AllianceBernstein®

JULY 2026

# Book Review Summer '26

Strategic investing depends not only on a market-focused narrative, but also on understanding the world that shapes the investment landscape. With that in mind, this note reviews eight recent books, by way of suggested reading for the summer. These works explore some of the defining themes of our time—from the changing nature of the global economy and supply chains to artificial intelligence (AI), demographics and the resilience of modern societies.

These are explicitly not investment books, and we appreciate that this might not sound like a cheery basis for beach reading, but perhaps it might appeal to those who are looking for work-adjacent material to consume while travelling this summer.

Inigo Fraser Jenkins

**Additional Contributors:** Alla Harmsworth, Robertas Stancikas and Maureen Hughes

Before people head off for summer breaks, we suggest some reading that might be of interest, at least for those who want to delve into work-adjacent material. In lists such as these, we want to offer a mix of books that are new this year, but also others from recent years that we think are relevant. Hopefully, the selection is broad enough, but we are curating the selection specifically to represent recent works that in some way, albeit indirectly, shape a strategic narrative for the world.

The themes that run through this selection are the return of the importance of the physical economy through demand for raw materials and energy. Then there is the demographic change that is taking place and promises to make the coming decades very different from the post-WWII years. AI, of course, is omnipresent as a topic. Then there are questions of inequality and societal resilience, which appear to be more urgent than in recent decades.

The greater energy demand of the contemporary economy, with its consequent implications for the climate, is one particular aspect of the growing importance of the physical economy. Increasing demand for energy and other raw materials is happening at a time when the ability or willingness of the US to impose order in a way that it has in the last seven decades is severely depleted. We think that this situation has profound implications for the complex global supply chains that have been constructed over decades. One should expect supply-chain shocks to occur with greater regularity, with consequences in turn for the volatility of inflation.

Several of the books discuss societal risks. Doctorow's coining of the term "enshittification" describes both the view that the internet is declining in quality but also the *process* by which it has happened, including a declining efficacy of competition and rise of platform companies. The apparent decline of competitive forces has been a recurring theme in a number of works recently, and it suggests that the apparent triumph of capitalism suggested by aggregate profit numbers is a veneer, with aggregate growth resting on shaky foundations. A different kind of risk is discussed by Kemp, who studies the long history of societal collapse through deep history. There has been an important series of works examining the contemporary economy and society from an anthropological point of view, rather than from a canonical economic standpoint (see Graeber), and this book fits into that tradition. Kemp identifies inequality as a key attribute that has brought about collapse in societies since the earliest times. There is also a fascinating discussion of how well the average human fares within and outside of hierarchical social structures.

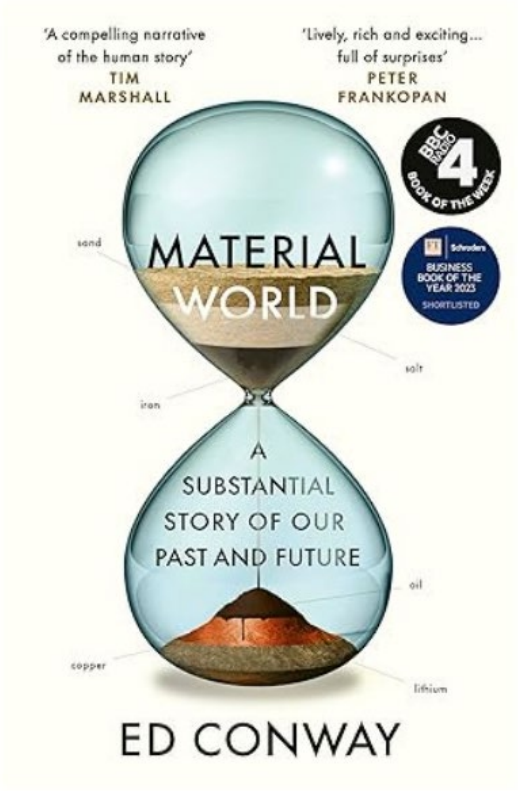
On the topic of AI, rather than discussing the current state of revenue expectations and capex etc. as market-focused notes would do, here we select works that deal with the broader social questions prompted by the current state of AI. There is a certain inevitability that topics such as inequality and the future of work arise in these works. But then, we find, in the more strategic investor meetings over the last year, that these topics are not too far from the surface, and we think they will be discussed with greater intensity over the years to come. However, there is considerable uncertainty in the social and political implications of the current wave of AI development. We review works from Amodei and the Pope.

It is not the point of this note to enumerate specific investment recommendations, and anyway, this note is hopefully of broader appeal than that. But these topics do come together to shape the overall long-term investment environment. On the one hand, there is the promise of increased productivity from AI, offset by near-term worries about the impact on jobs and longer-term issues such as making an increase in inequality likely, and underpinning a pivot back to a resource-intensive growth period. At the same time, high government-debt levels, shrinking working-age populations, climate change and a rapid shift in the geopolitical environment suggest a competing downward force on growth rates and higher inflation. This is a very different environment from recent decades. It is not bearish, but requires a rethinking of the design of portfolios.

These topics are also relevant to the question of whether to overweight or underweight US assets, one of the key controversies in portfolio allocation today. AI, demographics and supply-chain resilience are all elements that, in our view, favor a strategic preference for the US. However, noting Kemp's thesis of the risks of inequality, there are counteracting forces in the long run there, too.

**For our previous book reviews see, for example,** Machines, Democracy, Capitalism and Feudalism: Five Books for a Different Age, and What it Means for Investing, and books on the future of the dollar and the changing nature of money, included in The Dollar: Half Awake in a Fake Empire?

## Ed Conway: *Material World*




The everyday lived experience for most people in advanced economies is that existence has the appearance of being increasingly dematerialized, but the underpinning reality is the use of resources on a scale that is historically unprecedented. In coming decades, we are likely to extract more metals from the earth's surface than we ever have before. The idea of a dematerialized existence increasingly lived online is a fiction only possible with an enormous use of raw materials. We have emphatically not escaped the physical economy; indeed, the advent of AI and its physical needs accelerates this trend, as has been alluded to in Kate Crawford's depiction of AI as an "extractive industry."[1] In addition to the very material needs of AI, the other theme running through the book is the demands of an attempted energy transition. While there is broad acceptance of the need to curtail anthropomorphic warming of the planet, there is a paradox. In order to shrink our $CO_2$ footprint, that goal probably involves digging and blasting more than we have ever before.

Within this world view, this book by Conway is a hugely entertaining read—indeed, we would describe it as a page turner! The reader is presented with on-the-ground descriptions of extraordinary kinds of places that one is dimly aware must exist somewhere but without much conception of their scale or what is involved. These include the Chuquicamata copper mine in Chile, deeper than the Burj Khalifa is high and both longer and wider than Central Park. This descriptiveness is interwoven with a history of how mankind has extracted raw materials through advances in mining, chemistry and land use. The book's refrain is that we cannot escape the material world, and that much of this comes back to energy.

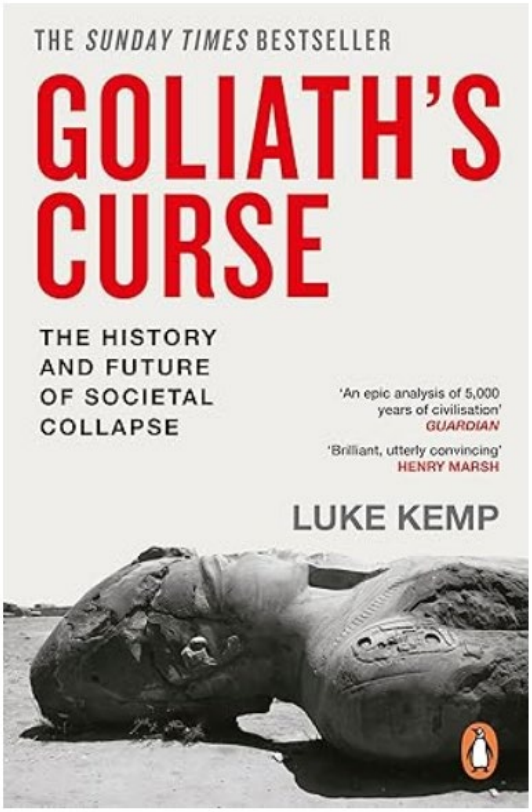
The book is arranged around six core materials that we require: sand, salt, iron, copper, oil and Lithium. These choices already spark interest. While most people are aware of the relatively new demand for Lithium as the underpinning of battery technology in an electrified world, and though copper and oil have been essential to the 20th century's waves of electrification and energy use, the first three sound initially like they harken back to a pre-modern era. But Conway shows our contemporary total dependence on them at vast scale as the ingredients for silicon fertilizers, etc.

[1]See our discussion of Crawford in Productivity, Democracy, Power and Truth: The Influence of AI on Markets and Investing

A theme running through the book is the degree of complexity and global nature of supply chains. Even if politicians talk about onshoring chip production, the availability of quartz for silicon requires geographic reach, and this is true for most other finished products, too. Reading this, one cannot help but reflect upon the strategic implications. There is the geopolitical change—An abrupt weakening of the US-imposed order of the last 75 years crashing into our ever-growing need for "stuff." We think the implications are that we will see supply-chain bottlenecks and, thus, much greater volatility of inflation. At the same time, there is a shift in the locus of geographic importance of countries, with some becoming more prominent, with the likes of Chile and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to cite just two examples.

Another theme of the book is that the easy-to-access material is gone. So, whether it is oil or copper or another mineral, extracting a given quantity of an end product today requires an astonishing increase in the amount of raw material—or earth displaced—for the same end result. In the past, there have been worries that this more challenging access would lead to us running out of a given commodity—oil was often a commodity worried about in this context. The book dismisses such thinking. The productivity of mining has evolved, such that it is still economical to extract more material, even if it is harder. This has happened in a way that has managed to avoid significant price increases in most minerals. However, the environmental impact is significant. Environmental reports often focus on the quantity of a material used, rather than the amount of impure materials that must be discarded in pursuit of it. To cite just one example from the book, between 2004 and 2016, Chilean miners increased annual copper production by 2.6%. But, in order to achieve this modest increase, the quantity of ore that they had to dig out of the ground increased by 75%. The logical extension of this is that to make an energy transition possible, the huge copper requirement will entail using copper that is even harder to extract. Thus, the quantity of ore mined per unit of copper produced will necessarily increase even more. Conway asks the open question: Will people accept this?

### Luke Kemp: *Goliath's Curse*




Doom-mongering tales of societal collapse perhaps have appeal for those of a certain kind of temperament. In the modern era, they seem to form a non-trivial share of "click bait" in corners of the alternative-media ecosystem. Luke Kemp's magnum opus could definitely not be accused of being clickbait: at 579 pages including no less than 98 pages of endnotes, it arrives on one's desk with a degree of gravitas.

The central thread that runs through Kemp's narrative is the notion of the "Goliath," which he defines as a "collection of interconnected hierarchies in which some individuals dominate others to control energy and labour" but is often mistakenly confused with "civilization." The core and real strength of the book is the outline of the evolution of the Goliath through deep human history of the Holocene into the development of early states. The narrative is firmly from the point of view of the average citizen and not of the elites who have left behind ruins of palaces, possessions and grand tombs. Inferring the wellbeing of the non-elites is harder of course, but he argues that it changes the conclusions.

As soon as lootable resources are invented, things go downhill for the majority of people. The author quotes multiple examples of societies that began egalitarian but saw inequality rise as an elite imposed more extractive policies; the inequality begets instability and the seeds of collapse. We learn a lot about the collapse of the late Bronze Age (including the fall of Troy), but the average person might have been better off as a result, contra to what our reading of the classics implies.

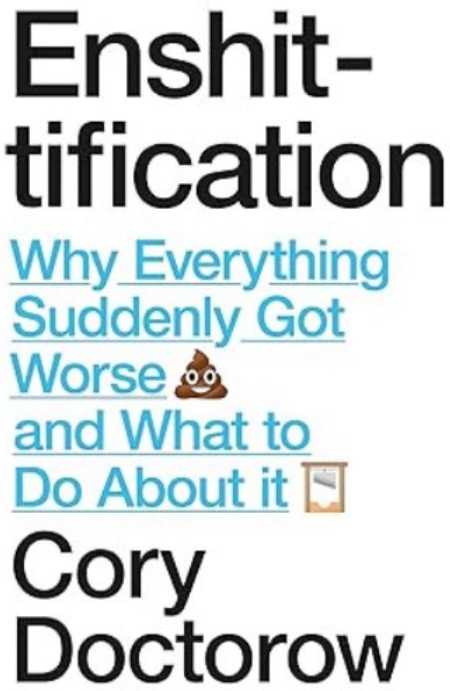
A stark claim is that the average person was better off outside these "civilisations," a metric for this status being taller skeletons for hunter gatherers than for sedentary farmers. This leads Kemp to the claim that the average citizen living under the auspices of a state would have seen little improvement in welfare in the over 5,000-year period between 3600 BC and 1700 AD. This is difficult to square with one's in-built views of the order and benefits provided by civilisation, but it is the well-researched claim. Throughout most of history, the lion's share of the surplus created by technology has been taken by elites. It's not clear, Kemp says, why a hunter gatherer would have wanted to farm, and the invention of "lootable resources" came accompanied with violence. We note, though, that when this becomes a discussion of modern society, he seems oddly somewhat dismissive of the healthcare advances that civilization today has delivered.

The book then moves to a reflection on the current state of affairs. Kemp suggests that the role that the US took on in the wake of WWII was to prevent societal collapse by imposing stability. There is then a list of ugly contenders for a future collapse that one would expect from a book with the subtitle "the history and future of societal collapse," such as nuclear weapons, bioweapons, AI in the "kill chain," AI in general, climate change and the impact of "forever chemicals." He attacks the growth-fetish of modern capitalism and calls for a rethinking of the growth metric—what do we want to measure the growth of? The discussion is reminiscent of recent books by Hickel and Susskind, which we would also recommend. Kemp's suggestions of policy responses to limit this, though, run into some of the challenges that Wolf has pointed out in terms of moral questions about limiting the standards of living and how that can work in a democratic society.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the author is particularly worried about the power that is being handed to mega cap tech companies: "either we kill Goliath or we potentially face a final collapse." He rightly points out that past technological advances have not necessarily improved the human condition, echoing Acemoglu's claim that it is the political and social milieu that determines how such gains are distributed.

This point does not lead to some unthinking "anti-elite" conclusion. By contrast, this suggests that we should instead think of elites as the specialists in their fields rather than just the rich. Tied to this, Kemp suggests in passing that the Athenians would not view our current system as a democracy but as an oligarchy. A point we might want to bear in mind.

**Cory Doctorow: *Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About it***




The eponymous neologism at the core of this book has, in a short space of time, become almost widespread in its usage. Indeed, it was named word of the year in 2024 by several august institutions[2].

The word encapsulates the idea that things, and especially the internet, have generally become worse, be it the breakdown in quality of public discourse through the rise of extreme and confrontational language and the degrading of retail experiences. Doctorow stresses that the word is not just a descriptor about how things are, but also points to an explanation of why things have become this way. So, aside from the familiar laying out of examples of a degraded experience for many (most?) people, Doctorow works to identify the cause. He lays much of the blame at multiple US administrations that have failed to enforce antitrust legislation, with the result that massive companies have achieved a degree of regulatory capture.

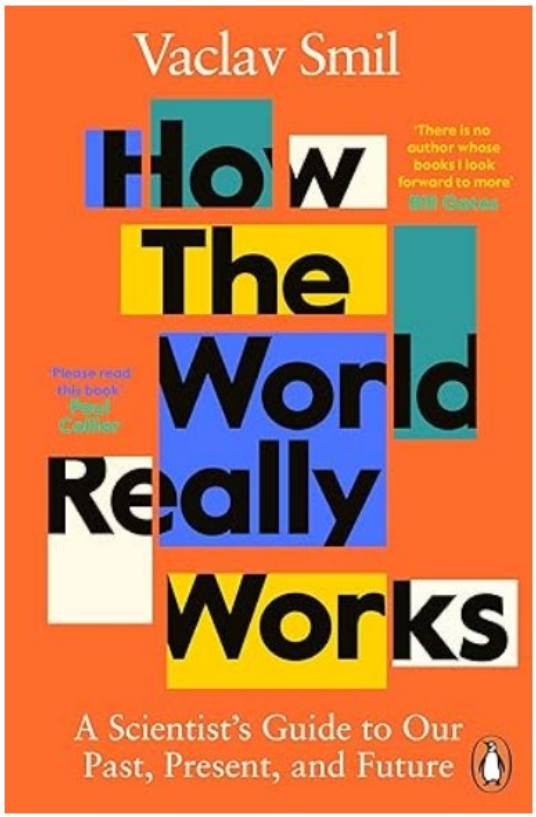
Reading Doctorow's descriptions of all the myriad ways that large tech companies have tried to mute competition or extract data, one is reminded of Varoufakis' description of the modern economy as no longer capitalism but a series of fiefdoms.[3]

Reading the book through the lens of an investor, one is drawn to reflect on the implications of Doctorow's thesis for the world of investment. The frenetic growth of large tech companies in recent years is all very well, and the implications for the stock market and "US exceptionalism" are plain to see. But if the foundation of corporate growth for a long time was competition, what is the prospect of this being a force to drive growth in a world of quasi monopolies that have emerged in many sectors and, Doctorow suggests, created a cartel-like structure. Leaving aside the broader social issues the book raises, the strategic worry for investors is that a degrading of capitalism is taking place. The book suggests that enshittification is by no means a necessary result of capitalism and that there are responses involving antitrust and data privacy enforcement that can restore the role of the internet.

[2] See, for example, https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2024/

[3] Machines, Democracy, Capitalism and Feudalism: Five Books for a Different Age, and What it Means for Investing

**Vaclav Smil: *How The World Really Works* and *Energy and Civilization: A History***




These are not new books, but they are important, and the topics that they deal with underpin so many strategic client conversations that we wanted to give them a place here. We mainly consider *How the World Really Works* (2022), but the magnum opus *Energy and Civilization: A History* (2017) deserves a place for its sheer encyclopedic scale and implications.

A core claim by Vaclav Smil, author of both works, is that to decarbonize by 2050 would require a huge economic step back, which is not possible in a democracy. There is no evidence that we can decarbonize anytime soon. Our dependence on fossil fuels has declined only marginally in recent decades, and reduction requires an extraordinary level of global cooperation that seems ever more elusive. Smil also cites the five billion people in poor countries who cannot afford to cut any emissions that they make. The conclusion: forecasts that $CO_2$ emission can decline rapidly are "wishful thinking," and any energy transition would take generations.

The real challenge is not in electricity generation, but in other primary demands such as transport and materials production that are much more challenging. The author's claim is that climate change has been well understood for over 50 years but we have chosen to ignore it.

A warning in the book is that globalization is not in any way inevitable. There is an ebb and flow of globalization, and one very topical element of this reality is the likelihood that governments will seek to involve themselves in the functioning of supply chains, not leave them to the market. Our interpretation of the strategic implications of the recent Iran "escapade" is a clear example of this in action. Investors, and those tasked with planning corporate supply chains, should not assume a technocratic-led framework for the governance of supply chains in future.

The second book is a detailed history of the role of energy use in civilization, written in the spirit of a grand narrative. There is fascinating detail on the increments in how mankind has exploited sources of energy over time and how this has been an enabling force economically and socially. For example, the history of farming can, in a way, be viewed as the gradual substitution of human labor by animal draft. For a long time, this only had a small impact on yields. In 13th century Europe, wheat production could not support population densities higher than in predynastic Egypt. For example, by the time of the Doomsday book, horses formed only a small fraction of draft animals in Europe, with oxen being still more numerous, and the adoption of collar

harnesses for horses was required for equines to replace their bovine competitors. But then other energy limits emerged. Horses' greater feed requirement formed another limit. For example, America's horse population peaked at 26.7 million in 1918 and required 25% of the country's cultivated farmland to feed them.

Other chapters deal with the history of deriving power from non-animal sources. Again, the narrative is constructed from painstaking analysis of advances in energy availability, with wonderful historical detail along the way. Waterwheels were known in antiquity, and we learn that the greatest known concentration of power in the ancient world was the Roman mill at Arles, which had 16 wheels each with 2kW of capacity. But despite water wheels' ancient origins, huge increases in their power was possible with changes in design. This led to the largest water wheel being built in 1854 on the Isle of Man, which was 21.9m in diameter with a maximum power of 427kW.

While Smil seems to reject an overlay normative or deterministic thesis for the impact of energy use on civilization, he does make a very strong claim that some of the key advances over time in society, economies and the evolution of states can be viewed through the lens of how mankind has enhanced the ability to exploit energy. The current power of the US can be seen as resting on this ability.

## AI

In the day-to-day running of portfolios, AI clearly infuses nearly all points of discussion now, be it questions of where and how large productivity improvements can be made, whether the capex is justified, the impact of market concentration and latterly the increased issuance of equity. We address those in our usual research;[4] in this book review, we want to stand back and consider bigger issues than this. AI is evolving so quickly that, rather than recommend one book, we refer to a mix of essays and books.

### Dario Amodei: The Adolescence of Technology

Societal questions echo through these AI pieces in ways that overlap with the books elsewhere in this review. Dario Amodei, from his seat as the CEO of Anthropic, has a number of very thoughtful essays on the bigger-picture questions raised by AI. Here, we focus on *The Adolescence of Technology: Confronting and Overcoming the Risks of Powerful AI*[5], which is presented as confronting the risks we are about to face but explicitly avoiding "doomerism".

Amodei invites us to conduct thought experiment. Imagine that a "country of geniuses" materialized in the world sometime in 2027 with, say, a population of 50 million people, all of whom are more capable than a Nobel prize winner. What would the leaders of other countries be worried about? What would be the goal of this new country of geniuses? Could they be malleable and misused by bad actors? What economic threat would the nation pose?

There is a risk of autonomy going awry. The author makes the point that itis very hard to be sure about AI systems adhering to goals that humans think they have instilled in them, hence AI "misalignment" is a risk we need to be aware of. Possible defenses to this risk include more focus on developing the science of training models and establishing values that the model keeps in mind through its use.

There is also a risk of this power being used by bad actors. It is rare, Amodei asserts, for people to have skills that could cause harm to many and also have the motivation to use them in malicious ways. However, a next stage of AI could empower those with malicious intent in ways that were not possible before. Here, he is most worried about biology, specifically bioweapons and "mirror life forms". There are also risks of such systems seizing power, either via the use of autonomous weapon systems or by AI propaganda and surveillance taking power in a "soft" way. His suggestion is that we strongly need international cooperation, while recognizing that the current political winds are exactly against such global cooperation

Amodei then covers risks of economic dislocation, with a focus on labor market disruption, which might be most immediately pertinent to many readers of this note. Here, his claim is that AI could displace 50% of all entry-level white-collar jobs in on to five years. By his telling, the long history of tech advance is that, as technology enters a new area (e.g., parts of farming in the 19th century), it automates parts of a given job. However, some of the tasks that make up a job still require human input, so the user of the technology becomes more efficient. Jobs only go into steep decline when technology is able to perform almost all of them. At that stage in the past, people could switch to other professions. Amondei says he would "strongly bet" that AI does not

[4] AI Capex: A Vertiginous Dialectic and Who Should Own AI? An Open Letter

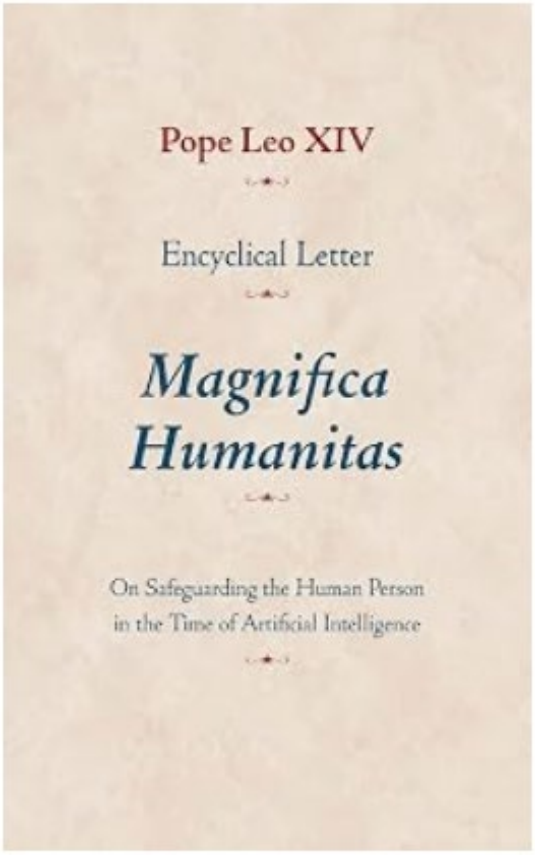
[5] https://darioamodei.com/essay/the-adolescence-of-technology#humanity-s-test

follow this historical trend. Why might the trend be different this time? He points to several novel aspects of AI that set it apart from past technological advances:

- Speed: this makes it very hard for humans to adapt
- Cognitive breadth: makes it harder for people whose jobs are disrupted to move to other professions
- Slicing by cognitive ability: AI might affect not so much a given industry but all people with a given level of cognitive ability.

The explicit risk is that this process results in inequality that undoes the social contract necessary for a functioning democracy. What defenses should society adopt in response? The suggested list includes corporates considering how they use AI, philanthropy and, inevitably, tax. We were particularly struck by this sentence: "*I think the extreme levels of inequality predicted in this essay justify a more robust tax policy on basic moral grounds, but I can also make a pragmatic argument to the world's billionaires that it's in their interest to support a good version of it: if they don't support a good version, they'll inevitably get a bad version designed by a mob.*" We agree.

### Pope Leo: Magnifica Humanitas




Incorporating a papal encyclical in a book review intended primarily for investors will always raise eyebrows. But this is an important attempt to mount a response to some of the greatest challenges posed by AI.

Leo stresses the need for the common good throughout. Under things that should be common goods, he includes not only the earth's resources but also technological infrastructure and data. He also extends this to truth itself, with all these things seemingly questioned by the nature of the evolution of AI.

As with other writers on AI (we would cite Amodei and Acemoglu), he presents the way the technology is developed as a choice. The development that he warns us against is AI becoming another Tower of Babel. He describes Babel as an impressive feat: a

single language, a single technology and a single direction. But he warns that such a city built on pride and with a claim to "dominate the heavens" will lead to dispersion. With this he asserts that, in practice, AI cannot be regarded as morally neutral because it takes on the characteristics of those who devise it.

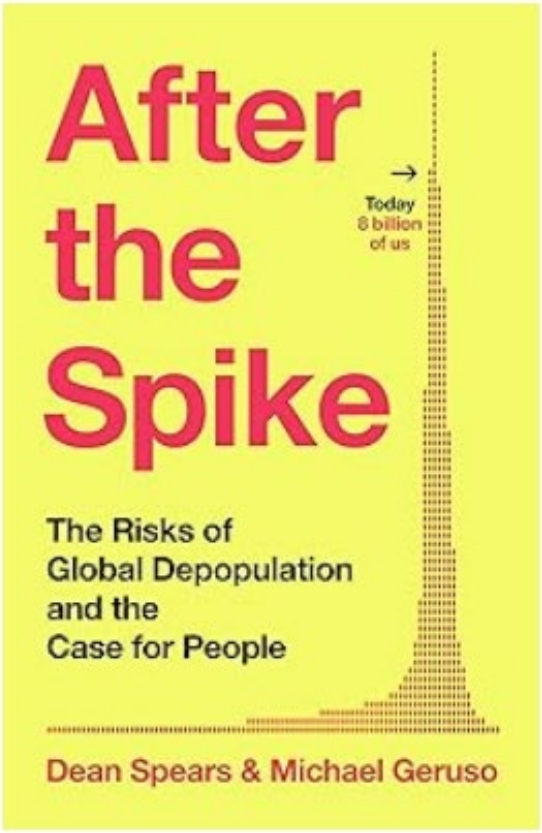
There is a focus on the dignity of work and the way that work gives meaning (a point also eloquently made by Lord Skidelsky[6]). The Pope makes the point that this meaning extends to a broader sense of identity in the contemporary world and also acts as a base for social relationships.

As is to be expected, perhaps, there is a significant focus on the potential for AI to drive an even greater increase in inequality. This is a topic that we find already comes up frequently in discussions with investors. The papal point extends this to inequalities for people between countries, given the transnational nature of the technology and its ownership.

The Pope refers to the "mindset of extraction" of AI—specifically the expropriation of data, exploitable information and physical extraction. This is referred to as a new colonialism, and with this a lot of space is given to worries that states are losing power relative to private entities in the development of AI.

Finally, there is a section on the use of AI in war. He sees this as especially dangerous, given the loss of power among multilateral institutions that is taking place at the same time, interestingly the same point that Amodei makes in the essay referenced above. The pope rejects the idea that a moral judgement can ever be left to a machine, particularly in the context of war, and calls for a return to multilateral instructions, particularly the United Nations.

### Dean Spears and Michael Geruso: After the Spike




One of the key forces that makes the next 10–20 years very different from the last 40 is demographics: the larger cohort of older people, a shrinking working-age population in most regions, and the very recent (last decade), and abrupt global decline in

[6] See Skidelsky, Robert. *The Machine Age: An Idea, a History, a Warning*

the birth rate. Just because this is a slow-moving force does not mean its impact is any less, nor in fact does its slow-moving nature preclude, it turns out, argument about what is going on and what to do about it.

In *After the Spike*, Spears and Geruso mount a robust argument for keeping the human population close to its current size rather than letting depopulation take hold. This might sound like a difficult position to defend; after all, is not human-induced climate change perhaps the greatest challenge that mankind faces? And surely a part of this has been, inter alia, a consequence of population growth. Thus, a common assumption is that fewer people would be better for the planet.

The authors ardently agree that climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing humanity but deny that the current likely path to long-run depopulation is a path to solving carbon emissions and planetary temperature increases. The problem, they point out in convincing detail, is in the timing. Preventing a runaway temperature increase requires urgent action now and over the next couple of decades. Whether the population stabilizes or birth rates continue to shrink is something that really only affects more than one generation hence. An increase in birth rates now would make a negligible difference to planetary average temperature outcomes by 2100. That can only be impacted significantly by dramatic shifts in net $CO_2$ emissions.

We were convinced by the argument about carbon emissions, timing and temperature. However, we would disagree that planetary impact is co-terminus with $CO_2$ and temperature. Yes, that is critical of course, but there are other concerns such as biodiversity which, we think, would be helped if the human population did gradually decline over time.

Second, they offer a range of arguments for why population staying at today's level is better, from the perspective of the broader good. Their key argument is a moral one resting on the ethics of depopulation, the value of possible future lives and the "blank space" of people who may never exist. They also claim that more people means more ideas and greater innovation and that scale is needed for specialization. We were less convinced by this argument for scale; as for the ethical argument, we strongly disagreed. Maybe the position of your reviewer being one best described as "militant atheist" would always make that kind of argument hard to accept. We just cannot see a case for giving a value to the possible extra lives that might not be lived. We would be happy to debate this point! It's also a very anthropocentric world view. How would one balance that with the moral desirability of more non-human lifeforms whom we cohabit our planet with instead—surely there is a trade-off?

One point we liked is that Spears and Geruso do not rest the argument on pension structure. We strongly agree this is not a reason to make more people desirable, despite that being perhaps a common view. The idea of mass and long retirement was a product of a set of special conditions in the mid-20th century. We have made the point before[7] that the confluence of higher inflation, greater longevity, high asset valuations and high starting levels of government debt make current structures unsustainable. Greater longevity and inflation make the required savings pot for retirement significantly larger, while lower future investment returns make meeting that goal harder. Meanwhile, high government debt precludes a fiscal solution. This can only be solved by letting pensions take more risk and by people working for much longer.

A large part of the book is devoted to why populations are shrinking and what to do about it. Some of this decline in birth rates has come about through increased female education and a fall in the birth rate below the age of 20. Presumably, everyone agrees this is a good thing, so not something to be seen as a problem. The authors forcefully argue that government control can't make a population stable, e.g., policies making parenting easier (see Scandinavia) do not seem to be effective. Ultimately, their argument is that declining birth rates is a function of the opportunity cost of having kids having risen by so much in a world with high standard of living and multiple life options. Hence, their recommended response is a society-level change, for example in terms of who looks after kids and the need for society to spend more on families.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the recent research outlined by James Burn-Murdoch.[8] He focused on the recent abrupt decline in the birth rate, suggesting that the number of children per couple has not meaningfully shifted recently. What has changed is the rate of romantic coupling. What is remarkable is the global nature of this recent collapse in the birth rate, across countries with very different levels of wealth. By this theory, it is not the opportunity cost of the modern world that has directly reduced the birth rate but the number of couples. The timing of this, country by country, leads him to suggest that it is the introduction of the mobile phone that is to blame, having a deleterious effect on rates of coupling and hence on births.

For those readers who are going to be in Venice this summer, the Biennale has a number of works dedicated to this issue as well. The Danish and Japanese pavilions explore the twin issues of declining fertility and the lack of babies. In the Japanese

[7] Pensions and Bonds: The End of the Affair?

[8] See James Burn-Murdoch: Homes, Phones and demographic decline, FT 16/17 May 2026

pavilion, visitors are invited to take part in a “baby holding experience” involving weighted dolls wearing sunglasses,[9] while the Danish pavilion is an endless floor-to-ceiling immersive video loop “investigating” the fertility crisis.[10]

Demographics is sometimes dismissed as too slow-moving to be worthy of discussion in investment. But it is an incredibly powerful force and, unlike most things in the investment world, is actually predictable. The period since 1980 has been very special for many economies and hence financial markets for several reasons, but one part has been demographics. Baby Boomers reached their peak productive impact, the female labor participation rate increased and, twinned with the increased labor pool from contemporaneous globalization, the global workforce increased at an unprecedented rate. These forces are now either going into reverse or have run their course. This therefore has a huge impact on future growth.

We think this is an important topic. Though on balance we personally do not agree with Spears and Geruso that a larger population is desirable because of planetary limits and we reject their moral argument for more people. But this is a very good contribution to the debate and deserves to be read.

[9] https://venezia-biennale-japan.jpf.go.jp/e/art/2026-en

[10] https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2026/denmark

**Nashville**
501 Commerce Street
Nashville, TN 37203
United States
(212) 969 1000

**New York**
66 Hudson Boulevard East
New York, NY 10001
United States
(212) 969 1000

**London**
60 London Wall
London EC2M 5SJ
United Kingdom
+44 20 7470 0100

**Singapore**
One Raffles Quay
#27-11 South Tower
Singapore 048583
+65 6230 4600

**Tokyo**
Hibiya Parkfront 14F
2-1-6 Uchisaiwaicho,
Chiyoda-ku
Tokyo, 100-0011, Japan
+81 3 5962 9000

**Toronto**
200 Bay Street, North Tower
Suite 1203
Toronto, Ontario M5J 2J2,
Canada
(647) 375 2803

**Sydney**
Level 32, Aurora Place
88 Phillip Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia
+61 02 9255 1200

**Hong Kong**
39th Floor, One Island East,
Taikoo Place
18 Westlands Road
Quarry Bay, Hong Kong
+852 2918 7888

objectives, financial situation or particular needs of any person to whom it is sent. This document is not an advertisement. AllianceBernstein L.P. is not licensed to, and does not purport to, conduct any business or offer any services in Taiwan. **Note to Readers in China:** This information contained here reflects AllianceBernstein Hong Kong Limited ("AB") or its affiliates and sources it believes are reliable as of the date of this publication. This presentation has been provided to you for the sole use in a private and confidential meeting. AB makes no representations or warranties concerning the accuracy of any data. There is no guarantee that any projection, forecast or opinion in this material will be realized. Past performance does not guarantee future results. The views expressed here may change at any time after the date of this publication. This presentation is for informational purposes only and does not constitute investment advice. AB does not provide tax, legal or accounting advice. In considering this material, you should discuss your individual circumstances with professionals in those areas before making any decisions. This presentation or any information contained or incorporated by reference herein does not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to purchase any financial instrument, product or service sponsored by AB or its affiliates within the People's Republic of China ("PRC", for such purposes, excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan). **Note to Readers in Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Thailand, Indonesia and India:** This document is provided solely for the informational purposes of institutional investors and is not investment advice, nor is it intended to be an offer or solicitation, and does not pertain to the specific investment objectives, financial situation or particular needs of any person to whom it is sent. This document is not an advertisement and is not intended for public use or additional distribution. AllianceBernstein is not licensed to, and does not purport to, conduct any business or offer any services in any of the above countries. **Note to Readers in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Bahrain, Qatar and Oman**: AllianceBernstein Limited has established a subsidiary in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) with number 6639, which is regulated by the Dubai Financial Services Authority (DFSA). The registered office is Unit GD-GB-00-15-BC-29-0, Level 15, Gate District Gate Building, Dubai International Financial Centre, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Promotions of financial information made by AllianceBernstein (DIFC) Limited are carried out on behalf of its group entities. This document is intended for Professional Clients or Market Counterparties only as defined by the DFSA and no other person should act upon it. The information contained herein does not constitute, and is not intended to constitute, a public offer of securities in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Qatar, or Oman, and accordingly should not be construed as such. The strategies have not been approved by or licensed or registered with the Dubai Financial Services Authority, the Financial Services Regulatory Authority, the Kuwait Capital Markets Authority, the Saudi Arabian Capital Market Authority, the Central Bank of Bahrain, the Qatar Financial Markets Authority, the Oman Regulatory Authority, or any other relevant licensing authorities or governmental agencies in these jurisdictions (the "Authorities"). The Authorities assume no responsibility for the contents of this document. No offer will be made in the following jurisdictions: Kuwait, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Bahrain or Qatar. This document is intended to be read by the named addressee only and must not be passed to, issued to, or shown to the public generally (other than employees, agents, or consultants in connection with the addressee's consideration thereof). **Note to Readers in Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, Uganda, Zambia and Kenya:** AllianceBernstein L.P. or its affiliates (including AllianceBernstein (DIFC) Limited) are not licensed to carry on business in Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, Uganda, Zambia or Kenya, and neither the Securities and Exchange Commission of Ghana, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Nigeria, the Regulatory Authority of Botswana, the Capital Markets Authority of Kenya, nor any regulatory agency in these countries has approved or disapproved of the provision of the services by AllianceBernstein L.P. or its affiliates. It may be difficult for you to enforce your rights and any claim you may have arising under the securities laws of Ghana, Nigeria, or Kenya, since AllianceBernstein L.P. or its affiliates are located outside these countries and some or all of its officers and directors may be resident outside these countries. You may not be able to sue AllianceBernstein L.P. or its affiliates or its officers or directors in a Ghanaian, Nigerian, or Kenyan court for violations of the respective securities laws. Further, it may be difficult to compel AllianceBernstein L.P. or its affiliates to subject themselves to a court's judgment in these countries. The product is not offered to the public and, depending on local private placement rules, it may only be offered to selected/limited number of investors or through reverse solicitation (where allowed). Important - if you are in any doubt about the contents of this offering document, you should consult your stockbroker, bank manager, lawyer, accountant, or other financial adviser; and the price of units or shares and the income from them (where income is distributed) may go down as well as up.



IMA-958635-2026-06-29