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Occupational Dimension of Technology

Understanding how knowledge shapes people’s decision-making is one of the landmark breakthroughs of 20th-century economics. The famous economics scholar Hayek actually won the Nobel Prize due to his discernment of the “knowledge problem.”

Let’s look at this question in light of the decisions you and I make every day. How do you know what to cook for dinner or which way to take to go to work? Within the context or scarcity or finite resources, these decisions would be realized quite differently from in a world of no scarcity. There is never a full and perfect knowledge.

According to Hayek, this knowledge is scattered and dispersed as no single person has all the complete information. In one of his essays, Hayek referred to this as the central economic problem. This has been referred to by Hayek as the “triple-whammy” knowledge problem:

- Scarcity refers to dispersed knowledge among individuals.
- The information we possess is most of the time contradictory.
- As unique individuals will all act upon the knowledge differently, individual behavior becomes more difficult to predict to this subjective valuation.

Given these particular circumstances, it may sound actually amazing that we can get so much done at all.

Given this feature of knowledge being dispersed or scattered, the beauty is that markets help coordinate this knowledge through a process of voluntary exchange.

From the perspective of a faith-based foundation for an economic way of thinking, the mechanism by which knowledge is dispersed this way can be described as follows:

Consumers can tell producers how much they value items in the market based on how much they are willing to pay. By sending signals about scarcity

and subjective value, prices help us cope with the knowledge problem by giving economic actors a way to share exclusive information and make informed choices based on price signals. Within the context of the Western society, value creation has become difficult to be recognized as it is no longer restricted to planting seeds and reaping harvests or bartering at the village market.

Human beings were designed to act in accordance with God's will to do good deeds on Earth. We have been provided with various cognitive skills such as reasoning and cognition to perceive the material world through our senses and evaluate these perceptions. Furthermore, we have been given skills to use the arts to disclose the Creator's beauty as well as to utilize creativity in various fields such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology to help flourish the world's economy. Economic exchange empowers human beings while enabling the production of things that are required, and science shows various threads of evidence with regard to the patterns and systems of God's world underpinning his character as sustainer, planner, designer, and so on. Complete submission to God (aka Islam) frees us to put into practice virtues such as love, mercy, self-restraint, courage, and justice to God's design for humanity.

The concept of vocation is multifaceted and complex. In contemporary discourse, it is an idea that is perhaps most often connected with work of some kind, usually (but not always) work that involves remuneration. In the educational realm, vocational schooling is associated with skilled trades or manual labor. What a person does for a paycheck is typically described as one's vocation, while what a person does for other reasons – whether personal interest, amusement, or fulfillment of other duties – is understood as one's avocation.

In our days, vocation seems to be often conceptualized as being either worldly or religious – not both. This modern situation is intriguing as our contemporary world leaves room for such special vocations but largely identifies vocation with worldly endeavors. These worldly endeavors, however, are secularized not only in that they are separated from religious institutions but also and more fundamentally in that they are separated from God. To speak of vocation nowadays leaves out the question of the divine *who* – the one calling a person to do something and to be someone. In place of God is the self, the state, the dollar, or some combination thereof.

Amid modern society's more common materialistic assumptions about business and economics, Muslims have a great deal to contribute when it comes to reviving a transcendent view toward work and service. Yet in

highlighting the importance of serving others, we risk the adoption of a different set of misaligned priorities and assumptions.

For many, our renewed emphasis on “work” is quickly misconstrued as an imperative to “follow your passion” or “live your dreams” – a cozy affirmation of our culture’s hedonistic refrains about “doing what you love and loving what you do.”

For those left unsatisfied by the lure of materialism, it seems like a good replacement. Unfortunately, without the proper arc and aim, it’s bound to lead to the same dead ends of self-focus and self-indulgence. Writers like Frederick Buechner further this misconception, defining vocation as melting pot of one’s happiness with the humanity’s deeper needs.

While vocation can surely manifest in this way, would this, truly, be what it’s fundamentally about? If vocation is fundamentally about personal happiness in work, it’s “a luxury only afforded to the most privileged on the planet which is bound to lead to a dissatisfaction for those who are doing ‘just a job’.”

For others, vocation (properly understood) may refer to *love and service to neighbor*, and if we hope gain and absorb that understanding, we’d do well to start with remembering that our “jobs” are only one facet of our vocations and probably not the most important: we also have callings in the family and the society. Our vocations are not just where we find our fulfillment but also where we follow the Qur’an.

God calls every believer to work in their vocations which leads us to serve others. Yet, we also have various other callings that flow from this. Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation God has assigned to them and called them. This situation that God has assigned encompasses the various areas that fall under the rubric of vocation.

Here are five things we should know about vocation:

Vocation is about love and service: As vocation aims to act as a means to serve one’s neighbor, the criterion for how to realize each and every vocation should be to ask the question of how one’s individual calling would serve his neighbor. Vocation is the specific way in which God calls us to live as a Muslim in the world and serve our neighbor.

Vocation is more than your job: We often use the term vocation in reference to our careers or occupation. But while our jobs are a way – maybe even the most significant way – we serve others, the Islamic concept of vocation is more expansive. It includes all the roles in which we are called to serve the mankind.

Vocation is not self-chosen: A vocation is something we are called to by God. It is not something we choose for ourselves. We discover our vocations by considering what resources God has given us for being a servant (i.e., talents, interests, abilities) and the people he has put in our lives (e.g., parents, children).

You have multiple vocations: We are called to serve in various spheres, such as the family, the workplace, mosque, etc. In each of these we have a vocation – sometimes multiple vocations (e.g., being both a parent of a child and the child of a parent).

The primary vocation of a Muslim is to be a Muslim: While most of our vocations are equal before God, one stands apart from all others: our calling to be a follower of our beloved Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.w). This is the most important vocation we will ever have in this life.

Given the self-centeredness and materialism of economic pursuits, vocation is a great means of countering this materialism by providing a new meaning and direction. It dismantles the self-centeredness of our age, from the materialistic pursuit of personal wealth to the emotional pursuit of self-actualization. So the Kenyan construction worker and the Bangladeshi woman sewing buttons have vocations. Vocation honors labor that the world looks down upon. Yes, being a wife, mother, sister, etc., is just as important as getting paid for a job – indeed, more important, the family responsibilities being the most fundamental. With regard to our various responsibilities – as spouse, parent, citizen, and worker – we are to live out our faith. Such a doctrine of vocation with its radical, neighbor-centered ethic displaces good works from the realm of the merely spiritual into the realm of the material, the social, and the ordinary. When we serve humanity, we do serve God.

Our modernistic and hedonistic sensibilities will surely resist such a framework, arguing, rather ironically, that all this amounts to a different sort of sentimentalism and emotionalism.

But just vocation is not spiritual frosting for materialism, nor it's also an excuse for pleasure-seeking and "following your passion." Vocation is a means for "jihad" serving human neighbors for the glory of God. Ours is a service not of our own design or choosing, and when we orient our lives accordingly, it's far more powerful because of it.

The classical notion of economy (Greek, *oikonomia*; Latin, *oeconomia*) had been associated with the family, and *oikonomia* was literally the "law" or "rule" of the household.

It was for later thinkers to develop and apply this idea to the arena of social organization of families within society, first as political economy

and later as economics as distinct from politics. Debates at origins of neo-classical economics struggled to differentiate between activities that counted as “economic” in the newer sense as being done outside of the family and those that were beyond the realm of economics, that is, within the household. The famed sociologist Max Weber would later develop an understanding of the relationship between Protestant moral teachings and vocation that would increasingly understand the latter in economic terms. As Weber asserted, within the context of the modern economic order, money can be earned legally as long as there is proficiency and virtue in a calling. A secularized understanding of vocation places the person within an “iron cage” of ever more profit-making, which is far different from those who out of love seek new and better ways of serving others and thereby serving God.

As there are increasing pressures of economic change and uncertainty, many have relished in a range of renewed nostalgias, whether recalling the blissful security of post-war industrialism or the rise of the Great Society and the prowess of the administrative state. Meanwhile, economic progress continues at an increasing pace. Indeed, as politicians attempt to prevent or subvert economic change by squabbling over wage minimums, salary caps, trade barriers, and a host of regulatory fixings, entrepreneurs and innovators are trying to accelerate learning to do less with more. As symbolized in the form of job-killing ATM machines, we live in an age where new competitive pressures are met with new efficiencies with astonishing speed. For example, Amazon recently showcased plans for the roll-out of its new convenience store concept, in which cashiers will be completely replaced by new “AI-powered technology.”

No sooner was the concept hailed as “the next major job killer” than we learned about the next iteration: a supermarket-sized store run almost entirely by robots, leaving room for as few as three human employees. According to an inside source quoted in *The New York Post*, Amazon will continue to “utilize technology to minimize labor.”

Upon hearing such news, Luddites of varying persuasions will surely be tempted to instigate the garden-variety protective and coercive measures to slow or halt the pace of innovation. Yet to do so will only delay or exacerbate the inevitable.

Every technological revolution destroys old jobs. The new productivity takes a different form each time, but it ultimately doesn’t have to mean fewer jobs overall. It means a change in the way jobs are defined.

At the beginning of the 20th century, mass production did the same thing to shop production that electronic production is doing to mass production

now. It eliminated jobs – at first. Mass production could create many identical units at low cost. The ideal policy was thus to make energy and materials cheap and labor more expensive, thereby creating more mass-market consumers using cheap fuels and electricity. After World War II, governments in the industrialized world did just that, raising the cost of labor by supporting labor unions, establishing payroll taxes, and passing minimum-wage laws. Cheap raw materials and energy, in the form of fossil fuels, came from the developing world. Even though businesses chafed at high salaries, they benefited from the increases in productivity and in demand.

Today, it's energy and materials that are too expensive (or will become so if growth resumes strongly), and they need to be reduced to cut costs. Environmental threats reinforce this incentive. Thus, businesses are redesigning products for smaller carbon footprints, fewer materials, and zero waste. Many products are also being turned into services – prerecorded music into streaming, for example.

According to the Frey and Osborne study from the Oxford Martin School, 47% of today's white-collar jobs in both the United Kingdom and the United States might be automated by 2035. A recent World Bank study suggests that 69% of all Indian jobs are vulnerable to automation.

Forecasters disagree over whether the coming wave of robotic automation will usher in a utopia or a wasteland, but none questions a future where automatons increasingly put human beings out of work.

Prognosticators agree that machines will meet an ever-growing share of man's needs and desires, while homo sapiens retreat into forced idleness. The optimists believe this will free humans to devote hone their higher, God-given faculties. Pessimists worry that a significant portion of the human race will lose its economic wherewithal, as fewer jobs are open to people.

Still others assert that the world will never see a future in which shiftless people relax while robots create more products than they can ever afford. According to them, the automation of existing production will do what it has always done. It will create the conditions for the development of new products, for new demands, and for new, different and well-paying jobs to emerge.

The 21st century differs from the previous business revolutions as AI, robotics, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, and the like are disruptive technological changes. While the debate about whether these technologies may bring superabundance or lasting job losses and lower pay may still be ongoing, neither outcome is plausible.

Former world chess champion Garry Kasparov has a new book out called *Deep Thinking*. Losing to the computer “Deep Blue” gave Kasparov a close encounter with a member of the race of “intelligent machines.” Despite this experience, he tends to see promise rather than threat in their growing power. As Garry mentioned in one of his essays for the *Wall Street Journal*, as machines replace physical labor, there would be more opportunity for human beings to focus on their minds so that more menial aspects of cognition can be taken over toward providing more space for enhanced creativity, curiosity, and joy.

It is instructive to take a backward leap to 1930 and to John Maynard Keynes looking forward to a bountiful future of superabundance in one of his essays “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren” as stated that human-beings should value ends above means or prefer the good to the useful.

An important point that should be taken into account is that here Keynes was talking about himself and people like him rather than the majority of individuals. Most people may not welcome a future of enforced idleness and leisure, however much opportunity it gave for mental contemplation. The latest round of automation and technological upheaval will not result in a land of plenty co-existing with entrenched unemployment. As Keynes’ prediction proved to be wide of the mark, so will be Kasparov’s. Free market economics and human nature are the keys to understanding the effect of yet another industrial revolution, since the first began in the second half of the 18th century.

Instead of rendering giant companies obsolete, the current system might complement them by opening other opportunities for wealth creation of another sort. As John Maynard Keynes correctly asserted, someone needs to create demand before innovation and investment can come forward. The last time it was by building houses on suburban land. Yet, how do you create demand now?

That’s where emerging economies are important. The so-called developing countries were not included in the mass production surge of the 20th century, because the advanced world was more interested in their natural resources than in their consumer market. Yet, that is changing now. As countries like China and India continue to grow rapidly, they provide demand needed by business producers, including food and materials producers in other emerging economies. These new producers will take advantage of much greater global demand to fund their development, which in turn should increase global demand for capital and consumer goods. It’s a new positive-sum game waiting to be set up.

The critical question is: Can a positive-sum game be established among all the world's nations? The need for full global development today is enormous, if only because of the growth in consumer demand that's needed. Even if ISIS is defeated, you must establish enough jobs in the less-developed economies to bring back hope to their populations.

It's essential for every economy to specialize, so that it can participate competitively in global markets. Yet, each piece of territory has to abandon the race to the bottom and define its identity, connected to its history or to strengths that it creates. Its businesses, universities, regulatory priorities, and tax regime must all favor the chosen direction for success, preferably defined by a consensus-building process. The advanced industrial countries may end up specializing in capital-intensive goods and high-level engineering while the lagging countries will have to build their own manufacturing bases. Some may specialize in raw materials-based industries while others may have their own entrepreneurs, innovating in products and services that reflect their culture and identity. Diversity is in the nature of information technology just as much as homogeneity was natural to mass production.

The Industrial Revolution was a gradual process of development comprised of the individual actions of thousands of innovators across time. The dramatic changes in the world have come about partially due to the technological growth, some of which developed out of this revolution of industry. It is not the result of a few "great, singular men," but of many interconnected individual innovations.

Technological growth comes about from the trade and exchange of concepts and ideas. Each innovation builds on previous innovations, connected in a web of technology that encompasses the world (See Appendix A for a complete review of innovation and competency policies). The more and the freer the trade, the more and better technological growth. As trade grows, so does the spread of knowledge and ideas, and the resulting innovation.

Most automation of jobs is only partial, not complete. Even partial automation can lead to jobs losses, of course. But as a whole, automation tends to merely shift the need for human labor from routine, low-skill tasks to more creative, high-skilled functions. Automation leads to fewer elevator operators but more elevator designers, engineers, and repairmen.

This shift ought to be lauded by Muslims. While we should rightly be concerned about the employment prospects of low-skilled workers, we should not become nostalgic for the mind-numbing, back-breaking work that automation has made obsolete. Too often we treat "jobs" as if they were an inherent good (at least if they pay a "living wage.") But not all jobs are

created equal. Some jobs that may benefit our neighbors' bank account may also be crushing their soul.

The rapid adoption of computerized automation has the potential to increase job satisfaction for entire occupations that have previously been dangerous, dirty, and demoralizing. In looking at the future of work, we therefore must look not only at the wages that a job will pay but also at the price such work requires of our neighbors. We can let the robots take over the parts that a machine can do so that we may use our God-given human abilities for more ennobling tasks. This can be achieved by improving upon our intuition and creativity while working hard. It is sad that today's millennials – many members of my own generation including myself – have a hard time in accepting this simple reality.

As Muslims, especially, we should remember that adapting to economic change is fundamentally about adapting to *human needs* and aligning the cultivation of our minds and the toil of our hands with love for and service to our neighbors. Rather than nostalgic pining for ages and economies past, we can move forward – not by manipulation via the levers of government power, but by building on our God-given intuition and creativity, staying pro-active in our response to the shifts that are sure to come.

When the economic conditions change, the voice of God will speak, wisdom will come, and we can move forward energetically and creatively, leaning not on our own understanding. We may think that certain forms of such destruction signal our end, but when we align our hands to anticipate the dynamism of a new set of needs, the ultimate solution may surprise us after all.

Leaders would have to understand their role in this crucial moment, move to open a consensus-building process, and be determined to take bold measures. Their efforts, hopefully supported by business and society, could be the basis for the global golden age of the information economy.

According to the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, the following revolutions occurred throughout the history of world economy:

- Steam power mechanizing production;
- Electric power facilitating mass production;
- Electronics and information technology automating production.

This latest industrial revolution might possibly turn out to be more profound and fast-moving than earlier revolutions. Accordingly, it might turn out to be more disruptive and cause more transitory unemployment. However, there

is no basis for believing that it will result in permanently higher levels of unemployment, nor in enduringly depressed incomes.

Recent historical experience is instructive. Workforce participation has risen since World War II has finished, despite increasing automation. In the United States, the participation rate was less than 60% in the 1950s compared with well in excess of 60% in more recent years. Participation has similarly risen in, say, the United Kingdom and in Australia since the 1970s. It is true that underneath these numbers is rising participation by women against falling full-time participation by men. Yet, the plain fact is that overall workforce participation has risen rather than fallen, as have real hourly wages, over the past 50–60 years of profound labor-saving technological changes.

There have been a large number of technological changes since the first Industrial Revolution began in Britain around 250 years ago. If these had cumulatively dampened employment, very few people would now be employed. Moreover, it is the new norm that families with children require two incomes in order to pay the bills and live comfortably.

It is certainly possible that the latest industrial revolution will produce more dislocation than experienced in the past. But it is essential to take account of unrequited human wants and the symbiotic relationship between those making products and those buying them.

There are more than seven billion people in the world, very few of whom have all that they want. We have a system of capitalism that generates a balance between supply and demand – and which critically depends on sufficient numbers of people being employed and being paid enough, to purchase goods or services. The system simply will not work for any length of time if there is an imbalance between automated production churning out vast quantities of products and a growing army of unemployed who can't afford them. It simply can't and doesn't work that way. Temporary imbalances can exist and produce recessions. But, left alone, these are part of a process of the economic system moving back into alignment.

Long-term mass unemployment is not a technological phenomenon, neither is it an economic one. It is a political one. The benefits come in the form of a range of different jobs and of increased supply and variety of goods and services – for the poor, the rich, and the not-so rich. In the latest industrial revolution, there is nothing to fear but fear itself – and inept and interfering governments.

Given the breakneck pace of improvements in automation and AI, fears about job loss are taking more space in the cultural imagination. Symbolized

by recent concerns about Amazon's "job-killing" grocery-store robo-clerks, the anxiety is palpable and persistent.

Using elaborate models and forecasts to affirm such fears, economic planners and doomsayers predict the rise of robot overlords and the demise of human labor. Such estimates paint a dismal economic future wherein humans are pushed to the side with little to contribute and even less to gain. Yet, could it be that this picture might be missing something?

As Ross Gittins explains, the common modeling which has been suggested by scholars such as Frey and Osborne includes significant errors, oversights, and inconsistencies when applied to the real world. To give a more specific example, Frey and Osborn asserted that surveyors, accountants, tax agents, and marketing specialists were automatable occupations, whereas Australian employment in these has grown strongly in the past 5 years. According to Frey and Osborne, the need for dexterous fingers is an impediment to automation, yet their method predicts that there is an automation probability of 98% for watch repairers.

Furthermore, Frey and Osborne's modeling assumes that if an occupation is automated then all jobs in that occupation are to be destroyed. So the advent of driverless vehicles is assumed to eliminate all taxi drivers, truck drivers, couriers, and more.

Moreover, these scholars make the assumption that if it's technically feasible to automate a job, there would be no need for employers to decide due to reasons of profitability. Similarly, these scholars assert that there will be no shortage of the skilled workers required to set up and use the automated technology.

Apart from their predictions about high-level trends – that certain jobs, sectors, and industries will indeed be largely automated – these scholars fail to recognize or account for the unseen and unforeseen developments that result from automation. As a result, the transformative role of human potential and ingenuity is ignored amid technological progress. Such a modeling involves no attempt to take account of the jobs created, directly and indirectly, by the process of automation. No one gets a job selling, installing, or servicing all the new robots. Competition between the newly robotized firms doesn't oblige them to lower their prices, meaning that their customers don't have more to spend – and hence create jobs – in other parts of the economy. All that happens, apparently, is that employment collapses and profits soar. But if it happens like that it will be the first time in 200 years of mechanization and 40 years of computerization.

Such an outlook requires not only a static view of the economy, but also a remarkably dim view of human creativity and possibility. If we look to history, we see that automation has led to greater prosperity and productivity, making more room for humans, not less.

This is precisely because we are not mere machines, consigned to junk yards when particular solutions or services are rendered obsolete. Rather, we are creative and imaginative human persons created as stewards of the only and one Creator. We are fully capable of adapting, mobilizing, and innovating our modes of service to be in line with His purposes in the earth. When the economic conditions change and mechanization or automation replaces old ways of meeting human needs, innovation comes and new human services are created.

Automation will continue to disrupt our old ways of doing things. But knowing what we do about the past and the future of human possibility, we needn't be fearful of our own position and power. As we survey the barrage of predictable reports about the end of human labor or the rise of robot dominance, let's be sure to wield our hope and skepticism accordingly.

Moreover, we'd do well to remember that doing less with more also means having more time and resources for more. Data continue to demonstrate that technology creates more jobs than it destroys, and we'd do well to seize on that reality with optimism and a thirst for the next opportunity for creative service.

That optimism requires more than just a change in attitude or orientation if we hope for the fruits to endure. As researchers like economist Tyler Cowen have explained, our vocational priorities need a drastic rehaul if we hope for our skills and study to apply in the economic order. As Cowen asserts, with the increasing automation and productivity levels of machines as well, the question of where human beings should be located within this picture should be reconsidered. This means that questions such as what would be the criteria to make progress in this new digital economy should be given serious thought.

As the authors Brynjolfsson and McAfee's quote in their book "Race Against the Machine" from the economist Clark, the population of horses to be used for work in England vanished later on as the workers were replaced in the 19th century with the arrival of the combustion engine and thus that the low wage did not pay for the feed of the horses. These authors assert that unarguably technology enables mankind to achieve progress in an unparalleled way. Due to the ICT profound structural changes are taking place. To give a specific example, similar to the jobs being eliminated due to steam power and the internal combustion engine, several jobs that we hold

today may be eliminated given the connectivity and automation opportunities provided by our digital age.

As the Industrial Age came in two main stages, namely steam and railroads followed by electricity and the engine, the ICT revolution started with the punch card and telephone lines not to mention today's smartphones which may be just the beginning of what this age will bring.

On the other hand, given this increasing level of connectedness and complexity provided by the ICT revolution, it becomes more difficult to discover how we can provide virtue and value in our apart from earning merely a compensation to pay our bills. Each job in fact has the potential to provide an opportunity to collaborate with God, often in ways that we may never see.

If individuals were asked about their career decisions, most of them would admit that they have been influenced by chance events to a great extent. So these seemingly random perturbations in addition to the initial starting point disrupt the ultimate trajectory of personal careers. Among the most common "random perturbations" are:

Limited options: There is a good chance that one's future job title will be one which has never been imagined before as they even did not exist once. Yet, despite the lack of complete control on the trajectory of our careers, we can still influence the initial conditions rather than choose a path based on restricted conditions.

Miswanting: Several research studies suggest that we are terrible at predicting what will make us happy in the future. This phenomenon has been referred to as "miswanting." Even though we may assume that money and status may provide pleasure, in the longer run we may discover that we should be seeking another mix of aims as our desires and motives will change radically over the next 10 years. In other words, the dreams we thought our future self would follow were not really what we wanted at all.

Focus on skill sets: The skill clusters we obtain, rather than our preferences, have often specified what job will become available to us. As these skill sets have a significant impact on the career path, we should choose them carefully.

Who knows you is more important than a resume: A better version of the cliché "It's not what you know but who you know" should be "It's not what you know but *who knows you.*" As we try to expand our network, our career will (mostly) take care of itself.

Lack of insight on where the journey will take: Although one's personal circumstances may not be particularly promising, they will change eventually.

More importantly, as Muslims we should bear in mind that we can be anything that *God* wants us to become. Our Creator clearly sees our path even if, from our limited perspective, it may look like a chaos. If we keep seeking his guidance by reading the Qur'an and obeying his commands, eventually He will enable us to practice our skills and creativity provided by Him into useful service. By trusting God, we can enjoy the exciting journey ahead of you.

Technology has played an important role in lessening the existing supply of labor while keeping many potential workers minimally satisfied and happily engaged in the comfort of their parents' homes.

This applies to consumption-oriented technology in general, but with video games in particular, we see a unique form of entertainment that often looks and feels like the best parts of the very workplace we're seeking to avoid. Unlike TV or movies or social media, video games move beyond idle diversion, creating illusions of toil and, in turn, earned success.

As Peter Suderman explains, in recent years, video games have evolved into something strikingly similar to what some might call "meaningful work". Video games can be considered as a kind of employment simulators as they include basically a series of quests comprised of mundane and repetitive tasks. So it is perhaps not surprising that video games are increasingly replacing work for many young men.

Video games serve as a buffer between the individual and despair as even the most open-ended games offer a sense of progress and commitment. Yet, although video games may indeed provide an initial rush of merriment or serve as a reasonable method for emotional "coping," the bigger question is whether that's actually where it stops. At what point does our cultural obsession with technology, and video games in particular, move from innocent leisurely consumption to a culture-wide replacement of meaningful production?

Whatever benefits these games may provide in the short term, and whatever emotions their "simulations" may satisfy, we should be careful to make proper distinctions about the fundamental aim, which impacts all else.

We should remember that as Muslims, meaningful work is about much more than simply overcoming obstacles, achieving "organizational success," or becoming an expert in a particular skill or industry. Through means of work, we serve not only others, but also God himself and He, in return, weaves the work of others into a culture of service that makes our work more rewarding. This is why work gives meaning to your life and to mine.

This is the basic difference between work and leisure, and it's a distinction that's bound to shape our attitudes and imaginations as we prioritize the hours

of the day. Play can be considered as a kind of recreation, as it prepares the individual to do his work better. Play is fun and relaxing, because it is always an end in itself. The desire that leads to playing is satisfied in the doing.

To be clear, leisure can be a very good thing. It plays an important role and can bring its own form of meaning in refreshing the human mind and spirit. Yet, when we confuse it for something else – seeking meaning in the feats and victories themselves – we move closer to embracing the counterfeit as an idol and calling it something else.

As long as an effort ends in the satisfaction of the self, it cannot be called as work. Regardless of the type of work undertaken, what the self gets engaged for the sake of its own satisfaction rather than realizing God's commands for serving mankind, this will not carry over into Afterlife, and hence will become a burden for the soul itself.

Given the impact of these distractions on the individual lives of workers and the economy in general we should keep remembering that while we work, we serve others unto the glory of God. In play, we play.

We should be excited about this future. Vast new opportunities are coming that will alter the course of human history. Technological change today is already occurring faster and more substantively than we realize. As with any change, however, there will be winners and losers.

Changes are happening so fast that as jobs and career opportunities are being destroyed, the ability to retrain or reset expectations isn't keeping pace.

As Muslims, especially, we should remember that adapting to economic change is fundamentally about adapting to human needs and aligning the cultivation of our minds and the toil of our hands with love for and service to our neighbors. Rather than nostalgic pining for ages and economies past, we can move forward – not by manipulation via the levers of government power, but by building on our God-given intuition and creativity, staying pro-active in our response to the shifts that are sure to come. As AI and the subsequent technology continue to improve, we needn't be fearful of our own position and power. We are not mere machines, but creative and imaginative human persons fully capable of adapting, mobilizing, innovating our modes of service to be in line with his love and purposes.

When the economic conditions change, the voice of God will speak, wisdom will come, and we can move forward energetically and creatively, leaning not on our own understanding. We may think that certain forms of such destruction signal our end, but when we align our hands to anticipate the dynamism of a new set of needs, the ultimate solution may surprise us after all.

