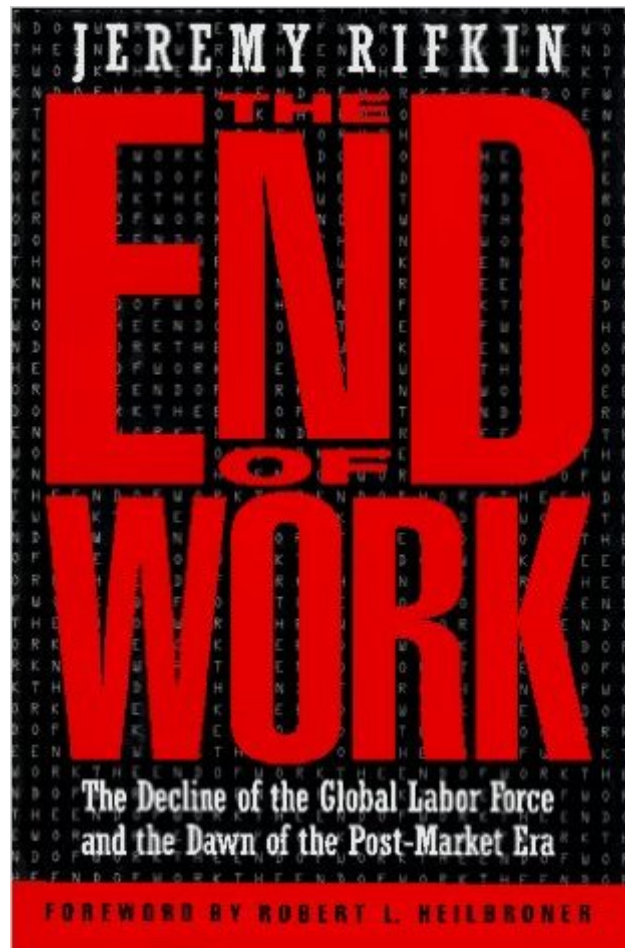


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The End Of Work



Synopsis

Jeremy Rifkin argues that we are entering a new phase in history - one characterized by the steady and inevitable decline of jobs. The world, says Rifkin, is fast polarizing into two potentially irreconcilable forces: on one side, an information elite that controls and manages the high-tech global economy; and on the other, the growing numbers displaced workers, who have few prospects and little hope for meaningful employment in an increasingly automated world. The end of work could mean the demise of civilization as we have come to know it, or signal the beginning of a great social transformation and a rebirth of the human spirit.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"We are entering a new age of global markets and automated production. The road to a near-workerless economy is within sight. Whether that road leads to a safe haven or a terrible abyss will depend on how well civilization prepares for the post-market era that will follow on the heels of the Third Industrial Revolution. The end of work could spell a death sentence for civilization as we have come to know it. The end of work could also signal the beginning of a great social transformation, a rebirth of the human spirit. The future lies in our hands." Thus ends the book, leaving no neat little answers - negative OR positive, but urging us to open our eyes and look around us. I'd seen him on C-span and promptly ordered his book through . This was when it first came out in hardcover and my oldest son, assured of a future work using skills from his newly obtained Masters in Computer Science, was concerned I was reading such a book. "Isn't he one of those Luddites?" I think of myself as a wanna be Luddite, but I saw no signs of this in the book.

Instead, Rifkin seems to be concerned with the coming affects of the Informational Revolution. The book begins with a history of the Industrial Revolution. He gives us a nice tour of the birth of materialism as a concept created and promoted by economists and businessmen. "The term `consumption," he tells us, "has both English and French roots. In its original form, to consume meant to destroy, to pillage, to subdue, to exhaust. It is a word steeped in violence and until the present century had only negative connotations.

With "The End of Work," Jeremy Rifkin has combined detailed research with insightful analysis to spread a warning message that any amateur futurist, economist, or social commentator needs to consider seriously before rejecting. Rifkin's thesis is simple: human labor has been, to a large extent, replaced by machinery in the production process, and this trend will continue to subsume jobs that require great amounts of skill, as computers and machines become increasingly capable of performing such tasks. The result is going to be a permanently unemployed and underemployed workforce, as labor becomes more extraneous, and the symptoms will be manifest in growing wealth disparity, and an increasingly dangerous world, as the unemployed become politically radicalized, and turn to violence, whether random, economic, and political. First, I feel compelled to acknowledge the elephant in the room, which is that Rifkin's thesis is decidedly Marxist. The idea of post-scarcity and the replacement of labor with automation, as well as the consequences that Rifkin forewarns of, were all predicted by Karl Marx throughout his career as a political agitator. That Rifkin's prescriptions are more moderate than Marx's does not make the diagnosis less Marxist. As a longtime libertarian and believer in capitalism, I would like to be able to dismiss Rifkin's thesis out of hand, as many reviewers of a conservative bent do and have. However, the care with which Rifkin has researched this book and the consistency of his analysis, as well as his stature as a scholar, compel me to consider his argument more carefully. One positive trait of the book is that it was written fifteen years ago. As such, it is somewhat dated.

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