

# Against Robotic Panic

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# The Resolution

- Resolution: *“Robots will eventually dominate the world and eliminate human abilities to earn wages.”*
- I disagree with both clauses. Our most probable future:
  - Robots will “dominate” nothing.
  - Many humans will no longer WANT to earn wages, but those who choose to work will earn more than today.
- Like most humans, I consider this the “optimistic” result. But regardless of your evaluation, these are my predictions.

# An Analogy

- Imagine the dawn of the domestication of animals. Suppose someone said, “*Domesticated animals will eventually dominate the world and eliminate human abilities to earn wages.*”
  - Since we can improve and rapidly breed animals, eventually they’ll be smart and numerous enough to take over.
  - Domestication will eventually yield animals so skilled humans will be unable to compete with them in the labor market.
- As you know, this hasn’t happened yet, and there’s no sign it ever will.
  - Limits to how much domestication improves animals.
  - Animals are bred for docility to man.
  - Animal skills improve *unevenly*, so humans specialize in areas where they have a comparative advantage, ultimately leading to *higher* human wages.

# The Relevance of the Analogy

- Case for the resolution is about as good as the case for my analogy.
  - Since robots can rapidly improve and multiply, eventually they'll be smart and numerous enough to take over.
  - Robots will eventually be so skilled humans will be unable to compete with them in the labor market.
- Rebuttal is about as good, too:
  - Limits to how much robots improve.
  - Robots are programmed for docility to man.
  - Robot skills improve *unevenly*, so humans specialize in areas where they have a comparative advantage, ultimately leading to *higher* human wages.

# “This Time It’s Different”

- But aren’t robots different from domesticated animals in fundamental ways?
- The robots we can *imagine* are, because imagination is infinite.
- The robots we’ve *seen* aren’t. So far, we have:
  - Robots that are awesome at a narrow range of tasks, like computation, pure math, web search, and assembly line production.
  - Robots that are getting okay at a broader range of tasks, like voice recognition and driving.
- “X hasn’t happened yet” doesn’t prove “X will never happen.” But it’s still one of the best arguments we’ve got, especially when X is a dramatic change that fires the human imagination.