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BEYOND THE STOCHASTIC PARROT: RECLAIMING HUMANITIES IN THE AGE OF AI

KALYANI JAIN

Jindal School of International Affairs, O.P. Jindal Global University.

ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) has triggered an existential crisis within higher education, as algorithms demonstrate the ability to synthesize historical data and draft complex analytical essays. However, recent empirical labour market data presents a profound puzzle: despite high indices of AI occupational exposure, university professors are experiencing job expansion that outpaces decline. Drawing on the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs Report 2025' and the International Labour Organization's 'Working Paper 140' (2025), this paper investigates this 'Professor Paradox.' It explores why the academic profession at university level broadly resists automation. By contrasting it with highly vulnerable administrative roles, it highlights the critical macroeconomic distinction between task-level augmentation and occupational replacement. To contextualise this technological disruption, the paper conducts a historical analysis of the Indian education system, which remains deeply entrenched in the 19th century colonial Macaulay model of rote, clerical learning. The paper argues that while the education system has not yet moved away from this output-based paradigm, the AI revolution provides an urgent, existential catalyst to finally dismantle it. Generative AI excels at syntactic replication and data retrieval but fundamentally lacks the capacity for ethical reasoning, historical empathy, and contextual meaning-making. By relying on algorithmic shortcuts to bypass the friction of critical thought, future generations risk losing the very intellectual and empathetic capacities that define human citizenship. Ultimately, the paper concludes that the Humanities are not rendered obsolete by AI. Instead, by forcing a necessary departure from colonial pedagogies toward true dialectical friction, AI elevates the Humanities to the highest imperative of democratic defence.

***Keywords**: Artificial Intelligence, Labour Economics, Humanities, Macaulayism.*

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the global deployment of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini, a palpable sense of existential dread permeated the halls of academia. For centuries, disciplines such as History, Sociology, and Political Science have assessed student competence through the written word, such as analytical essays, historical research papers, and policy briefs. When Generative AI demonstrated the ability to produce these exact artifacts in seconds, often with a syntactic fluency rivalling undergraduate levels, it seemed to herald the obsolescence of the Social Scientist. If an algorithm can synthesise historical timelines, pass standardised competitive examinations, or draft a Political Science literature review, what is the future economic and societal utility of the Humanities?

The answer to this question does not seem to be as straightforward as one would expect. A macroscopic view of current labour trends reveals a glaring empirical puzzle. According to the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs Report 2025', specifically analysing job growth versus decline by occupation, university and higher education teachers show a projected scope of expansion that significantly outpaces their projected decline. This paradoxical trend is robustly corroborated by the International Labour Organization (ILO 2025), whose empirical analyses of Generative AI's impact on employment indicate that educators face massive "exposure" to AI but minimal actual job destruction.

How can an occupation be simultaneously highly exposed to advanced automation and still be rapidly expanding?

This paper seeks to resolve this 'Professor Paradox' by rigorously examining both the macroeconomic mechanics of labour and the historical purpose of the Humanities. If the function of a university was merely to transfer information and produce standardised written outputs, Generative AI would indeed render human educators obsolete. However, as Türkkahraman (2012) and Murray (2023) emphasise, education serves as the fundamental engine for societal development, which is not just about data retrieval, but the act of civic cultivation, ethical moderation, and the development of democratic judgment.

To resolve this paradox and understand why the academic profession is insulated from the very technology that mimics its outputs, this paper breaks down the macroeconomic

mechanisms at play. It contrasts academic expansion with the specific administrative jobs that are being destroyed by AI (such as data entry and telemarketing) to precisely isolate the 'human elements' that algorithms cannot replicate. Furthermore, it situates this technological crisis within the history of Indian education. The current academic system is still largely trapped in the 1835 Macaulay framework of clerical, rote learning. This paper argues that AI is not destroying human intellect; rather, it is destroying the clerical model of education. Ultimately, the AI revolution presents an urgent, unavoidable opportunity to abandon our colonial educational hangover and reclaim the uniquely human elements of historical empathy and ethical reasoning, lest the coming generations lose their humanity entirely to cognitive offloading.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To move beyond a purely descriptive analysis of technological disruption, this paper utilizes three intersecting theoretical frameworks drawn from labour economics, political science, and cognitive psychology.

First, the paper adopts the Automation of Work Framework proposed by Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2025). Moving away from traditional, flawed 'job-cantered' approaches that falsely predict total occupational replacement, this framework requires multiple scopes of analysis, specifically breaking down labour into distinct duties and tasks. Applying this framework reveals that the complete displacement of complex roles is highly improbable. Instead, AI drives partial job automation and work redesign. Generative AI automates the routine clerical tasks of academia, forcing a structural redesign of the educator's role toward non-routine, interpersonal, and empathetic duties that technology cannot replicate.

Second, the paper utilizes Historical Institutionalism to analyse the persistent legacy of British colonial education. Historical institutionalism emphasizes the concept of 'path dependence', i.e., the tendency of institutions to remain stable and highly resistant to change over long periods (Mohn, 2024.). For nearly two centuries, the Indian education system has remained path-dependent on Thomas Macaulay's 1835 clerical model. However, historical institutionalism also identifies 'critical junctures', i.e., pivotal moments of systemic disruption that present a brief window to radically alter an institution's trajectory. This framework posits

that Generative AI acts as the ultimate critical juncture. Because AI is a flawless 'clerk,' the institution must finally abandon its path-dependent colonial model or render human cognition economically worthless.

Third, the paper synthesises the psychological concept of Cognitive Offloading with John Dewey's Theory of Education. 'Cognitive offloading' refers to the human tendency to use external devices to reduce the mental effort required to perform a task, which, over time, can lead to severe cognitive 'skill decay' (Risko and Gilbert, 2016). Recent empirical studies confirm that individuals increasingly trust and rely on technological tools to manage memory demands, exacerbating the risk of offloading (Peng and Yeh, 2025). This psychological risk directly threatens the sociological imperatives outlined by Dewey. In revisiting Dewey for the modern algorithmic age, Peters and Jandrić (2017) emphasise that participatory democracy requires the active friction of human experience. If students permanently offload their analytical thinking to LLMs, they bypass the productive cognitive friction required to develop moral judgment.

METHODOLOGY

Because this paper addresses a large-scale structural shift at the intersection of technology, labour economics, and educational philosophy, it relies on a mixed-methods approach utilising secondary economic data analysis and comparative historical analysis.

To establish the central puzzle of occupational expansion despite high AI exposure, the paper utilises the World Economic Forum's 'Future of Jobs Report 2025', specifically analysing its demographic projections for educational and administrative sectors. To explain the mechanics of this paradox and isolate the defining 'human element,' the study utilises the International Labour Organization's 'Working Paper 140' (2025). By contrasting the projected growth of academia and social sciences against the projected collapse of strictly clerical roles, the methodology quantifies exactly what labour markets value in human workers in an algorithmic age.

To determine if the current panic over AI is uniquely dangerous or a repetition of past technological anxieties, the paper employs historical comparison. It examines the ancient Socratic fear of the written word (detailed in Plato's *Phaedrus*) as the original 'cognitive

panic.' It then heavily contrasts the modern capabilities of Generative AI against the 19th century implementation of the Macaulay education system in India. By tracing the historical through-line of 'clerical education,' the methodology demonstrates that AI is shifting the fundamental nature of the social scientist's job, rather than eliminating the need for the discipline itself.

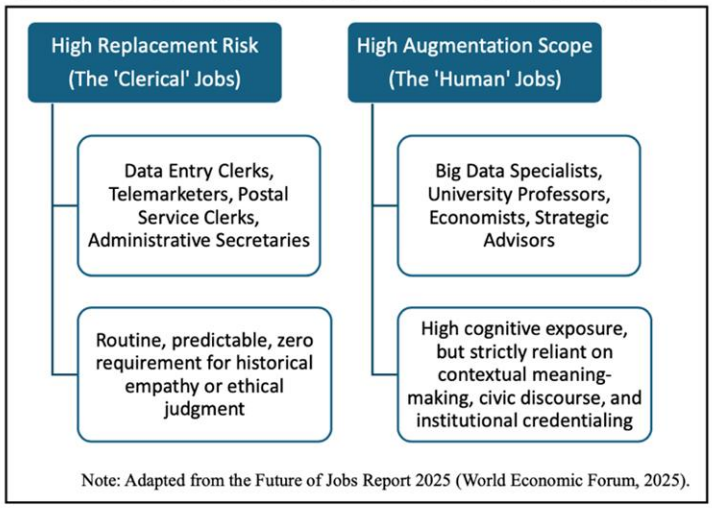
RESOLVING THE CORE PUZZLE

To unpack the 'Professor Paradox,' one must rigorously examine why certain jobs are entirely insulated from AI while others are facing imminent collapse. The ILO's 2025 Working Paper provides the definitive economic answer, i.e., high exposure to generative technology does not equal occupational replacement.

According to the WEF and ILO reports, the jobs facing rapid, systemic decline, such as bank tellers, postal clerks, data entry keyers, payroll clerks, and administrative secretaries, all share a defining characteristic. They are structurally devoid of the 'human element.' These roles require the routine, syntactic processing of data without the need to assign emotional, ethical, or historical meaning to that data. Because Generative AI is a flawless execution engine for routine cognitive tasks, these jobs are rendered obsolete.

Conversely, in the academic and Social Science sectors, Generative AI acts as a profound augmenter rather than a replacer. For a university Professor or a policy researcher, AI primarily targets the routine administrative drudgery of the profession like synthesising massive literature reviews, translating texts, checking for plagiarism, or grading standardized multiple-choice assessments. Liberated from this clerical burden, the professor's productivity exponentially increases, allowing a full pedagogical shift to what machines cannot do. This stark bifurcation of the labour market, between clerical replacement and humanistic augmentation, is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The AI Labour Impact Spectrum: Replacement Risk versus Augmentation Scope



This raises the critical question: What exactly is the 'human element' in Humanities that insulates it from automation? Based on the limitations of LLMs, this element consists of three un-automatable capacities:

1. Historical Empathy: An algorithm can compile a flawless timeline of the 1947 Partition of India or the Transatlantic Slave Trade in seconds. However, it cannot understand the emotional, psychological, and generational realities of human suffering and triumph. Historical empathy requires a human consciousness to connect with the lived experience of another human being.

2. Ethical Weighting and Moral Judgment: An AI can analyse the economic efficiency of a proposed public policy, but it cannot judge whether that policy is 'good,' 'just,' or 'equitable.' Ethical weighting requires a moral compass, an understanding of human rights, and a stake in the societal outcome – none of which an algorithm possesses inherently.

3. Contextual Meaning-Making: The ability to look at disparate historical data, cultural shifts, and political movements, and construct a narrative that moves beyond simple pattern recognition is something that AI has been unable to mimic in a way that provides a society with its identity. Meaning making is an inherently subjective,

humanistic endeavour that algorithms, which operate purely on statistical probabilities, cannot simulate.

Furthermore, there is a macro-structural reason for academic expansion. As AI displaces millions of routine clerical workers across the globe, the State and private enterprise are being forced to launch massive retraining initiatives. According to the macro-economic projections of the World Economic Forum (2025), the global labour market is undergoing an unprecedented structural churn centred around reskilling and upskilling. Displaced workers are returning to universities, vocational schools, and public policy institutes to learn AI-resilient, human-centric skills. This massive influx of adult learners is directly driving the projected job growth for educators and social scientists. Thus, the paradox is resolved: AI destroys clerical work, which in turn drives massive demand for humanistic, ethical education.

THE MACAULAY HANGOVER

While the institutional role of the professor and the social scientist seems to be economically secure, the intellectual development of the student is under an unprecedented historical threat. To truly understand the danger of Generative AI, one must acknowledge a difficult and uncomfortable truth, i.e., the modern Indian education system has not yet moved away from its colonial origins. We are still operating deeply within the pedagogical framework of Thomas Babington Macaulay's 'Minute on Indian Education' of 1835.

The explicit political goal of the British colonial state was not to cultivate independent philosophers, indigenous scholars, or democratic citizens capable of critical dissent. Rather, the goal was to mass-produce a clerical class, or "*a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect"* (Macaulay, 1835). These individuals were designed to serve as administrative intermediaries who could process data and execute the orders of the colonial state with mechanical precision. To achieve this, the colonial administration instituted an education system prioritising rote memorization, the formulaic reproduction of data in written examinations, and strict syntactic compliance (Viswanathan, 1989).

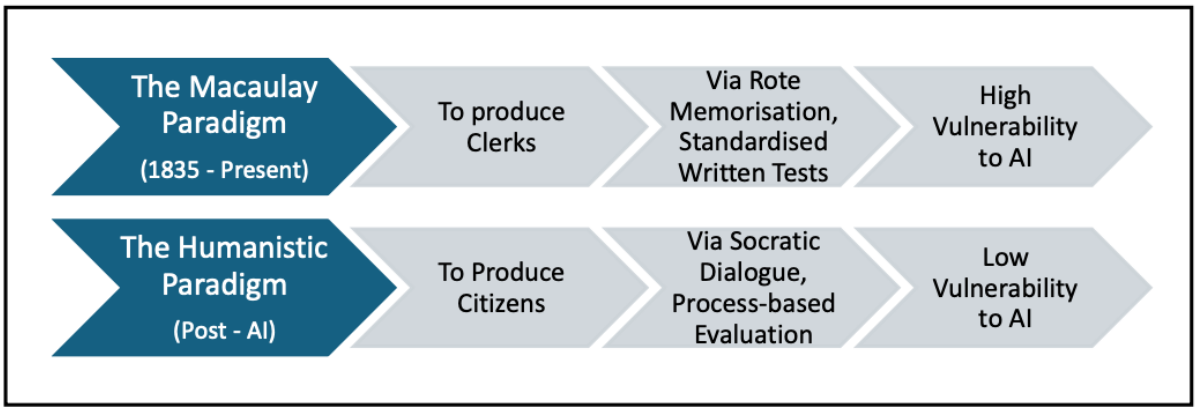
Nearly two centuries later, despite the end of colonial rule, our universities still largely reward Macaulay's model of learning. We test students on their ability to act like data-retrieval

machines. Success in the modern educational system is still largely determined by a student's ability to memorize vast quantities of information and reproduce it in highly standardised, output-based written examinations.

Generative AI exposes the absolute intellectual bankruptcy of this ongoing system. ChatGPT is, by definition, the ultimate colonial clerk. It can memorize historical dates, retrieve jurisprudence, and draft formulaic, grammatically perfect essays exponentially faster and more accurately than any human student. If we continue to operate on this historical model by testing students on their standardised output rather than their frictional thought process, the education system will be entirely hollowed out.

Therefore, it can be argued that AI is not destroying human intellect. Rather, it provides an urgent, existential catalyst to finally dismantle the Macaulay model. We have not yet moved away from it, but AI means we now must, lest the upcoming generations lose their very humanity (as summarised in Figure 2).

Figure 2: The Pedagogical Paradigm Shift: Transitioning from the Macaulay Model to Humanistic Education



If students continue to use algorithms to bypass the friction of writing and analysing, they risk experiencing a devastating atrophy of thought. This echoes the most profound historical parallel to our current crisis, found in classical antiquity. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates recounts the Egyptian myth of the God Theuth, who presents the invention of writing to King Thamus. Thamus rejects the technology, warning that delegating human memory to external

tools provides “not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they [humans] will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing” (Plato, 360 BC). Today, if a student uses an LLM to generate an essay on the causes of democratic backsliding, they have acquired the appearance of wisdom without the underlying intellectual struggle required to attain true comprehension.

THE HUMANITIES IMPERATIVE

To understand why this cognitive atrophy is so dangerous, we must look at how algorithms function. Computer scientists explicitly warn against treating LLMs as arbiters of truth, logic, or meaning. Bender et al. (2021) famously categorized Large Language Models as “stochastic parrots” i.e., systems that blindly stitch together linguistic sequences based on probabilistic training data.

Generative AI recognizes patterns of words, but it has no semantic understanding of the real world. It does not know what a ‘democracy’ is, nor does it understand ‘human rights.’ It only knows that those words frequently appear near each other in its training data. Because an algorithm has never possessed a body, faced mortality, experienced poverty, or felt political oppression, it is fundamentally disconnected from the human condition. Therefore, when an AI writes an essay about the Partition of India, the French Revolution, or the drafting of the Constitution, it is merely calculating statistics, without being affected by it emotionally.

If we allow the coming generation to outsource their historical, sociological, and political analysis to stochastic parrots, we will actively cultivate a society incapable of empathy and vulnerable to manipulation. For Political S not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality. Science scholars, this is a matter of democratic survival. Democracies are inherently fragile ecosystems that rely entirely on the active, critical participation of their citizens. John Dewey (1916) argued that a functioning democratic State requires a populace capable of navigating epistemic uncertainty, recognising propaganda, and engaging in empathetic moral reasoning with opposing viewpoints. Democracy is not a machine that runs on its own but is a human system that requires constant human judgment.

Generative AI environments, often operating as proprietary 'black boxes' controlled by monopolistic technology corporations, are fundamentally anti-democratic in their intellectual architecture. They are designed to provide singular, authoritative-sounding answers, artificially flattening the complex, multipolar debates that define Political science and History. They remove the nuance, the disagreement, and the friction that is essential to the democratic process.

Furthermore, the digital public sphere is rapidly being flooded with AI-generated synthetic media, deepfakes, and automated disinformation campaigns. In this new digital ecology, technical and clerical skills will not save democratic institutions. The only defence against a post-truth, algorithmically manipulated society is a citizenry deeply rooted in the analytical frameworks of the Humanities. The future citizen must possess the historical literacy to recognise authoritarian rhetoric, the philosophical grounding to debate ethics, and the sociological training to spot structural bias in an AI's output.

To achieve this, the Social Sciences must drastically and immediately overhaul their pedagogical approach. If an assignment can be completed flawlessly by an AI in ten seconds, it is no longer a valid assessment of human intellect. The field must move away from 'output-based' written assessments and return to 'process-based,' highly interactive evaluations. We must embrace Socratic dialogue, oral defences, live civic debate, and experiential learning. An algorithm cannot participate in the spontaneous, face-to-face friction of a human debate. It cannot feel the ethical weight of a policy decision in a classroom, nor can it demonstrate contextual empathy to a peer.

CONCLUSION

The panic surrounding the obsolescence of the university professor and the social scientist in the face of Artificial Intelligence is historically and economically misplaced. As the empirical data from the WEF and ILO demonstrates, the academic profession is expanding because human educators are augmented by AI, insulated by institutional credentialing, and desperately needed to cultivate the non-routine, deeply human skills required in a disrupted 21st century workforce.

The true, existential crisis we face is the potential automation of the student's mind. For two centuries, we have remained trapped in a colonial education system designed to produce administrative clerks. Generative AI has now mastered clerical work. We can no longer afford to test students on their ability to act like algorithms. Generative AI offers a frictionless, intellectually hollow shortcut that threatens to atrophy the critical reasoning, ethical judgment, and historical empathy of the coming generations.

Because democratic governance is entirely dependent upon an engaged and critically capable citizenry, the outsourcing of human thought to the algorithmic ‘mind’ poses a structural, fatal threat to the fabric of free societies. The future does not seem to render the Humanities obsolete, rather, by forcing us to finally abandon the Macaulay model and prioritise human friction, meaning making, and ethical debate, the AI revolution elevates the Social Sciences to the absolute highest imperative of public policy and democratic defence.

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