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Book Review

Rethinking Human Future in The Age of AI: A Review through the Civilizational Lens

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The Age of AI: And Our Human Future by Henry A. Kissinger, Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021, ISBN 978-0-316-27410-4.

In the book explains that AI is not merely a tool but a philosophical paradigm shift, replacing certain aspects of human capacity. The authors highlight how systems-like the AI that discovered new antibiotics or developed unconventional chess strategies function in ways humans cannot fully grasp but increasingly rely upon. AI models learn from pattern recognition rather than pre-programmed logic, they develop conclusions that humans can find highly counter-intuitive. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the defining forces shaping twenty-first-century international politics, military affairs, diplomacy, and governance. In the *Age of AI: And Our Human Future* by Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt and Daniel Huttenlocher present a thought-provoking examination of how AI challenges long-held assumptions regarding knowledge, decision-making, statecraft, and human agency. Rather than treating AI merely as a technological innovation, the authors argue that it represents a civilizational transformation comparable to the Enlightenment or the Industrial Revolution.

From an Indian Perspective, however, the book offers an opportunity to rethink AI through the philosophical foundations of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and India's evolving strategic culture. While the authors primarily draw upon western philosophical traditions, they pay relatively little attention to non-western epistemologies, thereby leaving significant scope for comparative analysis. The central contribution of the book lies in its argument that AI is altering the relationship between knowledge and power. The authors caution that autonomous systems increasingly generate insights beyond direct human comprehension, thereby challenging traditional notions of political authority and strategic judgment. This observation resonates strongly with India's contemporary pursuit of AI-enabled governance, defence modernization, cybersecurity, and digital diplomacy.

In First chapter, "*Where We Are*," Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher analysis that AI is unlike previous technological changes because it has the power to reshape nearly every part of human life. They suggest that this change will go beyond practical matters and reach a deeper philosophical level, affecting how people understand reality and their own place in the world. As a result, they raise important questions about how AI may influence human thinking, relationships, culture, and even the way history unfolds.

As technology becomes faster and more capable, an important question emerges: what will continue to make us uniquely human? Rather than focusing only on skills or efficiency, *Human Edge in the AI Age* encourages readers to think about qualities such as empathy, creativity, and purpose that remain at the heart of human life. Nitin Seth writes in a clear and engaging style, blending personal experiences with thoughtful insights. He begins with relatable moments, such as a ride in a Waymo self-driving car, before connecting them to ideas from the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. These reflections add depth to the discussion, making the book as much about personal growth as it is about technology.

As workplaces continue to change, the book offers practical guidance for adapting with confidence. Instead of encouraging readers to compete with machines, Seth emphasises the importance of strengthening qualities that are deeply human. He introduces the POSSIBLE framework, which highlights eight essential traits, including problem-solving, openness, leadership, and emotional awareness. These qualities help individuals remain adaptable and valuable in an evolving world. One of the book's greatest strengths is its balanced and reflective approach. Rather than focusing only on technological change, it invites readers to consider their values, strengths, and sense of purpose. Through real-life examples, insights from different industries, and thoughtful philosophical reflections, *Human Edge in the AI Age* leaves readers with a reassuring message: even in an age of rapid technological progress, it is our humanity on compassion, resilience, and wisdom that will continue to shape the future (Seth, 2025).

In Second chapter, *"How We Got Here—Technology and Human Thought,"* Kissinger and his co-authors trace the Western intellectual tradition from Classical antiquity through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, culminating in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), which argues that human understanding is shaped by the mind's own structures and therefore cannot access reality in a completely unmediated form. They contrast Kant's position with 20th century thinkers and physicists, especially Wittgenstein, whose emphasis on patterns, overlap, and

resemblance helps explain how AI systems identify meaning across large datasets. Building on this, the authors suggest that AI is changing the traditional human role in interpreting, organizing, and evaluating knowledge and action.

Viewed through the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems, AI need not be perceived solely as a disruptive technology but as an instrument whose ethical use depends upon Dharma (righteous conduct), Jnana (knowledge), Viveka (discernment), and Lokasangraha (collective welfare). Classical Indian thinkers consistently emphasized that knowledge without ethics produces instability. This philosophical insight becomes particularly relevant in an era where AI increasingly influences warfare, public administration, education, healthcare, and social discourse.

Chapter Three, "*From Turing to Today and Beyond*," describes Alan Turing's famous 1950 idea: if a machine behaves so convincingly that people can't tell it apart from a human, we should call it "intelligent." John McCarthy later broadened this by defining AI as machines that carry out tasks typically associated with human intelligence. Recent advances have produced AI systems that match or surpass humans in specific areas, though they don't reflect on their discoveries the way people do. The chapter distinguishes between artificial general intelligence (AGI) systems able to perform any intellectual task a human can and narrow AI, which is built for a single purpose. As a reviewer, I think those key terms (ANI, AGI, ASI) should have been introduced in the first chapter to give readers a clearer framework for the rest of the book.

Chapter Four, "*Global Network Platforms*," shows that many online services—social media, search engines, and similar platforms depend on AI to work at scale. As more people join a platform, its usefulness grows, creating strong network effects. That makes the question of community standards more complicated: rules about acceptable content now reach across borders, and Kissinger et al. argue these standards can be as powerful as national laws. Although these platforms often present themselves as neutral, their algorithms shape what people see by how content is created, collected, and shown to users. The authors worry that platform companies and their human overseers will end up regulating the information environment and controlling disinformation.

In chapter Five, "*Security and World Order*", Kissinger et al. argue that no major nation can ignore the security dimensions of AI, especially what they term "stra-tegic AI." Such ever evolving AI technologies will be integrated into offensive and defensive aspects of potential nuclear, conventional, and cyber warfare. Troubling to the authors is that the shift to AI and

AI-assisted weapons and defense systems is reliant on (or delegated to) an intelligence of significant analytic potential on a fundamentally different experiential paradigm. Such a scenario introduces unknown or poorly understood risks. Kissinger et al. note the need for having human operators passively "on the AI loop" or "ín the AI loop" to control AI actions (to at least ensure moral agency and accountability) of such autonomous and potentially lethal weapons systems. Moreover, the authors recommend that the major powers pursue their strategic competition within a negotiated, international relations framework of verifiable limits.

Kissinger's geopolitical experience highlights a looming crisis in deterrence and escalation theory. If military systems rely on AI to select targets or execute engagements at speeds and patterns beyond human comprehension, traditional arms control and liberal deterrence may unravel. The book assesses the tense technological supremacy battle between the U.S. and China, illustrating how AI could redefine national power through cyber operations, autonomous warfare, and economic dominance.

Chapter Six, "*AI and Human Identity*," argues that as AI becomes more capable, our ideas about what it means to be human our roles, aspirations, and sources of fulfillment will shift. People who have long taken pride in agency, centrality, and a monopoly on complex thought may find their self-image challenged. Many will also struggle to understand why AI systems behave as they do, which can erode feelings of autonomy and make the world feel less meaningful. As AI changes the nature of work, it risks undermining people's sense of identity, purpose, and financial security. To respond, the authors propose clearer boundaries: societies should decide when people must be told they're interacting with an AI, what authority those systems may have, and which uses are off-limits. They recommend keeping core government decisions under human control and oversight rather than delegating them to automated systems. However, the authors don't do enough to address a crucial weakness: current AI systems often lack the transparency needed for continuous human oversight, so small harms can accumulate unnoticed until they become crises.

Chapter Seven, "*AI and the Future*," lays out three broad choices humanity faces with advanced AI: contain it, cooperate with it, or surrender decision-making to it. The authors stress that if AGI appears, we'll need a guiding ethic to clarify what we've built and what it means for human life. They call for measured conversations among governments, universities, ethicists, and industry to agree on international limits particularly around cyberwarfare and nuclear use. The book urges the United States to map AI's capabilities, study its effects, and begin

reconciling with the technology steps the reviewer agrees are overdue. Kissinger and his co-authors also propose a national commission to keep the U.S. strategically and intellectually competitive, to raise public awareness of AI's cultural impact, and to coordinate with other governments and local groups on contentious issues.

The discussion of strategic competition between major powers in the book also invites comparison with India's indigenous strategic traditions. Ancient Indian political thought, particularly the ideas of Kautilya, emphasized intelligence gathering, calibrated use of power, alliance formation, and prudent statecraft. Many of these principles remain visible in India's contemporary strategic culture, which combines realism with strategic autonomy. AI therefore becomes not merely a technological capability but an extension of India's long-standing emphasis on informed decision-making and national resilience.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its interdisciplinary character. It integrates philosophy, international relations, computer science, ethics, and strategic studies into a coherent narrative. The discussion on autonomous decision-making, military AI, and geopolitical competition provides valuable insights for scholars of security studies and emerging technologies. Nevertheless, the book has notable limitations. Its analysis is largely rooted in Euro-American intellectual traditions and offers limited engagement with Asian philosophical systems or the experiences of developing countries. The Global South, including India, appears more as a future participant in AI governance than as a contributor to normative frameworks. Consequently, readers interested in India's civilizational approach to technology may find the discussion incomplete.

The absence of sustained engagement with Indian ethical traditions represents a missed opportunity. Concepts such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Sarvodaya, and Antyodaya could significantly enrich debates on responsible AI governance, international cooperation, and inclusive technological development. Similarly, India's experience with digital public infrastructure demonstrates that AI can simultaneously advance economic growth, social inclusion, and democratic governance.

In conclusion, *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future* remains one of the most influential works on AI and global politics. The authors delineate AI is a transformative, cross-disciplinary force already spreading through many parts of life, and because it can learn and surprise, it will reshape industries, politics, and human identity. Rather than celebrating or condemning AI, the

book aims to clarify the issues and provide readers a framework to help societies decide how to govern and shape AI in line with human values. However, its arguments acquire greater significance when read through the prism of Indian Knowledge Systems. Such a perspective demonstrates that technological leadership cannot rely solely on computational capability; it must also rest upon ethical wisdom, strategic restraint, and civilizational responsibility. In sum, this exceptional work delivers a comprehensive examination of the challenges and responsibilities that AI creates, not only for global security but across the full range of social, political, and personal spheres. In future perspective, therefore move beyond Western-centric AI discourse by incorporating India's rich intellectual traditions into debates on global AI governance and strategic stability.

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