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Human Values in a Technological Society

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In this introductory article, the current volume editor of the journal *Philosophy. Sociology* analyses the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) development on human values, the meaning of work, and the existential conditions of contemporary technological society. AI's ability to take over both routine and creative tasks raises the question of whether traditional work will continue to be the primary source of human identity and self-realisation. From an axiological perspective, the article discusses the importance of moral values for regulating technology and promoting human well-being. It also examines universal basic income and the role of philosophy in fostering critical thinking. The article emphasises that, to avoid an existential vacuum, new models of meaning beyond traditional work must be developed.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, values, meaning of work, axiology, technology, universal basic income

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary academic discourse, the question of the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) technology on the labour market and society is becoming increasingly important. It is often argued that AI will become a powerful tool capable of transforming the very nature of human work and even potentially eliminating certain professions entirely. In this context, it is especially important to examine not only the economic and social but also the existential aspects of this technological societal transformation. Will the inevitable influence of AI across various spheres of human activity ultimately diminish the sense of human happiness? Could this technology provoke existential crises, increasing feelings of meaninglessness, even while providing a more comfortable life and greater material well-being? Such questions and similar ones become significant when analysing the relationship between technological progress and human values.

This article seeks to reflect on the transformations of human values in the face of technological progress, analysing not only – or primarily – the changes in work, welfare and social models, but also the potential impact on humanly comprehensible happiness, the sense of life, and the meaning of work and daily activity. The discussion is based on a general axiological conceptual approach. Axiology, as a broad philosophical theory of values, examines human activity and the values realised or grounded within it from various perspectives. For example, when analysing a person's way of life or lifestyle, one may ask which values shape the mentality

of an individual or even entire communities, their attitudes toward certain phenomena, etc. Axiological research is closely intertwined with other social and humanistic disciplines, such as ethics, aesthetics, religious studies, sociology, political science, economics, ethnology, cultural studies, and others.

In his works, the Lithuanian philosopher Vydūnas also devoted a significant attention to axiological* issues. He emphasised that moral values are the foundation not only of personal but also of social life. The philosopher argued that values such as freedom, justice, equality, virtue, and the pursuit of the common good must be important not only for the individual but also for the entire state and its various institutions (Vydūnas 1922). In his view, moral values are essential for the progress and prosperity of a democratic society (Bagdonavičius 2017). In the contemporary technological society, the importance of moral values and ideals becomes even more pressing, particularly in relation to the development and application of artificial intelligence (AI) technology. AI has an enormous potential to assist humanity in various areas. However, if this technology is not controlled or governed according to certain moral values and ethical principles, it can become a threat. Without a proper regulation and ethical guidelines, artificial intelligence could be misused to violate privacy, manipulate people, cause financial or other harm, and more. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the development and use of AI are based on high moral standards – certain widely recognised moral values. Developers and researchers of AI systems must collaborate with government institutions to ensure that this technology is used responsibly. Only in this way can potential threats be prevented, ensuring that artificial intelligence remains a useful tool that aids people rather than becoming a weapon capable of harming individuals and society.

We live in a technological society where technologies are far from being mere neutral tools that simplify daily life (Heidegger 1977). Historically, technologies have continually reshaped social structures, modes of communication, and even core human values. Examples include the Luddites' resistance to workshops transformed by steam engines, the shift from manual labour to factory-based automated production, and more broadly, the colonial enterprises initiated by Western powers from the 15th to the mid-20th century. Those processes were fundamentally grounded in technology – ranging from military innovations and navigation and shipping technologies to industrial, production and medical advancements, as well as the diverse technological tools employed in scientific research. Such tools encompass not only material instruments like microscopes and telescopes but also research methodologies developed in Western science, including experimentation and the mathematical modelling of experimental data. Significantly, those technologies were largely absent in the regions colonised by Western powers.

As in the past, technologies continue to exert a profound influence on human values, and through them, on broader social transformations. In the contemporary world, technological breakthroughs such as automated and robotic production, artificial intelligence, and other innovations increasingly impact both labour markets and the social fabric of society. Many scholars predict that in the coming decades, AI and automation could replace half or even more of existing jobs. This prospect raises fundamental questions about human values in a technological society, particularly concerning the meaning that individuals assign to their activities and existence – the meaning that may be at risk in the age of AI.

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* This article is based on the presentation of the same title, which was delivered at the international scientific conference '*Health Promotion Innovations and Heritage for Human Well-being*' held at Klaipėda University on 21 March 2025.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MEANING OF WORK

The 20th century was often described as the 'Age of Knowledge', in which the ability to think critically, analyse information, and generate knowledge was considered a cornerstone of human competence (Drucker 1993). Those skills were seen as a defining basis for human superiority over other living beings – humans, it was said, are rational, thinking animals. The work associated with knowledge creation and processing became prestigious and highly valued, and human identity was often closely tied to professional activity. In post-industrial societies, that activity typically involved tasks related to creating, managing, or analysing information. However, in the 21st century, it has become evident that artificial intelligence (AI), rapidly advancing across multiple domains, already surpasses human intellectual capacities in areas traditionally regarded as uniquely human, including knowledge creation and analysis. AI is no longer merely a tool; it is evolving into an autonomous creative force capable of generating new ideas across various fields of human work. This shift raises a fundamental question: If AI can perform many intellectual tasks more efficiently than humans, what will be the meaning and value of human intellectual and creative labour? Unlike previous technological revolutions, AI has the potential to replace not only routine tasks but also cognitive activities requiring creativity – tasks once considered exclusively human.

Analogous to the emergence of mechanical and automated machines, which fundamentally transformed the paradigm of physical labour in agriculture and industry, the advancement of AI into the intellectual sphere holds the potential to automate human cognitive activity. While this does not imply that humans should abandon the pursuit of knowledge or creative expression, it fundamentally challenges traditional conceptions of intellectual work and its role in human life. Historically, work has often been experienced as both an obligation and a necessity – not only for economic survival but also for the formation of psychological identity. In the context of AI-driven technological progress, work may transform into a freely chosen form of human self-expression, much like physical activity has shifted from being essential for survival to becoming an elective pursuit, realised through sports or other leisure activities requiring physical engagement. Yet this transformation carries potential risks. By removing the necessity to work, individuals may also lose one of the primary sources of meaning in life (Frankl, 2006). If work ceases to be the central axis of human existence, the question arises: What could replace it to prevent an existential vacuum and a sense of meaninglessness? Could entertainment and pleasure alone suffice? This shift demands a philosophical re-examination of the meaning and value of work in human life, exploring new sources of purpose and values. Technological society may provide greater opportunities for individuals to seek and create their own sense of meaning, but it can also complicate this process by generating environments of excessive choice and uncertainty.

Looking back retrospectively, one can observe that when automation reduced the number of jobs in the agricultural sector, people moved into the manufacturing sector. When manufacturing became automated, people shifted en masse to the service sector and jobs based on information work. If the service sector – and, more broadly, all work involving information – becomes heavily (or largely) automated, as is increasingly made possible by modern robotics and artificial intelligence technologies, people will have nowhere else to move because there simply will be no new sectors.

As one possible solution to a potential labour market crisis resulting from the development of these technologies, the idea of basic income is widely discussed. Universal basic income is a government-guaranteed periodic payment to every citizen. Its purpose is to provide

sufficient funds to cover basic living expenses, thereby creating financial security. This idea is understood as a way to compensate for job losses caused by the rapid development of modern technologies, such as automated production and AI. By providing basic income, it would be possible to reduce or eliminate social welfare systems, support programs, food assistance, and other institutions that provide essential social aid, which are costly to maintain. However, the same existential question about meaning arises here: If people can no longer realise themselves through work, will they experience an existential crisis? Could this lead to depression, a sense of social irrelevance, and a loss of joy and purpose in life? In an attempt to fill the resulting void, some individuals may turn to addictions, such as drugs, alcohol, social media, and the like.

The concept of basic income proposes ensuring a minimum standard of living for every member of society, regardless of their participation in the labour market. This concept is based on the assumption that the future economy, by automating routine work, will be capable of meeting basic needs even as traditional employment declines. The introduction of basic income could eliminate economic stress and provide individuals with greater freedom to choose activities that are more motivating and meaningful to them. However, is the satisfaction of basic needs sufficient for human happiness? If the necessity to work is removed, might people also lose the motivation to pursue higher goals, to feel needed, and to perceive themselves as meaningful members of society? Human happiness and well-being depend not only on material needs but also on psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and connection with others. Satisfaction derived from achievements in one's professional field is another important factor. Traditionally, work often provides opportunities to fulfill precisely these needs. Thus, it becomes clear how technological progress could transform fundamental human values, altering not only our concepts of work and welfare but also the very existential foundations of life.

In the context of artificial intelligence (AI) development, the discipline of philosophy becomes increasingly important. Philosophy examines general principles across various fields – for example, logic studies the most universal principles of thought and knowledge of reality, while the philosophy of science can clarify the essential and fundamental principles of scientific inquiry. The same applies to other philosophical disciplines. Even though factual and technical information will increasingly be accessible through AI programs, it will still be necessary to navigate the information provided by AI, to filter it, and to evaluate it critically. Strengthening philosophical knowledge at all levels of the education system can help develop these skills. Philosophy, as the study of reasoning and critical analysis, becomes particularly relevant in the age of AI and information overload. It can help people not only to orient themselves in streams of information but also to understand the fundamental principles underlying both scientific understanding of phenomena and practical life. AI systems can process vast amounts of information and provide answers to a wide range of questions, but they cannot replace the human capacity for critical thinking and evaluation – the very skills that various philosophical disciplines teach. The development of AI raises fundamental philosophical questions about human nature and our place in the world: What is human value without compulsory work? If machines perform work, what can humans offer that machines cannot? What would give life meaning if work were no longer one of the main sources of meaning? Where should meaning be sought – perhaps in art, science, family, or volunteer work? In contemporary society, productivity is often equated with value. But is it possible to learn to value oneself not only by what and how much one does, but also by entirely different criteria? In this issue of *Philosophy. Sociology*, readers are presented with research from various philosophical fields,

including the philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of technology, philosophy of education, social and cultural philosophy, and others.

FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSIONS

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation raises not only economic and psychological challenges but also philosophical and existential ones. For a long time, people have associated their identity, self-worth, and life's meaning with work. The work not only provides a livelihood but also gives structure, goals, social connections, and opportunities for self-realisation. If, due to the advancement of AI, robotics, and other technologies, many people are no longer able to participate in the labour market, this could trigger a profound existential crisis. However, this crisis can be avoided if society takes proactive measures, such as education, psychological support, strengthening community bonds, and creating new values. The most important step is to show people that their value is not limited to the labour market, and that life can be meaningful and fulfilling even without a traditional 'work-based' identity.

The development of AI makes philosophy not only relevant but essential. Philosophy teaches critical thinking, information analysis, ethical problem-solving, and understanding the fundamental principles of science and technology. Strengthening philosophy within the education system can help people use technology more effectively, avoid manipulation, and find meaning and value in a technologically advanced society. Philosophy becomes not only a tool for thinking but also a tool for survival in the age of information and technology. To prevent an existential crisis resulting from AI development, it is necessary to develop new philosophical models of life and values that enable people to feel needed and meaningfully engaged in society.

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Žmogaus vertybės technologinėje visuomenėje

Santrauka

Šiame mokslo žurnalo „Filosofija. Sociologija" numerio sudarytojo įvadiniame straipsnyje analizuojama dirbtinio intelekto (DI) plėtros įtaka žmogaus vertybėms, darbo prasmei ir egzistencinei būsenai šiuolaikinėje technologinėje visuomenėje. DI gebėjimas perimti tiek rutinines, tiek kūrybines užduotis kelia klausimą, ar tradicinis darbas išliks pagrindiniu žmogaus tapatybės ir savirealizacijos šaltiniu. Remiantis aksiologine perspektyva, aptariama moralinių vertybių reikšmė technologijų reguliavimui ir žmogaus gerovei. Nagrinėjamos universalios bazinės pajamos ir filosofijos vaidmuo kritinio mąstymo ugdymui. Pabrėžiama, kad siekiant išvengti egzistencinio vakuumo būtina kurti naujus prasmės modelius už tradicinio darbo ribų.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: dirbtinis intelektas, vertybės, darbo prasmė, aksiologija, technologijos, universalios bazinės pajamos