

# The Value of Work in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Meaning, Social Contribution, and Recognition amid Productive Dehumanization

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## Abstract

In the context of rapid technological change, particularly the rise of artificial intelligence and automation, the traditional centrality of work as a source of identity, income, and social recognition is undergoing profound transformation. This article critically examines the socio-philosophical implications of a post-work society, exploring the tensions between labor, meaning, and value in contemporary capitalism. Drawing on theoretical contributions from André Gorz, Hannah Arendt, Axel Honneth, David Graeber, and others, the study interrogates the declining association between economic productivity and human worth. Through a synthesis of critical theory and recent empirical research, it advocates for a new ethics of social value grounded in recognition rather than employment status. The paper concludes that without structural reforms—including progressive taxation and universal basic income—the benefits of technological advancement may exacerbate social exclusion. Ultimately, the article calls for a reimagining of societal frameworks to support dignity, contribution, and flourishing beyond the confines of formal labor.

## Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Labor and Identity, Social Recognition, Value beyond Productivity

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## 1. Introduction

In the early 21st century, societies are witnessing a significant transformation in the perception and role of work. Historically, work has been central to individual

identity, social inclusion, and national development. However, even during periods when work was highly valued, many individuals engaged in labor primarily to fulfill economic imperatives, often contributing to wealth accumulation for a limited segment of society (Rifkin, 1995). The advent of artificial intelligence, automation, and platform economies further challenges the traditional structures of employment, not only affecting job availability but also questioning the essence of human contribution in an era where machines can replicate or surpass cognitive functions (Frey & Osborne, 2013). This shift signifies more than an employment crisis; it represents a profound reevaluation of existential value and social recognition associated with work.

Gorz (1989), in his *Critique of Economic Reason*, anticipated the profound limitations of a social order that conflates human value with economic productivity. With the decline of the industrialist ideal, where labor once held the promise of personal emancipation and societal integration, emerges a more unsettling void: the incapacity of economic reason to furnish a sense of meaning when work no longer stands at the center of human experience. Resonating with this critique, Arendt (1958) draws a vital distinction between “labor”, “work”, and “action”, asserting that only the latter reveals the full scope of human freedom and plurality. However, contemporary economic structures have increasingly sidelined this domain of action, relegating human activity to repetitive, instrumentalized tasks oriented toward efficiency rather than existential or civic fulfillment.

This article seeks to revisit the value of work considering these challenges. It critically examines how artificial intelligence exacerbates existing disconnections between work, meaning, and recognition, and explores alternative frameworks that may restore dignity and purpose. Drawing from Gorz, Arendt, Honneth, Graeber, Harari, and others, it asks: What does it mean to contribute to society when work is no longer needed for survival? Can we imagine a social order in which individuals are valued beyond their economic performance? And how can public policy reflect a broader ethics of recognition?

## 2. Materials and Methods

This article adopts a critical theoretical approach, combining interdisciplinary literature review and philosophical analysis to interrogate the evolving role of work in contemporary society. Rather than relying on quantitative metrics or case study data, the methodology engages conceptual frameworks from critical sociology, political philosophy, and labor economics to build a normative and diagnostic narrative.

Key thinkers—André Gorz, Hannah Arendt, Axel Honneth, David Graeber, Yuval Harari, Eva Illouz, and Philippe Van Parijs—serve as analytical anchors. Their work provides a lens through which to examine the symbolic, institutional, and psychological dimensions of labor, automation, and recognition. Textual analysis was conducted across significant theoretical contributions, supported by recent empirical findings related to digital labor, social policy, and behavioral

shifts in post-work contexts.

The research is further informed by secondary data and peer-reviewed sources in labor studies, AI ethics, and welfare economics, chosen through a purposive sampling strategy focused on relevance to post-work transformations. This methodological blend supports a synthetic critique aimed not merely at diagnosing emerging trends but also proposing ethically grounded alternatives to labor-based value regimes.

### **2.1. The Value of Work in Modern Society: Identity, Contribution, and Recognition**

In modern societies, work has historically been central to personal identity and civic legitimacy. Employment has served not only as a means of economic survival but also as a primary source of social esteem, moral recognition, and psychological stability. The common inquiry, “What do you do?” often substitutes for “Who are you?”, underscoring the profound entanglement between occupation and self-worth. However, this association is increasingly scrutinized as technological advancements and economic transformations reshape the structure, visibility, and perceived utility of various forms of labor (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Miscenko & Day, 2015).

Gorz (1989) argued that within the capitalist mode of production, individuals are defined as “workers” prior to being recognized as social agents, suggesting that labor precedes and constrains identity. In his critique, work is no longer a medium for self-realization but becomes an externally imposed activity, disconnected from the worker’s values, creativity, or autonomy. The rise of artificial intelligence and algorithmic governance exacerbates this dynamic, reducing many jobs to supervisory or reactive roles and rendering the worker increasingly invisible in the social value chain.

Graeber (2018) further critiques this phenomenon by exploring “bullshit jobs”—occupations perceived by their holders as socially pointless or even harmful. Through ethnographic and historical inquiry, Graeber reveals that many individuals derive little to no satisfaction from their work, not due to physical exhaustion or intellectual demand, but because it lacks straightforward social utility. This disconnect fosters anxiety, resentment, and a diminished sense of purpose, particularly in knowledge-based service economies where labor is often abstract, performative, or managerial.

Honneth (1995) provides a normative framework for understanding the importance of recognition. According to Honneth, recognition is a precondition for personal development and social participation. In the labor sphere, this entails being acknowledged not merely as a productive unit but as someone whose contribution is meaningful to the community. When labor fails to be recognized—due to being hidden (e.g., domestic work), devalued (e.g., service jobs), or replaced by automation—workers experience misrecognition, leading to alienation and exclusion.

As work becomes more precarious and fragmented, the traditional link between contribution and recognition weakens. [Gorz \(1989\)](#) anticipated this disjunction, noting that under advanced capitalism, entire classes of workers might be excluded from economic production while still making socially valuable contributions—for instance, in caregiving, artistic creation, or community building. Yet, these contributions often remain outside formal labor markets and are thus unrecognized in policy, compensation, or status.

This situation raises an urgent question: can societies reframe the value of work beyond its economic output? Rather than defining contribution solely through productivity metrics or wage labor, there is a growing need to incorporate social, relational, and ecological dimensions. Such a shift would not only democratize recognition but also reorient economies toward human and planetary flourishing.

In sum, the erosion of meaningful, recognized work in the era of artificial intelligence reveals a profound crisis of social value. As traditional employment structures dissolve, new forms of recognition and inclusion must be imagined—ones that affirm the dignity of human presence and action, even when disconnected from formal labor. Without such reimagining, the loss of work will not only be economic but existential.

## **2.2. Artificial Intelligence and the Displacement of Human Work**

The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has introduced a structural rupture in the organization of labor. Unlike previous waves of automation that primarily replaced physical labor, contemporary AI systems increasingly substitute cognitive, administrative, and decision-making tasks once thought exclusive to human intelligence. This transformation not only reshapes the labor market but also calls into question the fundamental social value of human contribution in a system where machines can outperform humans in speed, precision, and scalability ([Chen et al., 2024](#); [Eloundou et al., 2023](#)).

[Harari \(2017\)](#) refers to this phenomenon as the emergence of a “useless class”—a segment of the population rendered economically obsolete not due to lack of effort or education, but because their skills are no longer needed. For Harari, the rise of AI generates a new form of exclusion: one based not on structural unemployment, but on functional redundancy. The challenge is not just finding new jobs for displaced workers but redefining what it means to participate meaningfully in society when traditional labor is no longer the primary mechanism of inclusion.

This disruption is compounded by what [Zuboff \(2019\)](#) identifies as the rise of “surveillance capitalism”. In her analysis, the most valuable form of labor in the AI age may no longer be paid work. Still, rather than the unremunerated behavioral data harvested from individuals as they navigate digital platforms. Human experience becomes raw material, expropriated without consent, to feed algorithmic systems that optimize engagement, consumption, and profit. Thus, even when people are no longer employed, they remain productive in a new, exploitative

sense—as data generators whose digital traces become assets for capital accumulation.

This model subverts traditional notions of labor and value. On one hand, individuals are excluded from formal labor markets. On the other hand, they are involuntarily enrolled in invisible labor regimes, contributing without recognition or reward. [Gorz \(1989\)](#) anticipated this shift when he argued that capitalist rationality seeks to economize human effort to such an extent that people become marginal to the productive process. Yet, paradoxically, capitalism still requires people—if not as workers, then as consumers, surveilled users, or data points. As Gorz observed, “economic rationalization appears destined to penetrate the sphere of ‘reproduction’ in which domestic labor... is still dominant” (p. 3).

Furthermore, AI-driven automation alters the quality of jobs that remain. Instead of empowering workers, many systems reduce human agency by assigning them monitoring or support functions in machine-dominated workflows. Workers become secondary actors, enacting decisions made by opaque algorithms whose logic is inaccessible and unaccountable. As such, labor not only becomes scarce, it also becomes meaningless, fragmented, and alienated from human judgment and creativity ([Vredenburg, 2022](#); [Malone et al., 2024](#)).

These developments demand a critical reassessment of how societies allocate recognition, purpose, and security. If AI continues to outperform humans in economic terms, a failure to decouple social value from labor market participation may result in the moral devaluation of millions. The idea that people deserve dignity, voice, and visibility must not be tethered to their economic productivity but grounded in their mere humanity.

Ultimately, the disruption caused by AI is not only economic but also symbolic. It destabilizes the belief that work is the primary site of social contribution. Without a renewed vision of value—one that embraces care, culture, education, community-building, and ecological stewardship—the post-work society risks becoming a post-meaning society. The challenge, then, is not to resist AI per se, but to reclaim a human-centered logic of value in its wake.

### **2.3. The Post-Work Society and the Paradox of Free Time**

As artificial intelligence and automation continue to displace human labor, advanced societies are confronted with a new paradox. While working hours may decline and opportunities for leisure expand, individuals often experience a growing sense of disorientation and purposelessness. The once-utopian vision of a post-work society—marked by creativity, rest, and social engagement—now increasingly reveals psychological and existential voids, especially for those whose identities are deeply intertwined with occupational roles. Rather than leading to freedom, the sudden availability of time may result in boredom, apathy, and a crisis of meaning, particularly when there are no alternative cultural or institutional structures to channel self-worth and recognition ([Frayne, 2015](#); [Westgate & Wilson, 2018](#)).

Gorz (1989) anticipated a critical tension within post-industrial societies: the growing availability of free time resulting from automation is not matched by a corresponding societal framework to give that time a meaningful purpose. He contended that within capitalist paradigms, time is only valued when tied to productivity, commodification, or economic output. As a result, time liberated from labor remains conceptually adrift. Without a collective reimagining of how leisure can serve human development and social well-being, such time risks being absorbed by consumerism, passivity, or superficial engagement, rather than fostering autonomy or flourishing.

This concern resonates with Arendt's (1958) distinction between labor, work, and action. While labor is tied to necessity and biological survival, and work refers to the fabrication of durable goods, action is the highest expression of human freedom—it is the realm of speech, politics, and mutual engagement. Arendt warns that a society of laborers liberated from labor, yet deprived of a political and ethical conception of action, would find itself disoriented and empty:

It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won (p. 5).

De Masi (2000) approaches the post-work society with greater optimism, proposing the idea of creative idleness. For De Masi, the key lies not in fearing automation, but in reconfiguring education and social structures to promote activities rooted in creativity, affection, knowledge, and civic life. Rather than seeing leisure as passive consumption, he envisions it as an active and intentional pursuit of fulfillment through artistic expression, lifelong learning, voluntary service, or community involvement.

Realizing a society where individuals can engage in meaningful non-work pursuits necessitates two fundamental shifts: decoupling social value from employment status and ensuring equitable access to the time and resources required for such endeavors. The persistence of employment as a primary determinant of social worth often leads to the marginalization of those without formal jobs, fostering experiences of stigma and exclusion (Krug, Drasch, & Jungbauer-Gans, 2019). Moreover, disparities in discretionary time—time available for activities beyond basic obligations—are influenced by factors such as welfare policies, gender roles, and household structures, resulting in unequal opportunities for personal development and leisure (Goodin, Rice, Parpo, & Eriksson, 2008). Without addressing these structural inequalities, free time risks becoming a privilege for the few, while others face involuntary idleness, economic hardship, or a lack of purpose.

Notably, the mere presence of free time does not inherently confer meaning or fulfillment. As Gorz (1989) observes, when leisure is commercialized—transformed into consumer goods such as packaged vacations, subscription media, or digital entertainment—it reproduces the very market logic from which it was meant to

provide respite. What is needed instead is a purposeful engagement with time: moments directed toward personal growth, shared cultural practices, and ecological responsibility.

The transition to a post-work society raises essential normative questions: Which activities should be socially supported, even if not economically profitable? How can public policy foster environments where free time is experienced as autonomy rather than abandonment? And how can institutions recognize forms of contribution that fall outside traditional labor markets but enrich the social fabric?

In this context, media and advertising increasingly promote leisure as a space for consumption, often encouraging behaviors such as excessive drinking and gambling. These portrayals have raised public health concerns in various countries. For instance, research indicates that active engagement with social media platforms is associated with hazardous alcohol use and problem gambling among adults (Graupensperger et al., 2025). Additionally, the proliferation of gambling advertising, particularly in sports, has been linked to increased gambling-related harms, prompting calls for stricter regulations (Wardle et al., 2024).

These public health risks—manifested through addictive behaviors like gambling and excessive drinking—illustrate how unstructured leisure time, in the absence of societal frameworks for meaningful engagement, can undermine dignity rather than enhance it. The consumption-driven logic of neoliberal leisure not only fails to recognize non-commodified forms of contribution but can actively degrade individuals' capacities for self-realization. Thus, addressing these risks is crucial not only for public health but for constructing a post-work society where time is reoriented toward recognition, creativity, and civic life.

Addressing these challenges requires a reimagining of societal values and public policies to support meaningful, non-commercial forms of engagement during free time. This includes fostering community-based activities, lifelong learning, and civic participation, ensuring that the benefits of a post-work society are equitably distributed and contribute to overall well-being.

Rather than fearing the disappearance of work, societies must rise to the challenge of reimagining purpose beyond it. Free time must not be a space of emptiness, but a stage for the unfolding of new forms of human flourishing—intellectual, relational, spiritual, and civic. Without such a reorientation, the automation dividend will not be emancipation, but estrangement.

#### **2.4. From Income to Recognition: Toward a New Ethics of Social Value**

In contemporary society, the rise of artificial intelligence and automation is significantly transforming labor markets, leading to the displacement of large segments of the workforce. This transformation undermines the traditional linkage between employment and income, demanding a reconfiguration of the principles underpinning social inclusion and individual value. As Ford (2015) argues, technological progress is increasingly rendering human labor obsolete in many sec-



tors, thus eroding the foundational role of work as the principal mechanism for economic participation. Similarly, [Srnicek and Williams \(2015\)](#) advocate for a shift toward a post-work society, where human worth is no longer contingent upon market productivity.

This decoupling of labor and livelihood urges policymakers and societies to recognize and support alternative forms of social contribution that may not be remunerated through conventional employment structures. [Standing \(2017\)](#) emphasizes the emergence of a "precariat" class, which is structurally excluded from stable, meaningful employment, thereby necessitating the institutionalization of mechanisms, such as a universal basic income, that acknowledge and dignify non-waged but socially beneficial labor. Moreover, [Fraser \(2016\)](#) highlights the need for a broader redefinition of value creation that includes caregiving, volunteering, and community-building—forms of work that sustain society but remain unrecognized in capitalist economies. In light of these developments, rethinking the nexus of labor, income, and social esteem becomes not only an economic imperative but also a moral one.

[Gorz \(1989\)](#) powerfully advocates for the delinking of income from formal employment, envisioning a societal framework where economic security is anchored not in wage labor but in the unconditional belonging to a political community. For Gorz, this is more than a pragmatic response to the displacement of labor through automation—it is a normative necessity. In a system where market mechanisms routinely overlook the societal worth of caregiving, education, cultural engagement, and environmental stewardship, conditioning income on paid employment perpetuates systemic exclusion. As he observes, securing “an income decoupled from the quantity of labour performed” is essential for both democratic participation and individual autonomy ([Gorz, 1989](#): p. 236).

Building upon this foundation, [Van Parijs \(1995\)](#) puts forward the concept of a universal basic income—an unconditional financial allocation provided regularly to all individuals, irrespective of their employment status. In his analysis, such a mechanism serves not only as a tool for poverty alleviation but also as a foundation for what he terms “real freedom”: the capacity to engage in meaningful pursuits, even when these fall outside conventional definitions of economic productivity. By freeing individuals to contribute through care, volunteerism, artistic expression, or civic engagement, basic income policies recognize and support the diverse forms of labor essential to the social fabric, though often excluded from market-based measures of value.

Empirical evidence from countries such as Finland, which piloted a universal basic income (UBI) scheme from 2017 to 2018, suggests that unconditional cash transfers can enhance individuals’ sense of autonomy, dignity, and civic engagement, even in the absence of formal employment ([Kangas et al., 2019](#)). While the primary aim was not to promote a recognition-based value system, participants reported improved psychological well-being, reduced stress, and greater freedom to engage in caregiving, volunteering, or creative activities—forms of labor often



neglected in traditional economic metrics. Similarly, Brazil's Bolsa Família program, though conditional, has demonstrated broader social benefits by recognizing and supporting informal contributions within families and communities, such as caregiving and educational oversight (Lindert et al., 2007).

This rethinking of social value demands not only symbolic recognition but also a structural revaluation of emotional and relational labor. Illouz (2012) highlights how contemporary capitalism, particularly in the service economy, appropriates emotional expression as a market tool while systematically neglecting the unpaid affective labor predominantly performed by women, care work, emotional regulation, and the cultivation of social cohesion. These practices, often rendered invisible in economic discourse, constitute the foundational infrastructure of collective well-being. Acknowledging their worth—culturally, politically, and economically—requires challenging the artificial division between productive labor and the private sphere and reimagining the very criteria through which societies confer legitimacy on human activity.

Institutional recognition of emotional and relational labor requires concrete mechanisms such as caregiving credits in pension systems, paid family leave policies, and formal inclusion of unpaid care work in national accounting systems, as recommended by the UN System of National Accounts (UN Statistics Division, 2020). Additionally, social protection schemes should expand eligibility beyond formal employment, incorporating criteria such as community service or caregiving responsibilities, as trialed in Uruguay's National Integrated Care System (Salvador, 2019).

Yet this recognition must extend beyond theoretical affirmation; it must be institutionally embedded. For public policy to truly reflect a pluralistic and inclusive notion of contribution, systemic changes are imperative. Social protection mechanisms must move beyond models tied exclusively to formal employment, embracing instead frameworks that affirm diverse forms of participation. Central to this shift is the restructuring of fiscal policy, notably through progressive taxation on the ultra-wealthy, since taxing accumulated capital and inherited wealth is not merely a matter of redistribution, but a precondition for funding universal social rights. In tandem, educational systems should be redesigned to nurture cooperative ethics, civic engagement, and critical thinking, rather than focusing solely on labor market insertion. Such reforms, taken together, would lay the groundwork for a more just and sustainable social contract.

Educational models that prioritize civic engagement and cooperative learning, such as democratic schools (Fielding & Moss, 2011) and Finland's interdisciplinary curriculum reform (Sahlberg, 2015), provide promising pathways. These frameworks shift the focus from workforce preparation to the development of critical thinking, social responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving. They affirm education as a space of empowerment, not commodification, aligning institutional values with a broader ethics of recognition.

Ultimately, moving from income to recognition means adopting a vision of jus-

tice that centers participation, dignity, and interdependence. In this vision, people are not valued for what they produce or earn, but for how they sustain and enrich the fabric of life. As the age of artificial intelligence unfolds, this ethical shift may not only be desirable but essential.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The insights gathered throughout this article coalesce into a transformative diagnosis: societies are facing not just a technological disruption, but a civilizational turning point. The advent of artificial intelligence, automation, and surveillance economies reveals a structural misalignment between traditional labor frameworks and the emerging contours of human contribution. Suppose work can no longer be the universal pathway to dignity, purpose, and inclusion. In that case, a new grammar of value must be articulated—one that moves from the metrics of productivity to the ethics of recognition.

The results of this theoretical and empirical synthesis are not presented as data points in the conventional sense, but as critical realizations that emerge from the juxtaposition of philosophical, sociological, and economic perspectives:

#### 3.1. Work is No Longer a Reliable Proxy for Social Value

Across multiple strands of literature—from Gorz’s critique of economic reason to Honneth’s theory of recognition—there is a clear consensus that the historical equation between labor and identity is collapsing. Automation renders many roles obsolete, while others are hollowed out into forms of algorithmic servitude. This reveals a vacuum in our normative frameworks: as labor contracts, so too does the scaffolding of self-worth, civic belonging, and social esteem.

Recent estimates from the TrueUp Tech Layoff Tracker reveal an alarming trend: by mid-2025, the global tech industry had already recorded 387 mass layoff events, impacting 93,725 workers, with projections exceeding 187,000 layoffs by year-end. This follows the 238,461 tech workers laid off in 2024, representing an average of 653 dismissals per day (TrueUp, 2025). Such figures expose not only the instability of employment in one of the world’s most profitable sectors but also reflect a broader systemic decoupling of labor from security, recognition, and social inclusion. Scholars like Standing (2011, 2017) have argued that this growing precariat—characterized by chronic employment insecurity and absence of long-term occupational identity—marks a profound shift in labor markets and social structures. Similarly, Bauman (2007) observed that in “liquid modernity”, work becomes episodic, precarious, and expendable, undermining the ability of individuals to derive stable meaning or dignity from their jobs. Layoffs, therefore, should not be seen merely as cyclical adjustments but as socio-symbolic ruptures that dismantle the historical promise of employment as a pathway to self-realization, civic participation, and moral worth. This deepens the urgency of transitioning from labor-based to recognition-based value systems in an era where economic rationality increasingly marginalizes human presence in the productive process.

### 3.2. Societal Contribution Exists Beyond the Market

Graeber's (2018) notion of "bullshit jobs" and Fraser's (2016) call for the recognition of care and reproductive labor converge on a central insight: much of what sustains the social world lies outside commodified exchange. Yet current systems of remuneration and prestige remain stubbornly attached to wage labor. These blind spots perpetuate misrecognition, particularly of women, caregivers, the unemployed, and creative or community-oriented individuals.

### 3.3. Post-Work Freedom Demands Structural Support

The liberation from work is only emancipatory if accompanied by infrastructures that enable people to pursue meaningful lives. This means not just free time, but structured autonomy: accessible education, guaranteed income, shared spaces for culture, deliberation, and cooperation. Without this support, post-work freedom becomes a form of abandonment. The prevalence of escapist leisure, addiction, and algorithmically curated consumption highlights this risk, as shown by recent research linking social media use to harmful behaviors such as problem gambling (Graupensperger et al., 2025; Wardle et al., 2024).

### 3.4. Recognition Requires Redistribution

A shift from income to recognition is ethically urgent but materially impossible without addressing structural inequalities. As this article argues, progressive fiscal reforms—including the taxation of wealth and capital—are prerequisites for universal systems of social protection. These are not acts of charity but essential investments in a democratic society that values all forms of contribution, visible and invisible.

Furthermore, the transition from income-based legitimacy to recognition-based inclusion demands a radical revaluation of emotional and relational labor, often rendered invisible yet indispensable to societal well-being. As Illouz (2012) argues, the emotional labor disproportionately performed by women, particularly in domestic and service spheres, must be recognized not merely symbolically but through redistributive mechanisms supported by progressive taxation on accumulated wealth. This ethical shift is vital for advancing a more pluralistic and just social contract. In sum, the results underscore that the future of human dignity in the age of automation will depend not on resisting technological progress, but on reconfiguring the moral and institutional frameworks through which societies define value, reward contribution, and sustain collective life.

Additionally, the post-work society must not replicate hierarchies of worth based on economic participation. As Gorz and Van Parijs contend, universal basic income is not just a safety net but a platform for shared belonging—an assertion that each person has the right to a dignified existence independent of labor performance.

In conclusion, the results of this inquiry reveal a paradoxical truth: artificial intelligence may liberate humanity from drudgery, but only if societies are pre-

pared to liberate value itself from the confines of work—a failure to do so risks deepening alienation, inequality, and cultural exhaustion. Yet the opportunity is immense: to reimagine a future in which dignity, creativity, and solidarity replace employment as the cornerstones of human life. The age of automation, if guided by ethical imagination, may yet become the age of human flourishing.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study concludes that societies stand at a historic juncture where the moral, institutional, and symbolic centrality of work must be reconfigured. The traditional equation of labor with identity, legitimacy, and entitlement has become unsustainable considering technological disruptions and structural inequality. Artificial intelligence, rather than solely threatening employment, exposes the deeper fragility of social contracts built on market-based inclusion.

A sustainable and equitable transition to a post-work society will require more than universal income schemes or reduced working hours—it demands a radical transformation in how value, purpose, and contribution are defined. This entails recognizing non-waged forms of labor, especially those related to care, creativity, and community, as central to societal cohesion and well-being.

Crucially, this revaluation must be backed by redistributive mechanisms, such as progressive taxation of extreme wealth and capital, to ensure that social protection and recognition extend to all, not just those within the shrinking domain of formal employment. Without such structural reforms, the automation dividend will deepen stratification rather than democratize dignity.

In essence, liberating society from the tyranny of productivity metrics opens the possibility of a more humane, pluralistic social order—where worth is grounded not in what one produces, but in how one nurtures, connects, and contributes to shared life. The age of artificial intelligence, if met with ethical foresight and institutional courage, can become a turning point toward human flourishing.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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