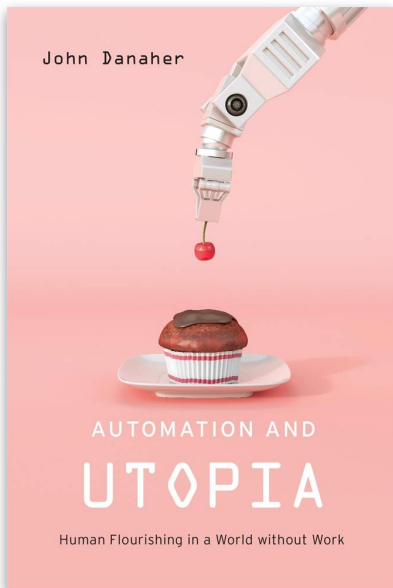


Automation and Utopia

Human Flourishing in a World Without Work



John Danaher

*“Armed with an astonishing breadth of knowledge, **John Danaher** engages with pressing public policy issues in order to lay out a fearless exposition of the radical opportunities that technology will soon enable. With the precision of analytical philosophy and accessible, confident prose, *Automation and Utopia* demonstrates yet again why Danaher is one of our most important pathfinders to a flourishing future.”*

James Hughes, Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies

Human obsolescence is imminent. We are living through an era in which our activity is becoming less and less relevant to our well-being and to the fate of our planet. This trend toward increased obsolescence is likely to continue in the future, and we must do our best to prepare ourselves and our societies for this reality. Far from being a cause for despair, this is in fact an opportunity for optimism. Harnessed in the right way, the technology that hastens our obsolescence can open us up to new utopian possibilities and enable heightened forms of human flourishing (from Chapter 1).

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tables

The Four Propositions

1. The automation of work is both possible and desirable: work is bad for most people most of the time, in ways that they don't always appreciate. We should do what we can to hasten the obsolescence of humans in the arena of work.

2. The automation of life more generally poses a threat to human well-being, meaning, and flourishing. Automating technologies undermine human achievement, distract us, manipulate us and make the world more opaque. We need to carefully manage our relationship with technology to limit those threats.

3. One way to mitigate this threat would be to build a Cyborg Utopia, but it's not clear how practical or utopian this would really be: integrating ourselves with technology, so that we become cyborgs, might regress the march toward human obsolescence outside of work but will also carry practical and ethical risks that make it less desirable than it first appears.

4. Another way to mitigate this threat would be to build a Virtual Utopia: instead of integrating ourselves with machines in an effort to maintain our relevance in the “real” world, we could retreat to “virtual” worlds that are created and sustained by the technological infrastructure that we have built. At first glance, this seems tantamount to giving up, but there are compelling philosophical and practical reasons for favoring this approach.

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What are the key arguments?

Automation and Utopia defends a number of controversial and novel claims. It does so in a way that fully engages with critical and contrary views.

- A defence of the claim that humans are obsolescing and that we are moving beyond the 'anthropocene' to the 'robocene'.
- A robust, up to date, defence of the claim that widespread technological unemployment is possible.
- An extended argument for the claim that work is bad and that you really should hate your job, even if you enjoy it right now, including a discussion of income inequality, and the perils of platform work.
- A defence of the claim that automating technologies pose five major threats to human flourishing:
 - They block human achievement
 - They make the world more opaque and usher in a new era of techno-superstition.
 - They distract and monopolise our attention.
 - They manipulate us, dominate us and undermine our autonomy
 - They turn us into moral patients (i.e. passive recipients of well-being, not active agents of change)
- A defence of the claim that humanity should organize itself around largescale utopian projects.
- A detailed and extended defence of the claim that we should become cyborgs (i.e. fuse ourselves with machines and become more machinelike)
- An equally extensive discussion of the limitations of the 'cyborg' ideal.
- A detailed and extended defence of the claim that we should 'retreat from reality' and prefer to live in virtual worlds.
- A defence of the claim that much of what we currently think of as 'reality' is in fact 'virtual' and that what we currently call 'virtual' is in fact 'real'.

What does the book do?

This book provides a novel and optimistic case for the automated future. It doesn't shy away from the recent criticisms and challenges to technology, but it does make the case for an intellectually respectable form of techno-optimism.

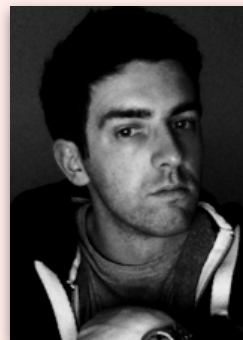
In the process, the book undermines some cherished beliefs in the value of work, the fallacy of utopian thinking and the importance of 'reality' in the well-lived life.

Who is the book for?

Anyone who cares about the impact of AI and robotics on the future of work and human life more generally. Anyone who wants to be optimistic, but realistic, about the future. Anyone who is willing to question their current commitments and beliefs. Anyone interested in the philosophy of technology.

What's different about it?

This book provides a rigorous and detailed assessment of the post-work future, and moves beyond the superficial hype one finds in other books on this topic. It aims to disorient the reader and open their minds to new possibilities, using stories and concrete examples to illustrate its key arguments.



John Danaher is a Senior Lecturer in Law at NUI Galway, Ireland, and the coeditor of *Robot Sex: Social and Ethical Implications*. He has published over fifty papers on topics including the risks of advanced AI, the ethics of social robotics, meaning of life and the future of work, and the ethics of human enhancement. His work has appeared in *The Guardian*, *The Irish Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Aeon*, and *The Philosophers' Magazine*. He is the author of the popular blog *Philosophical Disquisitions*.