

6 Conclusion

The automation of human labor is an ongoing development, affecting human lives from multiple angles and increasingly challenging the universal notion of what it means to live a life with human dignity. This dissertation initially discussed the key terms used in this research, pointing out the importance of eschewing marketing-related terms in the technology field to clearly focus on the aspects that affect human dignity.

Subsequently, the ethical point of reference was introduced, explained, and justified: first, the universal moral relevance of human dignity based on the principle of vulnerability was explored; second, the notion of living a life with human dignity was explained based on the capabilities approach; and third, the approach was specified based on the role that work fulfills in relation to human dignity and enriched to develop a suitable and justifiable framework to ethically assess human labor automation.

The ethical assessment discussed opportunities and challenges based on the ethical point of reference and yielded the following key findings: first, the wholesale replacement of manual human labor with machines is occurring increasingly in labor-intense areas, such as manufacturing and supply chains, mining, and agriculture. Humans are stripped of their jobs, while new jobs are no longer available to inhabitants in certain regions, leaving them without access to financial income. Despite the ethical opportunities provided by releasing humans from dangerous work, entire regions are afflicted with unemployment and thus individuals' ability to live a dignified life is severely compromised, as their ability to earn an income shapes their lives in multiple respects.

Second, education and skills change in the context of advancing automation, creating new opportunities from an ethical perspective as new modes of education become available. Nonetheless, the quality of education must be monitored closely. Risks arise owing to the constantly changing labor market, and stable incomes may be put at risk when job profiles and requirements alter on a short-term basis.

Third, the automation of communication, including developments in terms of social media, poses considerable threats from an ethical perspective, not only endangering freedom of expression through guided information and the development of crucial human cognitive skills, but also

increasing the possibility of exploiting humans through data slavery by failing to remunerate them for their work on selfhood.

Fourth, automation in the financial industry provides ethical opportunities if financial literacy is provided, as lower costs and new automation technologies mean that individuals now enjoy more robust access to financial services that were formerly restricted. This could strengthen the possibilities to live a dignified life, if through education, a fairer distribution of income is made possible by this democratization of financial services when work is no longer available.

Fifth, the opportunities in medicine and care result from reduced costs in the provision of access to healthcare. This development improves the availability of drugs for poorer people if transport and productive costs are reduced as a result of automation. Nonetheless, it must be ensured that care treatments maintain their “human nature” to ensure that patients are not objectified and that human workers remain in decision-making roles for health-related services.

Sixth, weapons and the rule of law are increasingly affected by automated decision-making, where policing decisions and even decisions as to who should be killed in war contexts may be executed by algorithms and longer as a work result of humans. This constitutes an ethical risk, as it may easily lead to unwarranted and unjustified actions from a rule-of-law perspective. Ethical opportunities arise in the area of public and legal service if they are increasingly delivered more efficiently and simply to previously marginalized communities.

Regarding ethical guidance for policy, various policy instruments have been discussed and evaluated, addressing the question of whether they could support a life with human dignity in light of the ethical point of reference. It may be concluded that, first, a minimum wage may be useful for those working in manual industries in supporting their transition to another profession to guarantee their dignity and access to education; second, social assistance schemes are crucial for stability reasons and provide for those who drop out of the labor market. Nevertheless, a UBI provided on a non-conditional basis would jeopardize the societal structure by devaluing work, which substantially influences human identity and the receipt of co-mutual recognition. Third, adequate educational programs and awareness with respect to automation are critical in ensuring that individuals can transition between jobs. In addition, the importance of education relates to other areas, such as health and financial literacy, and receiving the right information is crucial in the long term to live a dignified life in addition

to enjoying labor market access. Fourth, companies' self-regulatory frameworks, such as CSR, are not adequate instruments, as corporate interests typically deal with short-term educational interests and generally focus on the wholesale replacement of human employees. Fifth, technology restrictions are crucial from a legal and technological perspective—for example, to prevent biases and ensure that the interests underlying the deployment of automation technologies are transparent. Sixth, new forms of taxation are required to compensate for reduced revenue when less income tax can be gathered as productivity rises and jobs are automated. This is necessary to, for example, maintain crucial social assistance schemes.

For Switzerland, this means that governmental action must focus on social assistance from an ethical perspective. This includes, on the one hand, ensuring access to healthcare for all individuals and, on the other hand, enabling the availability of education, which is increasingly assuming a key role in allowing individuals to remain on the labor market and enjoy appropriate working conditions. Nonetheless, the current social assistance set-up, which aims to integrate individuals into the labor market while supporting those who are no longer able to work, is a suitable approach that is aligned with the ethical point of reference. In addition, the direct democratic system, with its strong participatory approach, ensures that despite the increased automation of communication, political discourse and exchange are maintained on a regular basis, which strengthens political rights in the long term.

Looking to the future, further research is required to ensure that the ethical opportunities of automation may be taken advantage of while their harms are simultaneously mitigated. This point becomes relevant when we consider how quickly new technology can come on the scene and affect human labor, such as the debut of Chat GPT-4 in 2023. More specifically, additional legal research may be needed on how to maintain control over technologies and algorithms and how to guarantee that appropriate social assistance is granted to every individual. In terms of technological development, clear guidelines for the development of automation technologies are necessary to ensure that they do not infringe on the right to pursue a dignified life.

