

Position Paper: The Ethical Collapse of Universal Basic Income in the Age of AGI

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Introduction

The emergence of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) presents an existential challenge to the human labor force. For the first time in modern economic history, human beings face systematic replacement not by foreign labor or automation alone, but by cognitive agents capable of outperforming them in logic, memory, productivity, and compliance. In response, policymakers and technocrats have increasingly floated Universal Basic Income (UBI) as a remedy. However, UBI fails to address the structural discrimination implicit in AGI-led displacement and risks relegating large swaths of the population to a state of permanent, subsidized irrelevance.

1. UBI as Rebranded Welfare

While UBI is presented as a clean, efficient safety net, it mirrors welfare systems in both form and consequence. Like welfare and Social Security, UBI provides monetary sustenance disconnected from productive participation. What distinguishes UBI is its presumption that unemployment is no longer a failure of the economy, but a permanent feature of post-AGI society. This reframing is dangerous, as it accepts human obsolescence as a given rather than a crisis to be avoided.

2. Structural Discrimination Against Humans

UBI masks what is effectively the largest instance of systemic discrimination in human history — one based not on race, gender, or age, but on biology itself. If AGI agents are deployed under the premise of maximizing efficiency, they inherently displace humans based on our cognitive limitations, emotional variability, and social needs. In any other context, such categorical exclusion would be considered unethical or unlawful.

3. Historical Precedents for Revolt

When large groups of humans are excluded from economic meaning — even when their material needs are met — the result is rarely stability. The Luddites, post-WWI revolutions, and modern populist movements show that when people feel expendable, they resist — politically, culturally, and violently. UBI does not offer dignity, ambition, or the opportunity to contribute. It is a pressure valve that fails to address the root causes of social unrest.

4. Toward Universal Basic Participation (UBP)

A humane response to AGI displacement must involve more than subsidies. We must establish a legal and social framework that guarantees human participation in the economy, even in a post-labor environment. This could include national service programs, AGI labor quotas, human-in-the-loop mandates, and dignity-based employment initiatives. The goal is not merely to survive the AGI transition, but to do so with our humanity, agency, and values intact.

Conclusion

UBI may soothe short-term suffering, but it is a Band-Aid on an ethical wound. We must confront AGI displacement not as a technical inevitability, but as a moral inflection point. Our societies were not built for human redundancy. They were built on participation, dignity, and contribution. Anything less is a betrayal of the very values that make civilization worth preserving.