
Ethical Reflections on Human Existence Under Posthumanism and Biotechnological Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT: Posthumanism originates from the negation of anthropocentrism, and states that humanity represents only a temporary phase or state in the evolutionary process of the world and can be able to interconnect with other non-human entities to form new substrates that carry life information. Biotechnology is one of the key means of realizing posthumanism, and provides a robust material and technological foundation to dissolve the human subjectivity and particularity. This paper primarily investigates the crises generated by humanity itself under the complicity of posthumanism and advancing biotechnology, and further attempts to employ Nietzsche's Übermensch philosophy and its contemporary developmental theories to critically analyse the philosophical and ethical issues that human subjectivity faces. The aim is to offer potential pathways to reconstruct human existential subjectivity for addressing the dilemmas of our era.

KEYWORDS: Posthumanism; Philosophy; Biotechnology; Artificial intelligence; Human

I. INTRODUCTION

From philosophical and ethical perspectives, humanism attaches importance to the intrinsic value of all human existence. The purpose of technological development is to serve human welfare, such as continuously exploring new medical methods to cure various diseases, attempt to extend human lifespan and strive to pursue the utmost breakthroughs in overcoming human limitations. Posthumanism, as an interdisciplinary intellectual movement, seeks to redefine the boundaries of humanity through such technological means. As early as September 1960, Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline proposed in their article, *Cyborgs and Space*, that astronauts could be implanted with neural control devices to withstand extreme conditions of outer space. This imagination of human modification had already transcended the original ontological boundaries of humanity. With subsequent scientific breakthroughs and innovations, biotechnologies, such as gene editing and brain-computer interfaces, have been practically applied in societal contexts. The technological conquest of humans and the dissolution of human subjectivity advocated by posthumanism are no longer merely conceptual ideas. The intellectual innovation of humanity has a tremendous and profound impact on traditional humanism and is the actual challenge faced by humans in real life.

The philosophy of Übermensch is a pivotal concept within Nietzsche's ideological system, and proposes a philosophical approach, that is, how humanity can create a new value system to save itself in an era of declining traditional values. This ideology has found renewed forms of expression in the technological age, and compels us to confront reality and reflect on the ultimate implications of human actions. For example, do breakthroughs of biotechnology truly realize human evolution? Does the ideology enhance or diminish free will? What are ideology's ethical and humanistic consequences and impacts? Faced with the technological innovation, how should humans define their own existence? Has the meaning of life thereby also been transcended and altered?

This paper aims to conduct an in-depth analysis from philosophical and ethical perspectives on the crisis of human subjectivity arising from the convergence of posthumanism and biotechnology. Based on Nietzsche's philosophy of the Übermensch, this paper seeks to clarify the ethical boundaries between technological development and human existential subjectivity, and endeavours to provide a theoretical foundation to define humanity's value objectives in the new era and formulate normative guidelines for the application of biotechnology.

II. THE COMPLICITY BETWEEN POSTHUMANISM AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

Posthumanism emerged in the latter half of the 20th century, and is a counter-traditional ideology developed and shaped by a series of conceptual constellation such as existentialism and cybernetics, and a series of scientific and technological achievements in biotechnology and artificial intelligence. In traditional concepts, anthropocentrism takes human values and needs as the standard by which all things are measured, and yet, within the posthumanist perspective, such standards are regarded as absurd.

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Posthumanism does not intend to focus on the concept of humanity because humans are not a special existence in the universe. Moreover, human autonomy appears negligible under the powerful intervention of biotechnology. Humans can be intimately connected with other material substances, and be redesigned and arbitrarily altered by the hand of technology.

The convergence of posthumanism and biotechnology represents the emergence of a new paradigm, and is a complicity that accelerates the demise of the traditional concept of the human. Through technological means, this convergence tries to achieve a fundamental transformation of the human body, and thereby substantiates that humanity is merely a form of the biological carrier and devoid of any inherent mystery or uniqueness. By employing technologies such as gene editing or brain-computer interfaces, humans can be edited and reconfigured, and then the boundary between the human and the non-human will blur. The most emblematic example is the emergence of the cyborg. This cybernetic technology, derived from control theory, originally refers to the integration of control devices and biological organisms. Donna Haraway, in 1985, explicitly defined the cyborg from a philosophical perspective as an entity that breaks down the boundaries between humans and machines, that is, a cybernetic biological organism, a hybrid of machine and biological organism, a creature of social reality, and also a science fiction character.

Posthumanism provides a subversive philosophical framework for biotechnological development and a technology-oriented denial of human ontological existence. Biological science offers the material and technical support to transform or even dissolve inherent human biological attributes, and puts the principles of post-anthropocentrism into practice.

III. THE PREDICAMENT OF POSTHUMANISM UNDER COMPLICITY

There is no denying that with the increasingly widespread applications of biotechnology in fields such as brain-machine interfaces, bionics and augmented reality, some devices like pacemakers, cochlear implants and artificial joints, and attempts to treat multiple diseases such as depression, paralysis and blindness by biotechnology have brought tremendous benefits to humanity. As time progresses, scientists' capabilities continue to grow, constantly pushing the boundaries to unlock new possibilities. In 1998, a British professor named Kevin Warwick implanted a cylindrical RFID chip with the size of a two-pence coin beneath the skin of his left elbow, and this chip enabled him to intelligently control switches for doors, lights and similar devices. Four years later, he attempted to implant a tiny chip titled BrainGate to operate a robotic arm. Elon Musk's neurotechnology startup Neuralink plans to develop a microchip that can be implanted in the human brain to record and stimulate brain activity. The development's purpose is to invent a universal device that has the ability to directly connect human thoughts to computers, and realize the vision that non-physical thoughts can be freely extracted and stored.

As technology advances triumphantly, science fiction works in literature and film have played the role of critical reflection with a sobering attitude. From the early ethical inquiries in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake*, in which a biologist creates the Crakers, the stark contrast between bioengineered humans and the reality of destruction is formed. In the film *The Matrix*, machines control humans by keeping human's bodies immersed in nutrient fluids and inserting tubes into the back of human's head. At this time, thoughts no longer belong to humanity, and human's bodies become mere biological vessels. These cautionary narratives reveal the risks inherent in technological progress, amplifying them to extremes to provoke societal reflection on the existential dilemmas that humanity might face in such future scenarios. The philosophical narratives in science fiction are not mere allegories, and as Donna Haraway says, cyborg-like hybrids are not only objects in science fiction but also biological entities within social realities. The dilemmas depicted in these works mirror precisely the issues we are confronting today. For instance, when biotechnology reconstructs the human, do humans themselves still exist? How is the boundary between human and machine defined? What purpose does the posthumanist technological path serve after dissolving human identity? What future value does the posthuman hold? The path to self-transcendence mediated by biotechnology is strewn with ethical thorns, fraught with the crises ranging from the fragmentation of social structures to the nihilistic erosion of human meaning.

IV. THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN NIETZSCHE'S ÜBERMENSCH AND THE POSTHUMAN PREDICAMENT

Humanity indeed faces numerous dilemmas, but among them, there is one most critical issue, that is, we should ponder the existential question of "what we ought to become," rather than focusing solely on what we can do. In the face of advancements in biotechnology, humanity cannot overlook the role of technology in fostering spiritual growth and moral elevation, and this represents a more far-sighted perspective than merely valuing the technology for its utilitarian benefits. Neglecting spiritual prosperity and nourishment can give rise to the elimination of the very value and meaning of human existence, and then where would such alienating progress lead? Within the post-human predicament, the subjective existence of humanity faces the threat of decline due to the intervention of biotechnology. This value order challenges the definition of humanity. Meanwhile, Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* is a spiritual ideal that transcends traditional morality and nihilism. Therefore, a space for potential tension and dialogue between posthuman dilemmas and *Übermensch* philosophy is probable to be created.

Unlike posthumanism, which employs biotechnology to enhance functionality and shape superhumans that transcend the traditional concept of humans, Nietzsche's philosophical *Übermensch* has spiritual characteristics, and is a constructor of meaning, and emphasizes the self-creation and the role of willpower. The *Übermensch* not only endow his own existence with new

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significance, but also through strong willpower, actively shapes his life and the surrounding world around, creating new values. We can observe that Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch* takes humanity itself as the starting point, and internality and self-generation as the core, and then all transcendence and growth are fundamentally the results of the subjects' own construction and effort. In contrast, the means of transcendence offered by biotechnology often depend on external factors, such as technological devices, and this dependency instead weakens individual autonomy and the ability of self-determination. Technologies like brain-computer interfaces or neuropharmacology could even directly intervene in brain functions, and interfere with and manipulate an individual's thoughts and decisions. In such case, no matter how perfect a decision may seem, it becomes difficult to discern what extent a person's choices and actions are truly own. This leads to a false sense of meaning characteristic of techno-utopianism and results in a spiritual crisis.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche presents a thought-provoking conclusion, e.g., the greatness of human beings precisely lies in the fact that they are a bridge rather than an end, and human's lovability lies in being a process of transcendence and completion. From a philosophical perspective, this description of the dynamic existential process of human nature is an effective way to break free from technological dependence and overcome nihilism. Technological means should serve the powerful will to life, yet after becoming purposes, means reveal a deep evasion behind technological arrogance, that is, means dare to set human subjects as own purpose, and avoid the natural course of life. From another perspective, the affirmation of Nietzsche's philosophy of the *Übermensch* reflects a more objective and scientific attitude toward technology. Humanity embraces technology and utilizes it to enhance and hone the will to power, and always prioritizes the creation of intrinsic value.

The philosophy of the *Übermensch* serves as a powerful critical resource against technological nihilism, and inspires humanity to focus on an immanent turn, transcend technological narratives and pursue the spiritual leap and the re-creation of human subjective value.

V. TOWARD AN ETHICAL CONCEPTION OF ÜBERMENSCH EXISTENCE

The most profound dilemma arising from the complicity between biotechnology and posthumanism does not stem from technological risks themselves, but rather from its attempt to dissolve human agency, creativity and subjective existence, hanging over the concept of human according to a nihilistic logic concealed within a technological shell. Nietzsche's philosophy emphasizes that every action of the *Übermensch* springs from the affirmation and praise of life's immanence, possessing active autonomous creativity. This intellectual system offers a valuable and referable direction for addressing the posthuman predicament, that is, the future ethical vision should not lie in the functional enhancements brought by technology, nor in confining technology within frameworks compatible with outdated notions of humanity, but in transforming technological purposes into tools that can deeply experience life itself, and serve immanent transcendence. Thus, this system ultimately fosters the emergence of a *Übermensch* existence centred around a powerful and affirmative will to power.

The affirmation of humanity's subjective position in nature is beyond doubt, and the prerequisite and fundamental purpose of any technological implementation. Strictly regulating the development of technology ensures that no technological intervention undermines the existence of the individual. Under this concept, the doubt about subjectivity caused by brain-computer interfaces, as previously mentioned, would no longer arise. We must make it clear that algorithms do not absolutely replace human decision-making, but rather provide the human brain with more effective data to let the human brain analyse, select and ultimately make a decision. Gene-editing technology seeks not to create more perfect humans but to expand and innovate on the basis of respecting the uniqueness of life. Humans are not the carriers of technology; technology is the carrier, and humanity itself is the purpose. Correspondingly, the ethical value of technology should be judged by whether it enhances or diminishes the status of the user as a sovereign individual. At the same time, Nietzsche's philosophy offers a profound insight, that is, it believes that humans must grow through suffering and hardship because the subjective will needs to be honed to become stronger. If technological intervention leads humanity into a comfortable dumbed-down fool mode, it would be a path to extinction. Technological design should focus on contributing to shaping the growth environment, stimulating resilience and fostering creativity, and thus empower humans with the ability and motivation to confront future challenges. The ultimate vision of the *Übermensch* existence lies in the conversion from functional empowerment to value-based empowerment. The success of technological development should not be measured solely by quantitative metrics, but be evaluated by breakthroughs on deeper value and spiritual levels, such as whether richer cultural forms can be fostered or whether individuals have a greater sense of responsibility for self, others and society. We have reason to believe that humanity must not abandon themselves, and affirming and protecting own unique existence is the true homeward journey. Human-machine hybrids may exist in form, but never in inner spiritual level. This is both the redemption offered by Nietzschean philosophy to the posthuman predicament and the greatest radiant vitality in the technological era.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The predicament arising from the complicity between posthumanism and biotechnology stands as one of the most significant philosophical and ethical challenges confronting humanity in our era. We anticipate that evolving technologies will continue to transform our lives, and meanwhile, we also hope to avoid the erosion of human subjectivity and the alienation of human nature.

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Both in the present and the future, humanity will face numerous dilemmas and challenges. Especially, when technologies give rise to various confusions and myths, humanity needs to employ philosophical reflection and deliberation to achieve self-redemption and preserve the radiance of humanity.

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