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English 1

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In “Passengers,” the first chapter of his book *The Glass Cage*, Nicholas Carr illustrates the increasing presence of automation and the resulting changes in work delegation, warning that passiveness leads to overdependence and miswanting, meaning that we must make ethical choices about our use of automation. Carr begins by describing his feeling of pride when learning to drive a manual transmission and his feeling of underutilization when an automatic transmission took over, claiming that what he had initially perceived as freedom quickly turned into a limitation. Carr then shifts his focus to Google’s self-driving car, emphasizing how it is a breakthrough in automation. He argues that despite the challenges facing self-driving cars, they have revolutionized automation, with more responsibilities likely shifting from humans to automation in the future. This brings Carr to the limits of automation. He asserts that Google’s driverless car blurs the line between explicit knowledge (which can be written as steps) and tacit knowledge (which people use unconsciously) (Carr 9-10). Carr emphasizes that computers are not becoming human but that they can use explicit knowledge at superhuman speed to accomplish tacit tasks, changing the way work is performed (11). Carr then focuses on our dependency on computers. He believes that we are overly dependent on software everywhere. Though this is disconcerting, Carr emphasizes that we generally welcome technology. The issue is that overdependence can lead to a feeling of underutilization in people. Carr then brings up the value of labor and leisure, using Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s 1990 book *Flow* to discuss “the paradox of work”, where people dislike being at work though they feel more fulfilled there (15). Carr summarizes this as “*miswanting*”, where we desire what we don’t want and vice versa. Carr then highlights the importance of achieving Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow (where we become so absorbed in our work that we tune out our problems) instead of staying idle (16). Carr then discusses the unintended consequences of automation. He reasons that our inability to limit our dependence on automation makes us passive. Despite this, Carr quickly notes that automation has numerous benefits, such as increasing efficiency and productivity. Carr concludes that the decisions we make regarding automation are ethical ones defining our lives and what it means to be human (18).

[370 Words]

Works Cited

Carr, Nicholas. “Passengers.” *The Glass Cage: How Our Computers Are Changing Us*. Norton, 2014, pp. 3-18.