



The debates, discussions and controversies involving digital media and technology have typically been defined by two different and opposed positions. In *Virtual Realism* Michael Heim finds contemporary debate about the social impact of the computer, the internet and cyberspace to be organized around and motivated by two different alternatives, which he terms “network idealism” and “naïve realism.”

For the “network idealist,” the computer constitutes a virtual technoutopia – a new world of uninhibited freedom, boundless opportunity and unrestricted growth. The “naïve realist” opposes this overly optimistic assessment and warns of increased surveillance, compromised security, loss of a sense of reality and the erosion of human connection and face-to-face interaction. Where the network idealist sees utopian possibilities and virtual redemption, the naïve realist perceives a threat to real human relations, real communities and reality in general. “One launches forth with unreserved optimism; the other lashes back with a cry to ground ourselves outside technology.”

Derek Stanovsky in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Computing and Information* charts the same oppositional structure. “Virtual reality is equally prone to portrayals as either the bearer of bright utopian possibilities or dark dystopian nightmares.”

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