



# Man vs Robot: Weapons Against Automation

Talmage Lamb

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview>

Marriott Student Review is a student journal created and published as a project for the Writing for Business Communications course at Brigham Young University (BYU). The views expressed in Marriott Student Review are not necessarily endorsed by BYU or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

---

### Recommended Citation

Lamb, Talmage () "Man vs Robot: Weapons Against Automation," *Marriott Student Review*. Vol. 5 , Article 10.

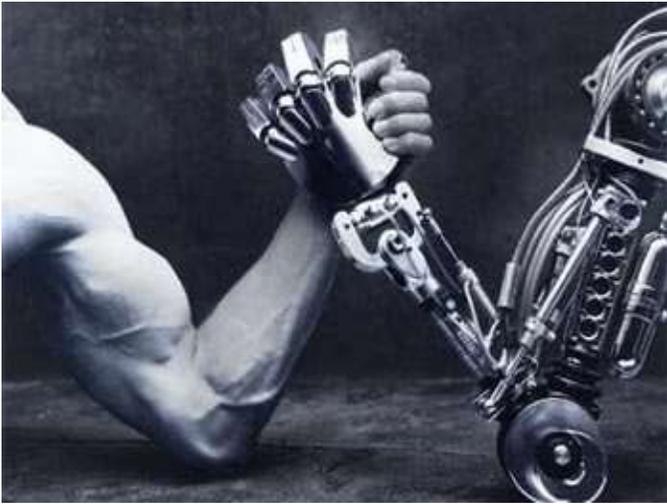
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol5/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marriott Student Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# MAN VS. ROBOT:

## WEAPONS AGAINST AUTOMATION

By: Talmage Lamb



A world war is approaching. This time, the enemy is unlike any to come before it. There will be no borders or territories, no prisoners of war or atomic bombs; instead, battle scenes will look closer to a *Marvel Avengers* movie than to an actual war. The enemy won't have a dictator or king; in fact, if anyone should be blamed for the enemy's power, it will be us. However, the biggest difference between this war and previous world wars is that battles won't be fought in trenches or behind barriers—this time the battleground will be the office.

In this war, the enemies are robots, and they are coming for our jobs. Prospects for defeating them are daunting, but one stands out as a likely hero—the liberal arts.

Complementing high school and college educations with classes in the humanities or liberal arts prepares students for an unpredictable future work environment by sharpening analytical skills, crafting communication tools, and inspiring creative thinking.



### Sharpening Analytical Skills

The liberal arts teach us how to grapple with the abstract. Professors in the humanities teach their students to work in the gray area of life. Unlike tests and assignments in finance or accounting majors, there are no correct answers to problems posed in humanities

exams. The students gather evidence and propose arguments for their convictions. This forces students in the humanities to deal with ambiguity. In fact, despite being more prevalent in humanities classes than in business classes, ambiguity is one of the greatest benefits of a liberal arts education, since solutions in the actual business world are rarely black and white. According to billionaire, investor, and owner of the Dallas Mavericks, Mark Cuban, this requirement to condone ambiguity is exactly why liberal arts majors will soon be recruiters' first choice. He believes that with the increase of automation in the workforce less employees will be hired to collect data and more will be needed to analyze the data. He says, "When the data is all being spit out for you, options are being spit out for you, you need a different perspective in order to have a different view of the data."<sup>1</sup> Although the world's top-grossing jobs are likely to shape-shift or be replaced; soft skills, such as analytical thinking, will always be in high demand.

## Constructing Communication Tools

Studying the humanities also teaches students how to speak their mind. The liberal arts teach students how to be better communicators in three ways:

- **Comprehension:** In the humanities, students will encounter complex ideas or philosophies. Learning to understand, answer, and fight through these ideas teaches students how to better articulate their own thoughts as well as helping students develop coherent speech. Texts are often dense and abstruse. When a student excels in understanding thick philosophical texts or literature, all other texts become easy to understand.

- **Writing:** Humanities students also become better writers. Unlike students in business or hard science classes, students of the liberal arts are heavily graded not by how well they scavenge for answers but by how well they formulate arguments. Formulating complex arguments enhances students' abilities to pen down sophisticated thoughts and become better, more well-rounded writers.

- **Conversations:** Studying the humanities forces students to improve their conversation

skills; however, learning to speak clearly is not the only way this occurs. Liberal arts and humanities classes introduce students to fascinating topics and history. Being able to talk about Van Gogh and Picasso or Napoleon and Charlemagne certainly help make a student well rounded, but it also exposes the student to diverse cultures and unfamiliar ideas.<sup>2</sup> The modern global workforce is ripe with diversity, and interaction between these groups is only increasing. As these students transition into the diverse workforce, their background in humanities will help them quickly find common ground and build meaningful relationships with their colleagues.

## Inspiring Creative Thinking

Unlike other degrees, the humanities and liberal arts degrees welcome—and depend on—creative thinking. In the workforce, creative skills will soon have their moment to shine; hard skills, like computing and engineering, will stay on the sideline. The assistant editor of Harvard Business Review, JM Olejarz, calls it “revenge of the nerds”:

“From Silicon Valley to the Pentagon, people are beginning to realize that to effectively tackle today’s biggest social and technological challenges, we need to think critically about their human context—something humanities graduates happen to be well trained to do. Call it the revenge of the film, history, and philosophy nerds.”<sup>3</sup>

Entrepreneur Elon Musk feels similarly. When facing challenging questions, he implores his workers to use the “first principles method.” This method requires workers to boil information down to basic ideas and “reason up” from there. “This creative process requires a lot of mental energy,” says Musk; however, he believes that it has been an integral part of how he built his companies and achieved success.<sup>4</sup>

## Why we Need the Humanities

Knowing how the humanities help us is not enough—we must also understand *why* they are necessary. As jobs are eliminated and work life is reformed, the attack on workers is expected to exceed that of any other period in the 2020s. Just like the rest of society, the future of the global workforce is growing more unpredictable every day. Forbes Magazine

projects that an entire 50 percent of current work activities will be automated by 2030.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, this complicates how children and students everywhere are preparing for future careers. Responding to the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” has never been harder.

Throughout the past twenty years, developed countries have witnessed a massive surge in demand for operational jobs such as computer programming and mechanical engineering.<sup>6</sup> Occupations such as these require hard skills and knowledge taught on college campuses or boot camps. There is now a greater reason to doubt the reliability of these jobs becoming careers as we consider the trajectory of modern technology. According to McKinsey & Co., jobs consisting of hyper-technical tasks such as these will be the first to go—and many have already.<sup>7</sup> In addition to creating an ethical dilemma for company executives, reality also imposes a tricky situation on future workers.

## How to Weaponize the Humanities

So how should an aspiring breadwinner use their humanities degree? Wouldn't it be better to just join forces with the robots? Shouldn't upcoming laborers just engineer brilliant artificial intelligence and software that will automate tedious work activities? The easy answer is yes. Unfortunately, the resources these products require will not be available to all. Finding a way to implement the liberal arts into the students' education or background is a much more promising solution.

The arts have long been a friend to mankind. In modern society, they may soon become our best friend. So how do they solve the problem of automation? And how should they be properly weaponized? The answer is not that everybody should go to Walmart and buy paintbrushes. A more likely application will be in academia. Implementing art or liberal arts subjects into college and high school education will give students a more general tool set that can be applied to a myriad of careers, instead of one highly specialized tool set that applies to fewer careers.

## So Now What?

So what's the bottom line? Does this mean that there's no use in finishing your coding boot camp or degree in mechanical engineering? The answer is no—certainly, if everyone had the same skill set, there would be no point in getting an education at all. The bottom line is that no matter what you choose to become, complementing your background with the liberal arts or humanities will allow you to stay in high demand.<sup>8</sup> Topping your experience off with the humanities can take several forms. It can entail obtaining a minor in South Asian linguistics, embarking on a personal binge study of Leo Tolstoy, or stopping in a new museum every Saturday—the options are endless.

## In Parting

Someone who studies the liberal arts or humanities shouldn't be surprised when they discover something more valuable than dollar bills or job titles. Unlike in business, where internships and grades are the means to a job or paycheck, the humanities embrace the idea

that studying art is justified enough by the emotional benefits. One of these emotional benefits will perhaps be the secret weapon in the forthcoming war—empathy. Empathy is a silver bullet. As the global workforce diversifies more and more, the need for empathy and understanding across contrasting cultures will skyrocket. Not only will empathy help job candidates secure positions, but it will also produce better employees. People who have emotional intelligence or the ability to empathize with strangers are more efficient at negotiating, pleasant to work with, and successful at building their network. As many have said before, prepare yourself for the future. Find a way to implement cultural studies or humanities classes into your education, and opportunities will place you in an advantageous position to be a leader in the war against robotics.

Notes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Abby Jackson, “CUBAN: Don't Go to School for Finance—Liberal Arts Is the Future,” *Business Insider*, February 17, 2017, [www.businessinsider.com/mark-cuban-liberal-arts-is-the-future-2017-2](http://www.businessinsider.com/mark-cuban-liberal-arts-is-the-future-2017-2).
- <sup>2</sup> Mikiko Nishimura and Toshiaki Sasao, eds., *Doing Liberal Arts Education* (Switzerland: Springer Link, 2019).
- <sup>3</sup> JM Olejarz, “Liberal Arts in the Data Age,” *Harvard Business Review*, July–August 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/07/liberal-arts-in-the-data-age>.
- <sup>4</sup> Ruth Umoh, “Mark Cuban Says This Skill Will Be Critical in 10 Years, and Elon Musk Agrees,” *CNBC*, July 26, 2018, [www.cnbc.com/2018/07/26/the-skill-mark-cuban-and-elon-musk-say-is-critical-to-success.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/26/the-skill-mark-cuban-and-elon-musk-say-is-critical-to-success.html).
- <sup>5</sup> Patrick W. Watson, “Machines Will Do Half Our Work By 2025,” *Forbes*, September 27, 2018, [www.forbes.com/sites/patrickwwatson/2018/09/27/machines-will-do-half-our-work-by-2025/?sh=792de1ec5e2a](http://www.forbes.com/sites/patrickwwatson/2018/09/27/machines-will-do-half-our-work-by-2025/?sh=792de1ec5e2a).
- <sup>6</sup> Tammy McCausland, ed., “News and Analysis of the Global Innovation Scene,” *Research Technology Management*, November–December 2020, <https://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?EbscoContent=dGJyMNHX8kSeprQ4zOX0OLCmsEmeprRSsK64S7OWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGuskyurK5IuePfgex43zx1%2B6B&T=P&P=AN&S=R&D=buh&K=146907011>.
- <sup>7</sup> James Manyika et al., “Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: What the Future of Work Will Mean for Jobs, Skills, and Wages,” *McKinsey & Company*, May 11, 2019, [www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages](http://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages).
- <sup>8</sup> JM Olejarz, “Put that Device Down and Cultivate Stillness.” *The Australian*, October 12, 2019, 47, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A602361338/AONE?u=byuprovo&sid=AONE&xid=1165094d>.