



The Future of Work

Ethics in Action for Sustainable and Integral Development



The choice of this theme is particularly appropriate, because human work ‘is a key, probably the essential key, to the whole social question’ (St John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, n. 3). The deep economic and social transformations we are experiencing in the past decade by virtue of computer science, robotics, and artificial intelligence (AI) make the theme of work more and more complex and it has serious human repercussions, for it gives rise to anxieties and expectations in many families and individuals, especially young people.

Work is an essential element for everyone. It contributes to a one’s personal and ethical growth because it is an integral part of a person’s everyday being and acting. ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat’ (St Paul, Ts 3:10). Idleness offers no interior motivation and does not allow a person to plan for the future; not only does it bring ‘loss and great want’ (Tb 4:13), but it is also the enemy of a good moral life (Cfr. Sir 33:29). Work also ensures every individual a place in society, through the justifiable feeling of being useful to the human community and through the growth of fraternal relations. Furthermore, jobs enable human beings to participate responsibly in the life of their country and to collaborate with God in the work of creation.

The new technologies hold great promise to address some of our most intractable social, economic and environmental problems, but they are also part of a long-term trend towards “automatization”, with consequences that may ultimately challenge the place of humans in society and especially their ability to work.

Unless channelled for public benefit and the common good, AI will soon raise important concerns

for the economy and the stability of society. We are living in a drastic transition period where millions of jobs are being lost to computerized devices, with a resulting increase in income disparity and knowledge gaps. With AI in the hands of companies, the revenues of intelligence may no longer be redistributed equitably. With AI in the military, we may witness a new and costly arm race. While intelligent assistants may benefit adults and children alike, they also carry risks because their impact on the developing brain is unknown, and because people may lose motivation in areas where AI is superior.

The effort to develop intelligent machines must remain incessantly directed to the common good, reducing the poverty gap and addressing general needs for health, connectivity, education, happiness, social justice, sustainability and respect of nature. Since employment cannot increase indefinitely, especially as a consequence of these new technologies, for the sake of human solidarity it is important to envisage the creation of new categories of jobs and formulate a reorganisation and better distribution of work, without forgetting the necessary sharing of resources with the unemployed and excluded. Effective solidarity among all is more necessary than ever with the challenge of these new technologies, particularly for those who have been unemployed for a long time and for their families, who cannot remain in poverty and destitution without the national community being actively mobilised; no one should be resigned to the fact that some remain jobless. In addition, new technologies are also promising in terms of inclusiveness, to help those affected by disability find their place in society.

All social, educational and political leaders should be alerted that a new major industrial revolution is underway and must take new measures to manage it to the benefit of the common good and the poorest of the poor. Scientists and engineers, the designers of AI devices, bear a primary responsibility in actively trying to ensure that their technologies are safe and used for the good of humanity and society. We welcome the initiatives of this tenth meeting of Ethics in Action to suggest ethical and safe solutions, and to join other organizations in establishing best practices and good standards for the beneficial development of AI.