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For most of human history, intelligence hasn't varied between individuals to any substantial degree but with the development of general AI*, humans will essentially be able to enhance their own intelligence, possibly becoming 'super humans.' As this happens, it will become increasingly important to think about who has access to this intelligence enhancing technology and how this will affect the division of our population by wealth.

In our everyday lives it is obvious that technology is vital and enables us to be more productive members of society. Personal computers allow us to do our homework and attend our classes, smart phones connect us with our friends on-demand and give us access to a nearly unlimited amount of information, but only if we can pay for it. Lower income families, who cannot afford this technology, are increasingly left behind by the wealthy members of society who can not only afford technology but can own multiple devices and upgrade them regularly. Nothing has made this more clear than the current pandemic. As schools have gone online, these families are losing their education, which has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to lift people out of poverty.

Take this to the next level where technology no longer only improves our productivity but actually changes our level of intelligence through the use of general AI. Whether this is actually enhancing our own brain or just outsourcing our intelligence, those with access to this technology will inherently rise to the top of our society. It is also a self-enforcing cycle, those with greater intelligence will reach new ideas first, allowing them to capitalize on those ideas, which in turn allows them to enhance their intelligence further and the cycle continues. This is not so different from the evolution of the human species. Many scientists credit our intelligence as the catalyst that allowed humans to come to dominate planet Earth. But what happens if the intelligence within our species diverges?

*General AI is a hypothetical technology that can learn and accomplish any task a human can instead of being good at only a certain task as AI is currently.

This is a problem we are going to have to face in the very near future. "The median estimate in the AI expert community [of reaching human level general AI] is around 2040 to 2050," (Anton Korinek & Joseph Stiglitz, 2017) and there are those who predict it will be sooner. If our capitalist world continues as it is, we will see this problem arise and it is likely to follow a similar pattern as our healthcare system. Just as different countries have different approaches to health care, I believe many different strategies will also play themselves out with AI. One suggestion for a solution is to treat access to AI as a right and provide it using a system like universal healthcare. Another suggestion is to let capitalism continue its path but move to a universal basic income so those with access to AI have to provide for those without it. Another approach could be limiting access to or regulating AI, but I believe this is likely to be futile as the development of technology usually outpaces regulation.

If predictions are correct, we will soon no longer be limited by our common biology and in order to prevent even greater wealth disparity, we need a paradigm shift. It is no longer enough to tell the story that everyone can make it if they work hard enough. If we are going to move into the next era of our species, we need to tackle the question of how to handle the wealth disparity caused by the advent of General AI and meet it head on. We need to stand with our fellow humans and lift each other up if we are going to build a future that doesn't leave anyone behind.

Resources:
Anton Korinek & Joseph Stiglitz, 2017
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INCOME DISTRIBUTION AND UNEMPLOYMENT
https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24174/w24174.pdf