

Introduction for Martin Ford

By Hollis Kurman

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Good evening. Just to set the stage for this evening's discussion, can I please see a quick show of hands in the audience to indicate your perspective on two questions?

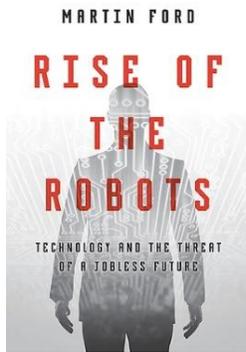
First – *on balance*, who thinks that the rise of the robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is good for humanity? And who thinks it is (or will be) bad for us?

Second – who agrees with the scientist Stephen Hawking that AI is 'the biggest development in human history'? And who thinks it's just another major innovation/tech disruption along the lines of the invention of electricity, the machine, or the internet?

Let's stay calm and say the jury is still out on these two points – at least until we hear from our guest speaker. Silicon Valley entrepreneur Martin Ford is here tonight to discuss with us his riveting tale of AI and its implications, *The Rise of the Robots* – chillingly subtitled, *'Technology and the Threat of Mass Unemployment'*. By turns fact-based analysis and cautionary tale, with a bit of horror film thrown in to keep the pages turning, Ford's version of the future is not bright. (Spoiler alert!). In an account unclouded by sentiment or wishful thinking, the book offers compelling evidence that this newest tech disruption is not like the others – but rather exponential in its development and all-consuming in its effects. In the age of machine learning, thinking robots and smart software are increasingly able not only to enhance and expand whatever we humans do – but actually to replace us in doing it.

At what point does technology cease to be a tool for humankind and start to become an autonomous replacement (and a cheaper, better one at that)? People are even training AI to learn and take over their own jobs. If this is the end of work as we know it, is any function or profession 'safe' from its ceaseless march? What are the consequences for the economy,





for politics, and for society as a whole? And, most importantly, what can we do – indeed, what must we do – starting right now, to prepare and to keep technology at our service?

It's no wonder that *The Rise of the Robots* is a *New York Times* bestseller – or that it has been raking in the awards, including FT/McKinsey Business Book of the Year and Forbes Top Business Book. It is, very simply put, a 'Must Read.'

I'm not a gamer, but the experience of reading this book felt like playing a video game. As we make our way through his game world, it's as if Ford has anticipated every move, every counter-argument, and every suggestion we might make – and cuts us off at the pass every single time. The pace is dizzying. The graphics are few but frightening. In the end, we are left with no buttons to push. However, this isn't a game. And it's certainly not Game Over! The future is still ours to create.

Martin Ford will be joined by **Wouter van Bergen**, financial reporter at the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* and author of the recent book *De robots komen eraan!*

*This evening, with the help of these two uniquely positioned technology experts, let's put our heads together and challenge ourselves and one another to be as **creative in our solutions** as we are realistic in our expectations. The future of work and the economy depend on it...not to mention a good night's sleep tonight!*