# AI isn't coming for your job. It's coming for your mind | Baillie Gifford

Your mind is changing already

The trade you don't notice

Better outputs, weaker minds

A thousand writers, one story

Learning from a machine that learned from us

Not replacement but rewiring

Sign up for first access to our manager updates, articles, podcasts and event invites via your inbox.

I'm an investment manager at Baillie Gifford, and my job is to find the companies that will reshape the economy over the next decade and beyond. We hold stakes in many of the businesses building AI today. This paper is not about what AI will do for those companies. It is about what it will do to the people who use their products, myself included.

Two hundred years ago, only 12 per cent of the world's adults could read. Today, that figure stands at 87 per cent. What happened in between was not just an education story. It was a biological one.

As billions of humans acquired literacy, their brains literally rewired. The connection between the hemispheres thickened. A region that had evolved for recognising faces was repurposed to recognise letters. Entirely new neural pathways activated in response to spoken language.

No gene had mutated. No evolutionary pressure in the traditional Darwinian sense was at work. A purely cultural practice, making marks on surfaces and training people to decode them, had reached inside the skull and reorganised the organ that makes us human.

This is not an exception but the rule. Across millennia, cultural technologies from cooking to markets to kinship structures have systematically reshaped human physiology and psychology in ways that genetics alone cannot explain.

We are now deploying a cultural technology that may be more pervasive than literacy and more transformative than markets, and it is spreading at unprecedented speed. AI is not simply a productivity tool or an economic disruptor. It is the next great rewiring, and it has already begun.

Both biological and cultural evolution depend on the same three forces: variation, transmission and selection.

The most transformative cultural forces in history didn't simply participate in this process. They hijacked it.

The Catholic Church didn't just offer a set of beliefs and wait for people to adopt them. It reshaped all three forces at once. It controlled variation by defining which ideas were orthodox and which were heresy, narrowing the range of acceptable thought across an entire continent. It dominated transmission through a near-monopoly on literacy, education and the pulpit, becoming the primary channel through which knowledge and values reached ordinary people for more than a thousand years. And, as Joseph Henrich argued in

The Weirdest People in the World

, it rewired selection by systematically dismantling the kinship structures that had governed human social life for millennia, banning cousin marriage, polygyny and arranged marriages, and replacing extended kin networks with the nuclear family and voluntary associations like parishes and guilds.

The result was not just a change in what people believed but a change in how they thought and, remarkably, a change in their biology. The shift from polygyny to monogamy alone altered male hormone profiles across entire populations. Populations exposed to centuries of Church-enforced outbreeding show psychological profiles that are measurably different from those that retained intensive kinship structures. The Church didn't just create a new culture. It created a new kind of mind. It succeeded not because its ideas were self-evidently superior, but because it seized control of the infrastructure through which all ideas spread.

AI is now doing something analogous, but at a speed and scale the Church could never have imagined.

A PhD scientist in traditional drug discovery might spend months characterising a single molecular compound. Scientists now use AI to analyse thousands of plant molecules simultaneously, making structural predictions in half a second that would take weeks using conventional techniques. AI doesn't just produce more variation. It produces ideas humans would never have reached.

in a way that has no real historical precedent. When a child asks ChatGPT to explain why the sky is blue, they are learning from a single model trained on the accumulated text of human civilisation, not from any individual human. That model becomes a cultural teacher to hundreds of millions of people simultaneously, transmitting a substantially more centralised and convergent body of knowledge, values and reasoning patterns than any human institution has ever achieved. The outputs vary by prompt, language and context, but the centralisation is staggering - a handful of model providers now mediate an enormous share of the world's question-answering.

In traditional cultural evolution, selection was a distributed, messy and largely organic process. Ideas spread because communities found them useful, because prestigious individuals adopted them or because institutions enforced them. When a medieval guild decided which techniques to preserve, or a community of scholars debated which ideas deserved attention, selection was at least loosely coupled to the practical value of the knowledge in question.

Today, recommendation algorithms have become the dominant selection mechanism for cultural content. They determine which news stories reach millions and which disappear, which musical artists find audiences and which languish in obscurity, which political arguments gain traction and which are suppressed. These algorithms do not select for truth, usefulness or cultural richness. They select for engagement. The result is a selection environment that favours certain kinds of cultural traits over others, not because those traits are adaptive in any meaningful sense, but because they happen to align with the metrics that drive advertising revenue.

The question is not whether AI changes what people do, but whether it changes what people become.

Algorithmic selection has almost entirely decoupled cultural fitness from human judgement. As an investor, I struggled to understand why Elon Musk paid $44bn for Twitter. Through the lens of cultural evolution, the logic becomes clearer. He wasn't buying a social media company. He was buying a selection mechanism - the power to shape which ideas, narratives and values get amplified to hundreds of millions of people and which get buried.

Michael Muthukrishna, Henrich's former student and collaborator at the London School of Economics, has pushed this analysis further in

. He argues that humanity has historically learned at three speeds. Genetic evolution is the slowest, rewarding and punishing over hundreds or thousands of generations. Cultural evolution is faster, accumulating knowledge, norms and technologies over hundreds or thousands of years. Individual learning is the fastest, a single lifetime of trial and error.

Muthukrishna argues that AI represents a fourth system that parses the entire human cultural corpus to discover patterns that neither cultural evolution nor individual intelligence would find. AlphaGo's defeat of the world's best Go players in 2016-2017 illustrates the dynamic. The AI discovered strategies that centuries of human play had never produced. Then human players studied those strategies and incorporated them into their own play, measurably improving the quality of their decision-making. The machine became a cultural model feeding new variation back into the human collective brain. The same dynamic is emerging in drug discovery, materials science and protein folding.

The question is not whether AI changes what people do, but whether it changes what people become. The evidence suggests it already has.

Your mind is changing already

MIT studied participants' brains over four months as they wrote essays under three conditions: unaided, with search engines or with AI assistants. The results were stark. AI users showed the weakest connectivity of all three groups, indicating they were barely engaged.

[Content truncated]