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## ANALYZING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THROUGH THE CONCEPTS OF JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET

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The article deals with the philosophical analysis of artificial intelligence (AI) through the concepts of the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. In particular, it considers his anthropological interpretation of technology, the idea of a project of life, and the phenomenon of the mass man. The article examines the concept of technology as an adaptation of the environment to human will, which contributes to saving effort and fulfilling a certain project of life. Ortega’s proposed evolution of technology, which consists of three stages: technology of chance, technology of the craftsman, and technology of the engineer, is analyzed. It is argued that AI can be interpreted as a logical continuation of the “engineer’s technology” stage, which is characterized by scientific rationality, methodical approach, and scale, but at the same time, by a growing gap between technical capabilities and their value-based interpretation. The dual connection between intelligence and imagination in the development of technology is shown, as well as the place of engineering as a secondary sphere subordinate to life projects. The paper analyzes the connection between the development and application of AI and various life projects of modern societies using the examples of the United States, the European Union, China, and Russia. It is argued that AI is not an autonomous or neutral technology, but embodies the dominant cultural, political, and value orientations of specific societies, determining the specifics of its regulation and social consequences. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of the phenomenon of the mass man in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is intensified by the widespread use of AI, the delegation of intellectual efforts to algorithms, and the formation of the illusion of competence. It is concluded that AI simultaneously expands the horizon of human capabilities and exacerbates the anthropological crisis, actualizing the problem of meaning, creativity, and responsibility. The conclusions also emphasize that the main challenge of our time lies not so much in the development of AI itself, but in the ability of people to form life projects to which the development of modern technologies must be subordinated.

*Key words:* artificial intelligence, philosophy of technology, José Ortega y Gasset, mass man, project of life, philosophical anthropology

**Problem statement.** The current stage of AI development, which holds one of the leading places in the structure of scientific and technological progress and is increasingly being integrated into various spheres of human activity, raises the question of its impact on society. This impact provokes controversial opinions that reflect two opposing, already traditional, views on the interpretation of technology: technocratic, which emphasizes the unconditional benefits and advancement of technology, and technophobic, which focuses on its threats to humanity. The problem lies in the need for a philosophical interpretation of AI beyond these polar approaches, in forming a more holistic perception of its essence and role in the modern world.

In this context, the legacy of the leading Spanish philosopher of the 20th century, José Ortega y Gasset, is particularly noteworthy. His perspectives on technology form an original methodological position that goes beyond both technocratic and technophobic interpretations.



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He viewed technology as a means of human self-realization, but at the same time criticized its dominance in the modern world, which makes his anthropological approach dialectical and relevant for analyzing today's challenges related to AI.

**Analysis of recent studies and publications.** Over the past decades, interest in José Ortega y Gasset's philosophy of technology has grown significantly: from sporadic mentions in general reviews to targeted, systematic studies that highlight his contribution to contemporary issues of technology and its role in shaping human existence. Early historiographical works already emphasized Ortega's avant-garde approach to technology: Mitcham calls him the first professional philosopher to take a thorough approach to interpreting technology, analyzing his essay "Meditations on Technics" (also known as "Man the Technician" in English translation) alongside the works of Mumford and Heidegger [7]. Such historiographical attention laid the groundwork for further interpretations that move toward systematization and applied interpretation of the Ortega approach.

Tereshkun conducts a systematic analysis of Ortega y Gasset's work with a focus on identifying the philosophy of technology within it [14].

Lucena compares the philosophy of technology of José Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger, arguing that Ortega's views are a better guide for the current situation and for countering the risks of technological development. He describes Ortega's position as moderate optimism and voluntarism with an emphasis on human self-creation, while Heidegger is presented as a more radical pessimist who sees technology as an essential risk to Being, expressed in the ubiquitous domination of "Gestell" [6].

Umut considers José Ortega y Gasset's perspective on technology as a means of realizing human nature. The author highlights his philosophy of "ratio-vitalism" as the basis for his views. The study also emphasizes the dangers of the current technological phase, in particular the emptiness that arises from excessive faith in technology, and stresses the importance of a life project that must be "pre-technological" [11].

Alonso recognizes Ortega as one of the pioneers in the philosophy of technology and focuses on analyzing his concepts of "superfluous necessities" and "supra-nature" [1].

Terrones Rodríguez examines the concept of the supernatural in Ortega's philosophy in the context of AI, with an emphasis on superintelligence and singularity as manifestations of the human desire to overcome natural limitations [10].

Luis Núñez Ladevéze, Ignacio Álvarez de Mon, and Margarita Núñez Canal have conducted a systematic interpretation of the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset, focusing on the concept of technology as its central element. The article also explores the relationship between "self-absorption" and technology, positioning Ortega as a "pragmatic realist" and distinguishing his position from Husserl's idealism and Heidegger's technological pessimism [5].

The review of the literature indicates an important shift from fragmentary recognition of Ortega's ideas to systematic, comparative, and applied study. At the same time, Ortega's ideas require additional applied reflection in the context of contemporary AI issues, which opens up a field for this study.

**The object of the study is** the phenomenon of technology in José Ortega y Gasset.

**The subject of the study is** the phenomenon of AI through the prism of José Ortega y Gasset's concepts.

**The purpose of the study is** to provide a philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon of AI through the prism of José Ortega y Gasset's concepts.

**The objectives of the study are:**

– to analyze Ortega's interpretation of technology and the main stages of its evolution, identifying the place of AI in it;

- to establish a connection between life projects and the development of AI;
- to substantiate the influence of AI on the transformation of the phenomenon of “mass man” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**The methodology of the study** is based on José Ortega y Gasset’s anthropological-philosophical approach, which is justified as an understudied but promising paradigm for interpreting the current state of AI.

The use of the comparative method made it possible to explore the differences in the development and application of AI in societies with different life projects. This method also allowed comparing the impact of scientific and technological progress on the emergence of the phenomenon of the mass man in the 20<sup>st</sup> century with the impact of AI development on the transformation of this phenomenon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**The results of the study.** In order to approach the analysis of AI, it is necessary to first consider Ortega’s key ideas about technology in general. Ortega begins his essay “Man the Technician” with considerations about what distinguishes humans from other biological species in nature and concludes that animals have to adapt to their environment, while humans, on the contrary, are able to change their environment to suit their needs.

Based on this, he distinguishes between two levels of existence: “being” and “well-being.” Each of these levels is characterized by its own set of actions: primary and secondary. Thus, primary actions are aimed at the immediate satisfaction of human biological needs for survival. For example, going into a cave to warm up, drinking from a river when thirsty, running away from a predator, etc.

Secondary actions are indirect actions that are not aimed at immediate survival (“being”) but at ensuring a certain standard of living (“well-being”) by adapting the environment to human will. For example: lighting a fire rather than using a naturally occurring one; building a house rather than finding a cave, engaging in agriculture rather than foraging, etc [8, p. 89–92].

It is these actions that Ortega refers to as technical: “Technical acts are not those through which we strive directly to satisfy our necessities, whether elemental or frankly superfluous, but those in which we first invent and then carry out a plan of action which permits us to achieve such satisfaction through the least effort possible and to secure completely new possibilities beyond the nature of man, such as sailing, flying, communicating by telephone, etc.” [8, p. 106].

In other words, this set of actions is responsible for the emergence of what humans call tools or instruments: “All these actions have one trait in common. They presuppose and include the invention of a procedure which guarantees, within certain limits, that we can obtain at our pleasure and convenience the things we need but do not find in nature <...>, we call it the tool or implement” [8, p. 94].

Thus, according to Ortega, technology is “the means by which we shun, entirely or in part, the ‘things to do’ which would have kept us busy under natural circumstances”, and the driving force behind this process is the saving of effort [8, p. 106–107].

This leads to the conclusion that it is not enough for a person to simply live – they strive to live well. Therefore, the true purpose of technology is not to satisfy minimal needs, but to create conditions for a “good life”. In this sense, technology is always aimed at producing the “superfluous”, which becomes necessary for humans.

#### **The concept of “supernature”.**

The result of human production of “superfluous” is the emergence of what Ortega calls “supernature” – an artificial environment consisting of human means, tools, and inventions that form a kind of layer between humans and “wild” nature. Without this layer, modern existence would be impossible. People are as dependent on it as primitive man was on nature. But it is

this dependence that conceals a certain danger: being born into a world of technical things, man tends to perceive them as something natural, existing by itself, and forgets that technology is the result of human activity, knowledge, and effort. And therein lies the paradox: the development of technology leads to modern man, surrounded by an artificial environment, returning to his primitive attitude, perceiving this environment as a gift of nature that simply exists.

### **The evolution of technology.**

It is precisely this difference in perception that Ortega takes as the basis for his classification of technology. Looking at how it's evolved, the Spanish philosopher points out that one can't really grasp the development of technology by breaking history down into stages based on individual inventions (like the Stone Age, Bronze Age, Steam Age, and so on). He argues that this periodization is too superficial.

Instead, he proposes a classification of the evolution of technology based not on individual inventions, but on how humans perceive technical activity itself. Thus, he identifies three stages in the evolution of technology: technology of chance, technology of the craftsman, and technology of the technician.

The first stage, technology of chance, is associated with primitive man. Here, inventions arise spontaneously, without a conscious plan or system. Man discovers tools or methods of action, rather by accident, in the struggle for survival. They are not separated from man's general activity. In this sense, primitive technology is instinctive and sporadic, lacking a systematic approach.

The second stage is the technology of the craftsman. Here, technical activity becomes specialized: craftsmen appear who consciously preserve and pass on their skills. Craftsmanship requires skill, experience, and individual mastery. But it is not yet based on systematic knowledge or science: the craftsman acts according to tradition. Therefore, this stage is characterized by limited productivity and attachment to a specific environment.

The third stage is the technology of the technician. This stage differs from the previous ones in that technology begins to be based on scientific knowledge and conscious design. At this stage, the concept of an "engineer" emerges, who not only repeats established techniques but also thinks systematically, plans, and designs. Technology becomes industrial, large-scale, and global. It is here that it takes on the form we associate with the modern world. At the same time, the rapid development of technology at this stage eventually reaches a point where the development of tools begins to outpace their contemplation.

### **Intelligence and imagination.**

To analyze this gap between the development and contemplation of technology, Ortega uses the juxtaposition of intelligence and imagination. The philosopher uses the term "intelligence" as the ability to think rationally, analyze, calculate, and invent. He emphasizes that intelligence seeks ways "how" to do something, but lacks the answer to the question of "why".

Intelligence alone is not enough for the development of technology. It must act within the framework of a specific life project, which, in turn, is the result of the activity of imagination: "One forgets too easily that intelligence, however keen, cannot furnish to its own direction and therefore is unable to attain actual technical discoveries. It does not know by itself what to prefer among the countless "inventable" things and is lost in their unlimited possibilities. Technical capacity can arise only in an entity whose intelligence functions in the service of an imagination pregnant not with technical, but with vital projects" [8, p. 137].

Thus, technical discoveries are born not from intelligence as such, but from a specific human life project, where imagination points the way: imagination – life project – intelligence – technology.

**The role of an engineer.**

Developing this idea using society as an example, Ortega identifies two spheres of human activity:

- technical or engineering – creates tools and material goods;
- values or life program – forms a “project of life”, i.e., goals, meaning of life, moral and cultural guidelines.

For the successful development of society, both spheres are indispensable and cannot function separately from each other. Technology is a tool, not a goal; its development is only possible in the context of human values, creative ideas, and meanings. That is why the work of an engineer, who embodies intellectual power, is always secondary and depends on those who shape goals and values – philosophers, politicians, writers, etc. Thus, technology only acquires meaning when it is embedded in a broader system of human life, oriented towards certain ideals and goals. It is this system that Ortega y Gasset defines through the concept of a “project of life”.

**Project of life.**

Any change, technical in particular, is a movement between two poles: “whence” and “whither”. The starting point (“whence”) is nature in its original form – that which exists independently of humans. However, in order to change nature, one must have a reference point, i.e., a goal (“whither”), according to which this change takes place. And this reference point is the “program of human life,” i.e., a person’s idea of what a good life should be. At the highest level, this program is realized as the aforementioned “well-being,” which is the ultimate goal of any technical activity.

From this interpretation, it follows that each era and culture form its own “life program” its own vision of “well-being”. Technology always subordinates itself to this project: it is not self-sufficient, but serves to realize various life ideals (for example, the life of a bodhisattva or an English gentleman [8, p. 123]). Therefore, there is no such thing as absolute technological progress.

A contemporary illustration of this idea can be found in the development of AI in countries with different socio-political systems (and therefore different life projects).

The US has historically been oriented on individual success, entrepreneurship, and leadership – the classic “American dream”. The US values initiative, innovation, and an open market. The life project of a 21<sup>st</sup> century American is often associated with starting their own business (startup), achieving material success, and personal freedom. AI is integrated into this project as a tool for competitive advantage and personal effectiveness: from business process automation to new opportunities in medicine, education, finance, and more. US policy on AI reflects these values: encouraging rapid innovation and minimal regulation [3].

In the European Union, the life project is based on the protection of human rights, freedom, and responsibility, so the discourse around AI focuses on regulation, transparency, ethical standards, and privacy protection. The EU’s goals include sustainable development, balanced economic growth, full employment and social progress, as well as a high level of environmental protection [4].

China’s life project is officially centered around the idea of the “Great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation”, or the “Chinese Dream”. It’s a collectivist project where every citizen’s individual aspirations should be directed toward the good of the state. So, AI in China is also considered a key resource for achieving these ambitions. Thus, the country is demonstrating a new level of digital authoritarianism, comparable in scale to Orwell’s novel “1984”. The country has a powerful surveillance system to control citizens, which corresponds to the ideology of control and collectivism [3].

Individuals in Russia often associate themselves with the “great” history of the state, and their life project is focused on strengthening the “Russian world.” Accordingly, the country actively uses AI as a tool of ideological warfare. Russian special services, in particular, use AI to generate large amounts of fake news, which, apart from disinformation, also leads to data pollution, on which new versions of large language models are trained [2].

### **The transformation of the phenomenon of “mass man” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

Based on the aforementioned, technology is meant to free people from the mundane nature of their circumstances, thereby allowing them to discover new opportunities and realize their life projects. However, when such a project declines or is completely absent, technology begins to lose its meaning, and a new social type emerges in society, which Ortega called the “mass man”. This idea roots in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to social and cultural changes: the development of democracy, scientific and technological progress, and urbanization. José Ortega y Gasset described a representative of the masses as a person “whose life lacks any purpose, and simply goes drifting along. Consequently, though his possibilities and his powers be enormous, he constructs nothing” [9, p. 53]. The mass man does not strive for independent understanding of his own existence; he feels like everyone else and finds comfort in this. They do not try to separate themselves from the crowd, are not guided by personal critical analysis, but follow prevailing trends and simplified social norms.

Society, according to Ortega, “is always a dynamic unity of two component factors: minorities and masses. The minorities are individuals or groups of individuals which are specially qualified. The mass is the assemblage of persons not specially qualified” [9, p. 13]. The Spanish philosopher called the dominance of these masses in public life “the revolt of the masses”. In the case of AI, this rise of the masses can be seen in the widespread use of this technology to perform tasks that until recently required certain qualifications. Today, anyone with access to the internet can generate a wide variety of content on various topics without any training in the corresponding fields. And these are not isolated examples of such use, but a global trend: from the mass creation of content on social networks, texts for blogs, marketing campaigns, and advertising messages, to news and even reports generated by AI. As a result, the Internet is increasingly overflowing with such mass “creativity”, among which the opinions of intellectual minorities are beginning to lose their voice, and the phenomenon of the spread of AI content in its most radical form has already been dubbed the “dead internet theory”.

Ortega y Gasset argued that every era has its own “height”. The modern era is a time of extraordinary scientific and technological progress, with the greatest access to resources, goods, information, etc., in the history of civilization. The life of modern man has become even richer in opportunities than it was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, our era is not marked by the same growth in spiritual, moral, or cultural height. This paradox lies in the fact that it is precisely the historical discovery of the world – with its comfort, security, freedom, and absence of real boundaries – that has narrowed the inner world of the average person. Freed from difficulties and obstacles, they have come to perceive the achievements of civilization as the natural backdrop of their existence and have ceased to be aware of their dependence on the efforts of their predecessors or on any higher order. In a world that no longer resists, the consciousness of the average person closes because they do not need to go beyond their own desires, compare themselves to others, or seek norms outside themselves. This is how a state of self-sufficient hermeticism is born: a person surrounded by unlimited possibilities refuses to improve themselves.

This paradox is only exacerbated in the context of AI. By delegating tasks that require thinking to AI, people lose the sense of the need for their own creative effort. So, instead of the drive for self-development and creativity, the freed-up effort is replaced by a vacuum in which

the ability to desire and create is lost. This reinforces intellectual hermeticism and the crisis of desires.

Comparing the quantitative or potential progress of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the previous one, Ortega concluded that “the really important increase of our world does not lie in its greater dimensions, but in its containing many more things”: “something which we can desire, attempt, do, undo, meet with, enjoy or repel” [9, p. 42]. That is, more opportunities.

Drawing a parallel with the modern era, we can see that AI has become one of the factors contributing to the “growth of the world”. It represents a qualitative expansion of the horizons of human capabilities, which can contribute to both individual development and social progress. One of the key achievements is the automation of routine tasks, which allows people to focus on the creative aspects of their work.

People, who were once limited by their own experience and available sources, now find themselves in an almost limitless information environment that enhances their ability to desire, think, create, make decisions – and, as Ortega y Gasset wrote, fills their consciousness with the impression of incredible power. But isn't this power somewhat illusory? Instead of meaningful knowledge, there is superficial familiarity with everything and nothing at the same time; instead of freedom of choice, there are “information bubbles” and the paradox of choice, which paralyzes the will. The excess of information creates a subject who is not oriented in the flow of knowledge, but only swallows it [13, p. 149]. The power that should inspire new achievements turns out to be exhausting. As the Spanish philosopher wrote, “we live at a time when man believes himself fabulously capable of creation, but he does not know what to create. Lord of all things, he is not lord of himself. He feels lost amid his own abundance. With more means at its disposal, more knowledge, more technique than ever, it turns out that the world to-day goes the same way as the worst of worlds that have been; it simply drifts” [9, p. 47].

The mass man is increasingly satisfied with superficial enthusiasm for technological progress, without questioning its value basis and consequences. The logic of efficiency comes to the fore, in which the main thing is optimization, not meaning.

People in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are even more confident than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they are self-sufficient. In modern mass culture, a false illusion is beginning to form that AI is a new panacea, thanks to which anyone can get answers to complex questions here and now, which in turn creates an illusion of competence and devalues real knowledge. People are increasingly inclined to obtain information rather than knowledge. As a result, society is becoming less tolerant of authority, and the distinction between competence and dilettante judgment is blurring.

At the same time, one of the distinctive traits of modern man is reliance on external forces, which takes the form of a revival of archaic magical practices. In the context of AI, this refers to man's blind trust in it, relying primarily on its effectiveness and not questioning the motives and principles underlying its functioning. This is reminiscent of the masses, who do not ask questions about meaning, principles, or limits – they accept what works, what is effective, what is convenient, without feeling the need to understand why it works, for what purpose, and at what cost. Modern people are less and less looking for meaning (“know-what”) and more and more for effectiveness (“know-how”) [12, p. 212].

Thus, the modern transformation of the phenomenon of “mass man” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century emphasizes the dual nature of technological progress. On the one hand, AI expands human capabilities, automates routine tasks, and opens up space for creativity. On the other hand, it contributes to the formation of superficial competence, intellectual hermeticism, and the illusion of self-sufficiency. The mass man of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, freed from difficulties and limitations, increasingly delegates thinking to AI, losing the need for self-improvement, critical reflection,

and the search for meaning. As a result, technological progress, which should raise the “height” of each individual, risks turning society into a space of mass “creativity” without real spiritual, moral, and intellectual depth, embodied in the modern illusion of competence and the phenomenon of the “dead internet.” Therefore, as was the case a century ago, the challenge lies not so much in the development of technology itself as in the human potential for creativity and progress.

**Conclusion.** As a result of the conducted analysis, it was found that, according to José Ortega y Gasset, technology is a human activity aimed at saving effort and creating superfluous means, with the help of which a person overcomes the pressure of circumstances and realizes their project of life. Ortega identifies three stages in the evolution of technology: the technology of chance, the technology of the craftsman, and the technology of the engineer. The study substantiates AI as a logical continuation of the technology of the engineer.

A connection between life projects and the development of AI has been established using the example of different societies. Thus, in the US, the development of AI is characterized by the encouragement of rapid innovation and minimal regulation by the state. In the European Union, on the contrary, the integration of AI is focused on increased regulation, transparency, ethical standards, and the protection of citizens’ privacy. In China, AI is a mechanism of collectivist state control and digital authoritarianism, while in Russia, it is a technology of ideological influence and information warfare. This confirms the thesis that AI is not an autonomous force; it always embodies the values and political aspirations of a particular society.

It has been argued that AI transforms and exacerbates the phenomenon of the mass man in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the one hand, it has been shown that AI is the epitome of saving effort described by Ortega y Gasset. This manifests itself in the automation of routine tasks, which helps people focus on the creative aspects of life. On the other hand, blind obsession with AI leads to a certain level of degradation. This manifests itself in a decrease in initiative, an increase in the mass effect, and the prevalence of superficial awareness over critical thinking.

Accordingly, the main challenge facing modern society is not so much the development of AI itself as the human ability to form projects of life.

**Prospects for further study** in this area lie in a deeper analysis of the application of AI within various life projects, the study of clip thinking as one of the factors contributing to the phenomenon of the mass man in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the study of the role of AI in the formation of the so-called “dead internet”.

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## АНАЛІЗ ШТУЧНОГО ІНТЕЛЕКТУ КРИЗЬ ПРИЗМУ КОНЦЕПЦІЙ ХОСЕ ОРТЕГИ-І-ГАССЕТА

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Стаття присвячена філософському осмисленню штучного інтелекту (ШІ) крізь призму концепцій іспанського філософа Хосе Ортеги-і-Гассета. Розглянуто, зокрема, його антропологічне розуміння техніки, ідею життєвого проєкту та феномен людини маси. У статті розглянуто поняття техніки як адаптацію середовища до волі людини, що сприяє заощадженню зусиль і реалізації певної програми життя. Проаналізовано запропоновану Ортегою еволюцію техніки, яка складається з таких трьох етапів: техніка випадку, ремісника та інженера. Обґрунтовано, що штучний інтелект може бути інтерпретований як логічне продовження етапу «техніки інженера», для якого характерні наукова раціональність, системність та масштабність, але водночас – зростання розриву між технічними можливостями та їх ціннісним осмисленням. Показано дуальний зв'язок інтелекту й яви у розвитку техніки, а також місце інженерії як вторинної сфери, підпорядкованої життєвим проєктам. У роботі проаналізовано зв'язок між розвитком і застосуванням ШІ та різними життєвими проєктами сучасних суспільств на прикладі США, Європейського Союзу, Китаю та Росії. Обґрунтовано, що ШІ не є автономною чи нейтральною технологією, а втілює домінуючі культурні, політичні та ціннісні орієнтири конкретних суспільств, визначаючи специфіку його регулювання та соціальних наслідків.

Особливу увагу приділено трансформації феномена людини маси у XXI столітті, яка посилюється масовим використанням ШІ, делегуванням інтелектуальних зусиль алгоритмам та формуванням ілюзії компетентності. Сформульовано висновок, що ШІ водночас розширює горизонт людських можливостей і загострює антропологічну кризу, актуалізуючи проблему сенсу, творчості та відповідальності. У висновках також підкреслюється, що головний виклик сучасності полягає не стільки у розвитку самого ШІ, скільки у здатності людини формувати життєві проекти, яким має підпорядкуватися розвиток сучасних технологій.

*Ключові слова:* штучний інтелект, філософія техніки, Хосе Ортега-і-Гассет, людина маси, життєвий проєкт, філософська антропологія.

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