more traditionally-minded economists have come to accept that some redistribution is inevitable in a highly automated economy [68] [69]. For example, Korinek and Restrepo (normally focused on task dynamics) acknowledge that if labor's share keeps falling, **redistribution is required to sustain demand and growth** [68] [69]. Virtually every thinker in this survey – whether on the left or libertarian right – agrees that without new distribution systems, an automation-driven economy would concentrate wealth to an unacceptable degree and leave too many without income or agency. In their models and policy discussions, they converge on a suite of remedies: UBI or **UBD (Universal Basic Dividend)** schemes [32], guaranteed public jobs or income floors, stronger social insurance, and possibly radical ideas of commons ownership of AI. In short, **broad-based entitlements to wealth** (not tied to having a job) are seen as indispensable in any post-labor scenario [14] [53]. This represents a significant convergence of thought: even those who traditionally emphasize market solutions concede that new forms of collective provisioning or ownership will be needed to uphold social stability when labor alone can't do so.

3. Active Policy Steering Can and Should Shape the Transition

A third area of agreement is the conviction that the trajectory of automation and its effects are **not preordained** – policy choices and societal steering will crucially determine outcomes. These thinkers reject a passive, deterministic view of technology. Instead, they argue that through enlightened policies, we can *either* mitigate the harms of automation *or* accelerate benefits in a way that includes everyone. **Human agency matters:** Acemoglu and Korinek both explicitly state that AI's impact depends on how we guide it [12] [13]. For example, AI could be developed to *complement* human workers (decision-support tools, human-AI collaboration) rather than to replace them [12]. Indeed, Korinek/Stiglitz and Acemoglu/Restrepo highlight that societies and firms have choices in the adoption of technology – some firms use automation to assist workers and boost productivity *without* layoffs, while others use it bluntly to cut labor costs [70] [13]. The **consensus view** is that government policies, corporate strategies, and even cultural values can *steer* these choices [33] [62]. Practically, this could mean implementing tax incentives or R&D funding for labor-augmenting innovations, setting regulations or ethical guidelines to slow automation in critical sectors, or redesigning education to focus on skills that complement AI. All thinkers agree that doing *nothing* – simply letting technology unfold – is dangerous. As Autor (2023) notes, the "extent and speed of labor

displacement can be influenced by regulation, economic incentives, and cultural values" rather than left solely to market forces [71]. Additionally, they concur that **policy will be essential to manage the transition period**. Automation won't happen overnight; there will be a protracted phase of hybrid economy, and how we navigate it (through retraining programs, adjustment assistance, job-sharing schemes, etc.) will determine if the shift is "chaotic and unequal or relatively smooth and inclusive" [72] [73]. Another aspect of steering is acknowledging *physical and social constraints*: several thinkers stress that even in an automated age, we must contend with environmental limits and human needs. For instance, there is agreement that a post-labor world should not pursue boundless output at the expense of the planet – instead, we have the opportunity to leverage automation for sustainable prosperity (as degrowth and *doughnut economics* proponents argue) [74] [75]. In other words, automation could enable **near-post-scarcity** in material terms, but policy must ensure this abundance is balanced with ecological management and directed towards well-being rather than endless consumption [76] [74]. Overall, the thinkers in PLE converge on the message that *we are not helpless*. Through proactive governance – from designing better social contracts (Stiefenhofer's "renegotiation" [53]) to enforcing new norms around work and value – society can shape how automation unfolds. This shared belief in **steering capacity** tempers the gloom of automation forecasts with a call to action: the post-labor future, if it comes, can be molded by policy decisions taken today [13] [33].

3. Areas of Disagreement or Divergence

While there is common ground, these thinkers diverge significantly on **key questions and assumptions** about a post-labor future. Their debates span the speed of change, the feasibility of interventions, and the very nature of technological progress. Below, we outline major areas of disagreement and situate them in current research paradigms:

A. Pace and Inevitability of Automation's Impact

One fundamental split is **how fast and how completely** automation will upend labor markets. *"Gradualists"* like Krugman, Autor, and Cowen believe AI's effects will unfold over decades and mirror past industrial transitions – disruptive but ultimately absorbable. Krugman, for example, argues that large AI-driven productivity gains will likely take longer than many anticipate, giving society time to adjust [6]. Autor has pointed to the historical resilience of employment, suggesting many jobs will evolve rather than vanish overnight [3] [4]. In contrast, *"disruption advocates"* like Korinek, Susskind, and many in the Silicon Valley camp foresee a much more rapid and possibly nonlinear upheaval. They posit that if AI reaches certain capability thresholds (e.g. artificial general intelligence), whole classes of jobs could become obsolete in a short span, potentially within a single decade [77]. Korinek's warning that AI might outperform humans at most tasks by the end of the 2020s (based on tech CEOs' predictions) epitomizes this sense of urgency [77] [9]. Empirical evidence gives fodder to both sides: on one hand, unemployment is near historic lows in many countries and productivity growth has been relatively modest, suggesting no immediate mass displacement; on the other hand, there are troubling signs such as declining labor force participation among less-skilled workers and widening inequality attributed in part to automation [26] [31]. Disagreements here often center on whether *"this time is different."* Techno-optimists argue that **the lump-of-labor fallacy still holds** – new jobs will arise as they always have – whereas others contend that AI's breadth and speed may break that pattern. As Larry Summers admitted, economists are "not so completely certain now" that the Luddites were wrong, indicating a shift in thinking [78]. In summary, there is no consensus on timing: Some expect an *evolutionary* change (giving policy and culture a chance to adapt

gradually), while others fear a more *revolutionary* break that could overwhelm current institutions. This divergence in expected timeline informs their sense of urgency (or lack thereof) in policy response.

B. The Extent of Technological Determinism vs Human Agency

Closely related is a debate over **technological determinism** – do economic and technical forces inevitably drive us toward a laborless economy, or can conscious choices alter that course? Thinkers like **Acemoglu and Brynjolfsson firmly reject determinism**, emphasizing *endogenous technology choice*. They argue that automation is not an exogenous tidal wave but a result of incentives that society sets. For instance, Acemoglu & Restrepo (2018) demonstrate that the direction of innovation (toward labor-substituting or labor-complementing technologies) is shaped by relative costs, tax policies, and research priorities [35] [12]. They believe we can and should tilt the balance toward complementarity – e.g. robotics that *assist* workers or AI that amplifies human productivity, rather than aiming to replace humans entirely [12]. Brynjolfsson similarly argues against the "Turing Trap" of pursuing human-like AI; by choosing to focus on AI that does what humans *cannot* do well, we can avoid direct competition between AI and labor [24]. On the other hand, some analysts are more deterministic (or at least skeptical about the feasibility of steering). They observe that **market pressures** and the inherent logic of profit-seeking drive firms to automate whenever possible. Once a technology to eliminate labor becomes viable, competition may force all to adopt it, regardless of social preferences – a scenario of *"technological imperative."* This view is implicit in Korinek's models, which often take the path of automation as given and then explore outcomes [9] [79]. Even Susskind, while advocating policy, acknowledges a strong trend: as AI improves, it relentlessly encroaches on tasks once thought exclusively human (chess, driving, medical analysis, etc.), suggesting a quasi-inevitability to eventual full automation of many jobs [16] [17]. The **disagreement** becomes clear in discussions of extreme futures: Will we inevitably reach a point where *no* human labor is needed (given enough time and innovation), or will there always be some comparative advantage or niche for humans? Casilli's work implies the latter – that the narrative of total automation is a *mirage* and that humans will always be in the loop somewhere, even if hidden behind algorithms [48] [49]. In contrast, Korinek and Suh's scenario assumes a finite set of tasks and suggests that once AI masters them, humanity's role in production effectively ends [9]. This theoretical divide links to academic paradigms: **task-based models** in labor economics offer a spectrum between full substitution and complementarity [79]. Some models assume tasks are *expandable* – new tasks for humans keep emerging (this is Autor's argument: as routine tasks got automated, humans moved into new roles, e.g. designers, care work, etc.). Others assume a fixed or slowly expanding set of tasks, which AI might eventually exhaust (Korinek's assumption of bounded task complexity) [9]. Likewise, Matsuyama & Chen's concept of **"conditional post-scarcity"** explicitly states that if certain conditions (like ever-expanding human needs or non-substitutable tasks) hold, then full automation may *not* remove the need for labor [51]. If those conditions fail, then a laborless economy emerges. In essence, there is a live debate: **Is a post-labor economy a choice or a destiny?** The convergence around policy importance (noted in section 2) shows most believe choice matters; yet their writings reveal a spectrum of confidence in our ability to redirect or slow the march of automation. This disagreement influences their policy stance – the more deterministic one views technology, the more emphasis on adapting via redistribution; the more one believes in agency, the more one pushes to *shape* innovation itself.

C. Future of Work: Creation of New Tasks vs "End of Human Work"

Another flashpoint is whether emerging technologies will chiefly **substitute** for human labor or also generate entirely **new forms of work** for humans. This ties into classical economic theory (going back to David Ricardo and John Maynard Keynes) but has taken new form in the AI era. On one side, optimists like

Autor and **Bessen** (and historically, Keynes) argue for a "reinstatement effect": even as technology automates some jobs, it opens up new opportunities – often jobs we can't yet imagine. Autor often cites how, after past automation (agriculture, manufacturing), we saw the rise of completely new occupations and industries [80] [81]. These thinkers accuse the doomsayers of a failure of imagination, projecting current job categories forward instead of recognizing how technology creates new demand (e.g., the app economy, AI ethics specialists, green energy jobs, etc.). **Task-based models** support this: if AI takes over certain tasks, human labor can specialize in the tasks AI is bad at (creativity, social interaction, complex problem-solving) [24] [82]. The disagreement arises in **whether those remaining human tasks are sufficient in scope and value** to employ the majority of people. Pessimists respond that AI is now encroaching even on creative and interactive tasks (writing, painting, customer service bots), potentially shrinking the set of things humans inherently do better. Susskind gives the example: we used to think only low-skill jobs were at risk, but now AI can draft legal documents or diagnose illnesses, so higher-skill work is also vulnerable [16] [83]. The concept of *conditional post-scarcity* again appears: Matsuyama's work indicates that if human consumption expands to new experiences or products that require human input, labor remains in demand [51]. But if AI can satisfy nearly all existing wants cheaply, we hit a satiation point and the need for labor plunges. **Empirical divergences**: Some recent studies (e.g. by Dauth et al. 2021 in Germany) found that introducing robots did *not* always reduce total employment at the firm level – often workers were reallocated rather than fired, or output grew so much that companies kept workers on in different roles [84]. Other studies (Acemoglu & Restrepo 2020 for the U.S.) found significant job and wage losses in local labor markets exposed to robots [34]. These mixed findings fuel debate: do we interpret current automation as mostly *displacing* (taking jobs) or *augmenting* (making workers more productive)? Brynjolfsson and Mitchell (2018) note that most jobs are a bundle of tasks, only some automatable [21] [22]. From this, they infer that partial automation will change the nature of jobs rather than eradicate them wholesale – an implicitly optimistic outlook [24] [85]. However, if AI reaches a point where it can handle *all* tasks in certain jobs (say autonomous vehicles entirely replacing drivers), then those roles vanish outright. The **viability of "make-work"** also splits thinkers: Some, like Cowen and McAfee, argue it's crucial to keep people engaged in *meaningful* work, even if automation reduces pure economic need for their labor [7] [27]. They worry about the social implications of a workless society (echoing Keynes' concern about how to use leisure, and contemporary concerns about purpose and mental health). Others, like Srnicek & Williams (the "post-work" proponents) and Shapiro, see the decline of work as an opportunity for liberation – as long as income and meaning can be provided by other means. Susskind straddles this line: he acknowledges the loss of the work ethic could be traumatic, yet points out that many people do not find their jobs meaningful even today, so a future with less work could be positive if handled well [86] [87]. Thus, underlying disagreements about new task creation vs end-of-work are also **normative**: is "full unemployment" something to fear and stave off, or a goal to embrace once we solve distribution? This ideological divergence colors interpretations of the same data – one side sees underemployed gig workers and argues for re-investing in job creation; the other sees the early stages of a post-work economy and argues for accelerating automation paired with UBI. The conditional nature of evidence – some new jobs *are* appearing (e.g., AI ethicist, drone operator), but perhaps not enough for all displaced workers – ensures this debate remains unresolved.

D. Policy Prescriptions: Universal Basic Income vs Alternatives

When it comes to solutions, a major divide is over the **best way to provide income and social support** in a post-labor context. Nearly everyone agrees some solution is needed (as noted, UBI is widely discussed), but there is disagreement over *which* approach is realistic or desirable. **UBI proponents** (Shapiro, Yang in the public debate, and to a degree Susskind and Stiglitz) argue that a no-strings basic income is straightforward and empowering: it directly gives people purchasing power and freedom, smoothing the transition to a

world with less work [63] [64]. They cite studies and trials (Finland's experiment, etc.) that show basic income can improve well-being without destroying work incentives in the short run [64] [65]. Moreover, they often view UBI as a *right* in a rich automated economy – a dividend of shared progress. **UBI skeptics** counter with several arguments. Cowen's critique is cultural and political: he worries a UBI large enough to live on would discourage work and *"damage our culture's work ethic,"* with long-term social consequences [7]. He also notes political resistance to paying people not to work and potential backlash against immigrants if UBI is in place [88]. Brynjolfsson and McAfee's objection is more economic: they argue that UBI, by itself, doesn't incentivize engagement in productive activity, whereas an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit or job guarantee would encourage people to remain in or return to the labor force [27]. They and others point to the non-monetary value of work (identity, community) and thus prefer solutions that keep a link between contributions and income [89] [90]. There is also debate on feasibility: some, like Krugman and many policymakers, note that funding a generous UBI requires significant tax increases or new revenue sources, which may face political hurdles – whereas targeting support (e.g. through negative income taxes or conditional transfers) might be more attainable. Another line of divergence is **public job creation vs. income support**. Mazzucato and some heterodox economists suggest a job guarantee or public service programs (e.g. investing in care work, green jobs) as a way to ensure people have gainful employment even if private sector jobs dry up. This stems from a belief that work itself is important for society; it contrasts with the more radical post-work stance of simply giving out income and not worrying if people work. In practice, many propose *hybrids* (UBI combined with part-time public work or community service expectations, for example), but philosophically the split is clear. We see this in Susskind's recommendation of a shorter work week: rather than no work, he envisions sharing the remaining work more broadly (e.g. a 3-day or 4-day week) [91]. That implies disagreement with those who would rather see people fully decoupled from jobs. **Tokenization and novel ownership**: Shapiro's idea of tokenizing productive assets so that individuals accrue micropayments from AI's output is innovative but untested, and some might view it as overly complex or speculative compared to straightforward taxation and welfare. Nonetheless, it highlights a divergence between high-tech libertarian solutions (create new property rights for individuals in data/AI) and traditional social-democratic solutions (tax and redistribute). In essence, all camps agree broad-based distribution is needed (as per Section 2), but they **disagree on the mechanism**: direct cash grants to all (UBI) vs. wage subsidies and job creation, unconditional vs. conditional support, centralized state provision vs. decentralized ownership. These disagreements often draw on differing empirical interpretations: for instance, does giving people cash reduce labor supply? UBI trials so far (e.g. Finland) showed little decrease in work effort [64], but skeptics argue long-term cultural shifts could be different. Likewise, proponents say automation will make enough wealth to pay for UBI; opponents doubt political willingness to tax that wealth sufficiently. This debate is far from settled and is deeply entwined with values about work and freedom.

E. Empirical Uncertainties and Theoretical Paradigms

Finally, it's worth noting that many disagreements persist because of **uncertainties in data and theory**. The field of post-labor economics is nascent, and different studies yield different forecasts. For example, one influential study by Frey & Osborne (2013) estimated 47% of US jobs were at high risk of automation, fueling alarm. Later studies (OECD, Arntz et al. 2016) argued the true percentage of fully automatable jobs was much lower (maybe 9%), because tasks within jobs vary. Sabine Pfeiffer's research directly challenges high automation estimates by empirically documenting the non-routine components of supposedly routine jobs [92] [93]. Such empirical debates lead thinkers to diverging positions on how many jobs are actually in jeopardy. **Task-based frameworks** introduced by economists like Autor and Acemoglu provide a common language, but they can be parameterized differently: if one assumes a high substitutability between AI and

human labor, one gets a different outcome than if one assumes complementarity. In Korinek & Stiglitz (2018) models, a key parameter is whether AI is a good substitute for human tasks; if yes, the model tends toward a "full automation equilibrium" with sharply lower labor share, whereas if AI and human labor are complementary in enough tasks, humans maintain a role and share in growth [36]. Different thinkers make different assumptions here, leading to disagreement in conclusions. **Endogenous growth theory** vs. classical models also play a role: Some, like Aghion and Howitt (not explicitly in our list but in the literature), might emphasize that automation could lead to new sectors via innovation (endogenous growth), whereas others might use a Solow-style model where technological change is exogenous and can hit a point where labor is largely eliminated as an input. *Conditional post-scarcity*, introduced by Matsuyama & Chen, is itself a theoretical paradigm saying: we must consider preference structures (non-homothetic preferences mean as people get richer from automation, their consumption patterns change in ways that could require new labor) [51]. This adds another layer of debate – it's not just about technology, but about human desires and macroeconomic dynamics. **Physical resource constraints** also cause disagreement: techno-optimists assume clean energy and resource substitution will allow automation to scale without running into scarcity of materials or energy. Ecologically oriented economists argue that even if labor is not a constraint, resources and climate are – meaning policy must deliberately slow certain types of growth and focus on sustainability. This is a separate but related disagreement on whether a "fully automated luxury communism" is feasible or whether we must accept limits (hence some prefer reduced work not just because of automation but to reduce consumption and emissions) [94] [74]. In conclusion, disagreements in the PLE discourse are driven by a mix of **empirical divergences, model assumptions, and value judgments**. Key thinkers debate how quickly automation will progress, whether new human work will offset losses, how malleable the path of technology is, and which policies can realistically safeguard human prosperity. These debates are informed by the latest studies (from analyses of online job postings to macro models of AI), but the evidence can be read in multiple ways. As Dehouche notes in his review, the field encompasses varied perspectives on the *inevitability vs. contingency* of post-labor futures [58]. Going forward, more data (for example, on AI's impact on job vacancies [95]) and experimentation with policies (like UBI pilots, skill programs, etc.) may resolve some disputes. However, many disagreements also stem from deeper philosophical views on work, which means a convergence there may require not just more research but a reframing of what we consider a good society. The current intellectual scaffolding – ranging from task-based economic models to theories of welfare capitalism – provides a structured way to argue these points, even as it leads different thinkers to divergent conclusions. Each disagreement ultimately enriches the discourse, pushing proponents to refine their models and assumptions in light of others' critiques, thereby advancing our understanding of a possible post-labor paradigm.

Sources: The analysis above draws on a range of contemporary literature and commentary on automation and the future of work, including academic papers, economic models, and public essays by the figures listed. Key references include Korinek & Stiglitz's work on AI and income distribution [10] [11], Acemoglu & Restrepo's empirical studies on robots [34], Brynjolfsson et al.'s task-based analyses [21] [24], Pfeiffer's critique of automation assumptions [39] [40], Susskind's arguments from *A World Without Work* [16] [19], and the systematic review by Dehouche (2025) which comprehensively maps the field [96] [56]. These sources, among others cited throughout, underpin the points of convergence and divergence discussed in this survey.

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