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ANALYZING DEEP UTOPIA

Abstract: *In his book Deep Utopia (2024), Nick Bostrom examines the question of life's meaning within a "solved world," where technological advancements have resolved all human challenges and eliminated the need for work, granting people the freedom to shape their lives as they will. From a technological maturity standpoint, a deep utopia is a realistic goal, while assuming human work and activity are needed would be unrealistic. A future in which autonomous machines are woven into daily life raises new questions and challenges, as work has traditionally been a means of human self-realization. There's a risk that a world dominated by autonomous machines could become one in which humanity is enslaved by its own ideas. The present paper will point out that Bostrom's "solved world" thought experiment overlooks the notion that meaning and values in human life are intrinsically tied to work.*

Keywords: *Deep Utopia, solved world, technological maturity, work, life meaning.*

1. Introduction

While the idea of robot autonomy may still seem like science fiction, autonomous robots are now a reality (see Agatonović 2024a; Agatonović 2025). At the beginning

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of 2024, some of the world's largest tech companies announced projects in which they intend to produce humanoid robots that would be genuinely autonomous. Leading firms are merging cutting-edge artificial intelligence (AI) with mechanical engineering to develop robots that perceive, reason, and act without human intervention. Among these breakthroughs, robotics company Figure has unveiled a humanoid robot demonstrating remarkable autonomy through integration with advanced AI systems. This technology enables the robot to process natural language commands, engage in contextual dialogue, and execute complex tasks by synthesizing sensory input with real-time decision-making. For instance, it identifies objects in its environment, draws logical inferences, and adapts its actions dynamically, capabilities rooted in the fusion of large language models (LLMs) for language comprehension and computer vision systems for spatial coordination. This progress extends beyond individual prototypes. Companies across the robotics sector are leveraging AI to enhance autonomous functionality, from household assistance to industrial applications. By training robots on vast datasets and simulated real-world interactions, companies are refining their ability to operate in unstructured environments, solve problems iteratively, and even collaborate with other agents, both human and robotic.

In the future, robots will likely become an integral part of daily life, potentially replacing much of the work currently done by humans. Economist Guy Standing warns that the forthcoming technological revolution, driven by the rise of robotics, will disrupt modern society and create instability. To mitigate this, he advocates for

the introduction of universal basic income as a means of distributing wealth, ensuring that everyone benefits from the economic gains brought by automation (Standing 2020, 31–32; Agatonović 2022).

In the book *Deep Utopia: Life and Meaning in a Solved World* (2024), Nick Bostrom envisions a utopian society where full automation has addressed all fundamental human challenges, making traditional work obsolete and granting individuals the freedom to shape their lives. The present analysis will examine Bostrom’s “solved world” thought experiment, which proposes a future where individuals are liberated to pursue self-defined meaning and fulfillment thanks to the technological maturity. The analysis will emphasize that Bostrom overlooks that work is crucial for humans to create meaning and values. A future where autonomous machines are integrated into daily life raises new questions and challenges, as work plays a crucial role in human self-realization. There is a risk that a world dominated by intelligent, autonomous technology could lead humans to become subservient to their own constructs, both in terms of values and scientific-technological ideas.

2. Solved World Thought Experiment

Bostrom distinguishes several types of utopias: *governance and culture utopia*, *post-scarcity utopia*, *post-work utopia*, *post-instrumental utopia*, and *plastic utopia*. Governance and culture utopia is a well-organized society with ideal laws and customs. Post-scarcity utopia is a society of material abundance where everyone can have plenty of everything. Post-work utopias are characterized as visions of a society that has achieved full automation, thereby removing the necessity for work. A post-work utopia, through technological development, would enable the emergence of the age of

post-instrumentality, the plastic utopia, and consequently, the deep utopia and a solved world. Technological maturity, in addition to eliminating the need for work, would also eliminate the instrumental need for any human effort or endeavor (for example, learning would no longer be necessary as technology would allow for digital uploading of information directly into the human brain), creating the post-instrumental utopia. Furthermore, technological maturity will enable “autopotency,” the ability for a being to shape itself according to its own will, thus creating the plastic utopia where technological possibilities are identical to physical possibilities (at least locally).

The central question of Bostrom’s *Deep Utopia* is: what would be the meaning of human life in a world where there is no need for work, or even any effort, in a world where a person can shape themselves as they please? What reasons would guide a person in such a world? What goals could a person set for themselves in such a world? What values would exist in such a world? In *Deep Utopia*, Bostrom does not offer a singular answer to these questions but rather analyses the concepts that are important in considering the meaning of human life. The analysis, presented in the form of a dialogue in a novel, where the character of Professor Bostrom gives six days of lectures from Monday to Saturday, is a thought experiment about the meaning of human life, its goals, and values in the context of radical technological changes in society, full automation, post-instrumentality, and autopotency. In *Deep Utopia*, the concepts of interestingness, fulfillment, and meaningfulness are explored, raising the question of whether life in utopia can be interesting, fulfilling, and meaningful. Life in

utopia could be boring, and as such, undesirable. Also, life in utopia could be a “fool’s paradise,” a life filled with every possible pleasure but incomplete.

Bostrom examines the underlying reasons for interestingness as a value, postulating several hypotheses at its core: (i) *the learning and exploration hypothesis* — interestingness arises from a tendency toward learning and exploration; (ii) *the signaling hypothesis* — interestingness stems from signaling social status; (iii) *the spandrel hypothesis* — interestingness results from valuing other things; (iv) *the rut-avoidance hypothesis* — interestingness comes from avoiding prolonged engagement in the same activity, or from the evolutionary utility of the aversive feeling of boredom. Since learning and exploration will not be necessary in post-instrumental and plastic utopias, and neither boredom nor social status signaling will pose issues (thanks to, for instance, autopotency), interestingness as a value will supervene on other values in line with the spandrel hypothesis.

Bostrom introduces the concept of *intrinsicification*, which he defines as the process during which something desirable as a means to an end becomes desirable for its own sake as an end in itself. Through intrinsicification, the value of interestingness, which according to the rut-avoidance hypothesis originated as an evolutionary tool, becomes an intrinsic value. Further in the analysis of interestingness, additional conceptual distinctions are introduced—novelty and diversity, and the distinction between contained and contributed interestingness—highlighting the relativity and conditionality of using interestingness as a value concept. The use of interestingness as a concept is stretched to its limits in the simulation hypothesis, the assumption that the world we

live in is a simulation, leading to discussions about cosmic interestingness or the interestingness of the simulation of our subjective experiences, which, according to Bostrom's simulation argument (Bostrom 2003), may be numerous and subjectively indistinguishable from one another (see Agatonović 2023).

In his analysis of the concept of fulfillment, Bostrom starts from a definition which associates this concept with the realization of a person's potential. According to this view, a person's unfulfilled life represents a failure to achieve their potential, whether due to poor health, lack of opportunities, or wasted time and talent. Bostrom argues that the value of fulfillment should be broadly achievable in the conditions of a plastic utopia. He believes that fulfillment can be attributed not only to humans but also to non-human animals, plants, organizations, traditions, and cultural movements. Along with fulfillment, Bostrom examines the concept of life richness as the complete experience of life and active participation in its creative processes. In a plastic utopia, life experiences would be immensely rich, as technological maturity would dissolve the distinction between fiction and reality, allowing reality to correspond to fiction and fiction to become reality. However, even such a life would remain incomplete without some kind of purpose.

Bostrom thoroughly explores the concept of purpose, defining it as anything for which we strive and undertake tasks. He distinguishes between small purposes as the aims of everyday actions, medium purposes as goals that require significant and long-term efforts (for example,

obtaining a degree from a good university), and large purposes, or missions, as overarching undertakings that can inspire lifelong dedication. Bostrom then outlines reasons why it is desirable for people to have purposes, particularly medium and large ones. First, certain tasks need to be completed. Second, having a purpose in life can be beneficial for psychological functioning and well-being, reducing the risk of addiction, depression, and boredom. Third, Bostrom lists non-instrumental reasons: (i) purpose gives life substance, and (ii) purpose contributes to the significance of life.

In a post-instrumental age, there will no longer be a need for any kind of work, rendering the first instrumental reason unnecessary in a post-instrumental utopia. In a plastic utopia, sufficiently advanced nanotechnology may be equally effective in promoting well-being as having a purpose, making the second instrumental reason also unnecessary in plastic conditions. Thus, in a plastic utopia, individuals would be left to create artificial purposes, which could be similar to the ones we have now, in order to provide life with content, and through purposes that are agent-neutral or agent-relative, make life objectively meaningful. In technological maturity, high-level relevant tasks might include, for example, physical expansion and preparation for interaction with extraterrestrials, requiring humans to merge with machines. Spiritual or supernatural attitudes and acts might also be obligatory in a plastic utopia, such as honoring deserving individuals, ancestors, heroes, and traditions.

In examining the meaning of life in a utopia, Bostrom begins with a definition of a meaningful life, which states that life is more meaningful when it takes the form of a good narrative, one that avoids repetition in its parts, is

original, and where negative experiences lead to subsequent positive ones, following a pattern of personal growth or another engaging life story. According to Bostrom, for life to be meaningful, an individual must be wholeheartedly dedicated, either to a goal, a role, or an ideal, thereby filling their life with purpose, which requires time, talent, energy, and persistence. Furthermore, Bostrom considers meaning as a comprehensive transcendent purpose, defining it as follows: purpose P is the meaning of life for individual S if and only if: (i) P is comprehensive for S; (ii) S has a strong reason to accept P; and (iii) that reason is derived from a context of justification that is external to the everyday life of individual S. Purpose P represents the meaning of life if it is a meaning that could apply to nearly everyone.

Bostrom provides several categories of life meaning as examples: rewards encompass religious afterlife, posthumanism (the radical enhancement of humanity through technology), simulation opportunities (if we live in a simulation, our life might be rewarded because of it), and nirvana; moral considerations include consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, and piety; zeal encompasses endeavors (such as enabling the poor to access healthcare), identity (for example, being a hero), alliances (for instance, alliances with divine beings), and commitment (artistic creation).

3. From Solved World to Alienation

Bostrom assumes that work and activities are unnecessary for a meaningful, fulfilling, and interesting life. Although certain jobs and activities can make life good, meaningful, fulfilling, and interesting, and can represent a purpose in life or a value through intensification, they are not inherently essential. In the era of technological maturity, a person can unite with a

superintelligent machine, which can become their life purpose, that is, a comprehensive transcendental goal that contributes to the objective significance of their life, making it rich, fulfilling, and interesting. Such a person's life does not necessarily involve any activity. Moreover, the meaning of their life can be realized without personal action. It is important to emphasize that meaning, goals, and values are “divorced” from human work and activities, whether subjective or objective. We perform a job to achieve a certain goal, that is, for instrumental reasons, but in the post- instrumental era, goals could be achieved without our activity, while our activities themselves could become intrinsic goals. However, Bostrom's assumption can be questioned by asking whether human goals are truly independent of human activities.

Arthur Schopenhauer believed that the world is fundamentally driven by the will, which has no ultimate goal, purpose, or meaning, and that every event and action is an expression of the will. Human behavior, every movement and motion of the body, is determined by the will, and thus every goal of bodily movement is also determined by the will, as Schopenhauer claims:

The *will* makes itself known as the essence in itself of our own body, as that which it is besides being an object of intuition, a representation, primarily, as we have said, in the voluntary movements of this body. These bodily movements are nothing other than the visible manifestation of particular acts of will; as they coincide perfectly and immediately with the acts of will as one and the same thing, distinguished only by the form of cognition into which they have passed, i.e. become representation. (Schopenhauer 2010, 336–337).

The essence of the will is striving without a final goal, without ultimate satisfaction. Restraining the will leads

to suffering, while achieving a goal brings satisfaction. Since “there is no final goal of striving of the will,” there is no lasting satisfaction, “no bounds or end to suffering,” and therefore, suffering is essential to all life (Schopenhauer 2010, 336–337). Even a deep utopia would not be able to satisfy the striving of the will or eradicate the deep suffering of the world.

Friedrich Nietzsche also rejected ultimate purposes in life, considering that “everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering, dominating*,” wherein “every purpose and use is just a *sign* that the will to power has achieved mastery over something less powerful, and has impressed upon it its own idea [*Sinn*] of a use function” (Nietzsche 2006, 51). Meaning is unstable, even when it comes to the “purpose” of an organ within the whole of an organism. According to Nietzsche, meaning is merely a subsequent outcome of the process of overcoming that underlies the activity of every whole of life in the broadest sense, whether it’s individual organisms, social communities, institutions, or traditions (Agatonović 2016). If the affirmation of life is the goal of life, and the meaning of the earth is the *Übermensch* (*Der Übermensch ist der Sinn der Erde*) (Nietzsche 1999, 14), this applies in a specific sense to Nietzsche’s philosophy. The affirmation of life is the formal goal of life inherent in every whole of life, but it gains particular content only in the case of a specific form of life that arises from the activity of that form. The *Übermensch*, as an ethical-aesthetic ideal of greatness and heroism, is the “meaning of the earth” that transcends everyday life, though it does not imply a transcendent reality or transcendent moral values. In the later stage of

Nietzsche's philosophy, the idea of the *Übermensch* as the "meaning of the earth" is omitted, and instead, a higher type of human is set as the ethical ideal. Nietzsche includes in this higher type the great individuals and peoples of the past, as well as prominent figures of his own time—creators, artists, and philosophers—who realized their abilities and talents thanks to culture, education, and self-education, rather than through external technological means promoted by transhumanists (Agatonović 2018; Agatonović 2024b).

In the modern world, where capitalism is the dominant economic system, productive activities are separated from their products as goals, and labour is detached from life. This phenomenon was described by Karl Marx in his work *Wage-Labour and Capital* (*Lohnarbeit und Kapital*), where he argued that in the capitalist mode of production, labour becomes a commodity that the worker sells in order to live (Marx 1976, 19). Labour is a life activity workers sell to secure the necessary means of subsistence (Marx 1976, 19).

What he produces for himself is not the silk that he weaves, not the gold that he draws up the mining shaft, not the palace that he builds. What he produces for himself is *wages*; and the silk, the gold, and the palace are resolved for him into a certain, quantity of necessities of life, perhaps into a cotton jacket, into copper coins, and into a basement dwelling. And the labourer who for twelve hours long, weaves, spins, bores, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stone, carries hods, and so on—is this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, boring, turning, building, shovelling, stone-breaking, regarded by him as a manifestation of life, as life? Quite the contrary. Life for him begins where this activity ceases, at the table, at the tavern seat, in bed. The twelve hours' work, on the other hand, has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, boring, and so on, but only as earnings,

which enable him to sit down at a table, to take his seat in the tavern, and to lie down in a bed. If the silk-worm's object in spinning were to prolong its existence as caterpillar, it would be a perfect example of a wage-worker (Marx 1976, 19).

The goal of the capitalist is profit, while the goal of the worker is wages, with labour serving as a means to achieve these objectives. The capitalist purchases labour from their existing capital, just as they buy raw materials and tools, in order to increase capital and generate profit. In the aforementioned work, Marx attempts to demonstrate that the interests of capital and wage labourers are fundamentally opposed, even though capital and wage labour represent *“two sides of one and the same relation. The one conditions the other in the same way that the usurer and the borrower condition each other ”* (Marx 1976, 33). The value of wage labour is inversely proportional to profit: profit rises in the same proportion as wages fall, and it falls as wages rise (Marx 1976, 37). In the pursuit of capital interests and the increase of capitalist profit, *“division of labour necessarily draws after it greater division of labour, the employment of machinery greater employment of machinery, work upon a large scale work upon a still greater scale ”* (Marx 1976, 43). Marx concludes that the division of labour and the use of machines will continue to expand, leading to the simplification of labour, greater competition among workers, and, consequently, a reduction in wages.

In addition to the above, the division of labour and the separation of work from life lead to alienation, as observed in recent interpretations of Marx (see Musto 2021). In a capitalist society, the worker is alienated from (i) the product of labour, (ii) the act of production itself, (iii) the essence of humanity, and (iv) the relationships

between men, as well as the other man's labour and objects of labour (Musto 2021, 55–56). Only in a communist society can a person, as a fully developed being, realize themselves, as asserted in the following quote from Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology* (*Die deutsche Ideologie*):

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now (Marx and Engels 1998, 53)

4. Through Work to Self-Realization

By separating values from work, Bostrom aligns with the dominant tradition in economic thought, which views work primarily as an unpleasant activity justified only by its outcomes. By contrast, Karl Marx challenged perspective that work is inherently “a curse,” as Adam Smith held, while also distancing himself from Charles Fourier's belief that work could become “mere amusement” (Marx 1973, 611). For Marx, work is both

rewarding and painful, with the reward being inseparable from the obstacles:

labour obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it. But Smith has no inkling whatever that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity – and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits – hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labour (Marx 1973, 611):

Bostrom might argue that Marx's concept of work has been intensified as a goal that individuals set for themselves, embodying self-realization and freedom; it has become desirable as an end in itself, even though it was originally valued only as a means to an end. In Bostrom's view, technological maturity leads to autopotency without requiring effort or labor. This gives rise to a plastic utopia, where individuals can generate their own purposes and meanings arbitrarily, without grounding them in external necessities or constraints.

In a sense, Marx's idea of self-realization aligns with Bostrom's concept of autopotency, provided it incorporates the level of technological maturity Bostrom envisions. Drawing on Elster (1986) here, self-realization as the full and free actualization and externalization of an individual's powers and abilities is a central element of Marxism's conception of the good life. As Elster argued, the idea of an individual fully actualizing all their potentials represents one of the more utopian aspects of Marx's thought (Elster 1986, 101), which would converge with Bostrom's concept of autopotency if it comprised technological advancements leading to a plastic utopia (c.f. Cohen 1985, 125–126). However,

paradoxically, actualizing of all individual's potentials with the use of technology would make one dependent on technology, which could hinder self-realization, as true self-realization inherently requires freedom of choice. For instance, if an individual's traits were predetermined through gene technology before birth and later modified or enhanced using various technologies, such as cyborg technology, nanotechnology, or gene technology (see Sorgner 2022), they would be deprived of the freedom to choose. Before making a choice, an individual must be free to decide which potentials to develop. Once a decision is made, the paths not taken are inevitably closed. If these paths are predetermined by technology, all other options are eliminated, freedom is negated. Without freedom, the process cannot genuinely qualify as self-realization. In the process of genuine self-realization the individual acts as both the creator and the "material cause," while technology, in supporting the individual's autopotency, takes on a life of its own as an autonomous agent that develops and progresses. Although it is reasonable to use technology as a tool to facilitate individuals to channel their desire for self-realization into socially beneficial occupations, it should neither be mandatory nor an inescapable means.

To actualize an individual's potentials, its abilities must first be cultivated and then put into practice. For example, developing the skill to play the piano is a prerequisite for knowing how to play it, which is itself a condition for actually performing on the piano. The ultimate use of this ability is, of course, the purpose of its development and what lends value to the process of self-realization. One could envision a future where an individual acquires the skill of playing the piano by directly uploading the knowledge through technology. However, without applying the skill, the knowledge

would remain fundamentally the same as it was before the upload. The act of playing does not necessarily need to occur on a physical piano; it could take place in virtual reality using a simulated piano, where the knowledge and skill are still put into practice. This application would still qualify as activity, and without the activity potential cannot be actualized.

Even if we were to inhabit a virtual world, it remains possible to live a good and meaningful life, as argued by David Chalmers (2022). While the world we would inhabit in such a scenario is virtual, our actions and engagements within it are as real as in the physical, non-virtual world (Bojić, Agatonović, and Guga 2024; Agatonović 2024c). The concept of a good life in a virtual environment, particularly one centered around self-realization, presupposes active participation and effort. For instance, the self-realization of a pianist in a virtual world still entails the act of playing the piano, whether on a physical instrument or a simulated one. The activity itself, not the context in which it takes place, is what imbues the process with value. This illustrates that self-realization requires not only the possession of certain skills or capabilities but also their active application. The good life in a virtual world hinges on the same fundamental principles as in the non-virtual world: the necessity of active participation, the exercise of one's abilities, and the pursuit of goals that contribute to personal growth and fulfillment.

5. Conclusion

The passage from *The German Ideology* cited in Section 3 is also cited by Bostrom as a description of an governance and culture utopia, while arguing that this is not the deepest level in society's development toward a perfect world. Bostrom assumes that no activity is

required for an interesting, fulfilling, and meaningful life, as machines can perform all work. However, if human goals and values depend on technology, these goals and values are alienated from human nature, which is intrinsically active and self-realizes its goals and values through its own activity. Even if robots and machines could autonomously perform all tasks that humans can, human purpose in life would still be independent of technology and would require human activity, physical labour, and education. Total reliance on external means could ruin, rather than improve, humanity, as Nietzsche argued in his reflections on the “improvement” of man (Agatonović 2018; Agatonović 2024b). The use of robots, for instance, could be driven by purposes disconnected from human goals, justified only to increase robot utilization, production, and sales. Ideas might then be promoted that seek to introduce purposes into human lives to encourage excessive robot use, production, and sales. While the application of technology can benefit humanity when it serves general well-being, it cannot replace the work essential to a meaningful life. Technology can help humans live well, but they are not necessary for a meaningful, fulfilling, and interesting life. Thus, a deep utopia might not be a place of true well-being but rather a society where humans are bound by abstract ideas of life’s meaning and technology they have created, without the freedom to define their purpose and the meaning of life through their own actions, bodily movement, and education.

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