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Artificial Intelligence and Humanity: A Posthumanist Study of *Klara and the Sun* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*

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Abstract

Posthumanism or post-humanism literally means “after humanism” or “beyond humanism”. It is an idea or a theoretical framework that questions the boundaries of anthropocentric existence. It explores the relationship between human and non-human. Humanism focuses on the importance of human potential for self-improvement and knowledge. It places humans at the centre of the universe. Whereas, Posthumanism questions the eccentric authority of humans over this world. Technology, which earlier served the needs of humans, now holds the potential to alter or replace them. Donna Haraway’s *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) employs the term of ‘cyborg’ as a metaphor for modern existence. It merges biological and technological parts of the world, symbolising their interconnectedness. It rejects the notions of strict duality in nature, such as human/machine, nature/culture, male/female, mind/body, self/other. It blurs the boundaries between these bifurcations. Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman* (2013) also questions the idea of ecocentric “man”. The advancement of artificial intelligence has raised a question on the traditional humanist possibilities of consciousness, ethics and survival. Contemporary literature reflects this drastic shift by highlighting the boundaries between the human and non-human. In this paper, we will analyse Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* (2021) and Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) through the theoretical frameworks of Donna Haraway’s cyborg theory and Rosi Braidotti’s posthumanism. This study will examine the future of humanity in the environment of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Posthumanism, Cyborg theory, Humanism, anthropocentric

Introduction

Donna Haraway in her seminal essay “*A Cyborg Manifesto*” (1985) introduces Cyborg as a hybrid concept which assimilates all the bifurcations in itself. It highlights the fluidity in movements of existing subjectivities. In her framework, she identifies this term as a metaphor for the posthuman identity, which is formed by machines, networks, and global data. It questions the anthropocentric views of human while rejecting the strict binaries of human/machine, natural/artificial, mind/body. The theory of cyborg destabilises the notion of whole and disciplinary dominance of humanism in the world. Rosi Braidotti’s describes the concept of posthumanism as something to challenge the traditional dominance of man in the universe. She talks about the over-universalising of experiences by humans. The rejection of the idea of putting the man on the top of the network of nonhuman existence in the universe subsidises the theory of posthumanism. To describe the theory of posthumanism in *Posthuman Knowledge*, Braidotti mentions:

The posthuman is not so much a dystopian vision of the future, but a defining trait of our historical context. I have defined the postman condition as the convergence of posthumanism on the one hand and post-anthropocentrism on the other, within an economy of advanced capitalism (Braidotti, 2013) ^[1]

Braidotti talks about the posthuman crisis or predicament, which is, living in the era of non-human dominance or co-existence. It will require the humans to think beyond the traditional humanistic values and restrictions and embrace the non-human beings. The concept of ‘universal man’ is put under trial to transform, from being the masters of the earth to being a part of the whole.

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In the novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro, the co-existence of human and robots in the natural world is portrayed. It gives special attention to manifestations of artificial intelligence, vulnerable ethics and redefinition of humanity. It narrates the story of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF) and Josie, a teenage girl suffering from serious illness. The robots like Klara are designed to become supporters and companions of children in a society dominated by the advanced artificial intelligence and genetic advancements. Klara lives with Josie as a non-human companion, as she is emotionally observant and can easily mimic human behaviours. Josie suffers from a fatal disease caused by a genetic enhancement process called as "lifting". Klara becomes a constant companion for her and even finds new solutions to get her cured. She adapts herself in her new home by observing the atmosphere and people around her. Klara notices the benefits of sun in the life of Josie, as it carries massive healing powers. Understanding the ancient rituals of worship to the sun, she herself makes a sacrifice of destroying a pollution machine, so that the sun is pleased by it and offers great health to Josie. This method, indeed works as Josie seems to be improving in her health conditions in few days. However, after her recovery, Josie forgets about Klara and starts living a new life. The future of Klara was left to be dumped in a yard filled with Artificial Friends (AFs). Nevertheless, it was the strong belief of Klara towards the sun, which made Josie regain her life.

Analysis

Cyborg is a state existing in the bifurcation of human and non-human agencies. Although, Klara is not mixture of human and non-human but she is a cultural and ethical representation of cyborg in natural world. She is engrossed in all the human-like activities and behaviour, such as worshipping the sun and making a sacrifice to attain rewards. The robot gradually starts living a decent human life, which eventually redefines humanity in perspective. She is emotionally involved with Josie, as she takes care after her illness and creates a special bond with her. In the Cyborg Manifesto, Haraway defines 'cyborg' as,

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. (Haraway 3)

Haraway's cyborg reveals how identities are formed and not inbuilt or innate. Klara's emotional bonding and devotion to Josie, declines the exclusive authority of human traits. The identity of being related and contributing to the life Josie, makes the existence of non-humans equal to that of humans. Furthermore, she states in her manifesto,

The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense - a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self-untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. (Haraway 5)

In other words, Cyborg has no gender in reality. It is part human and part machine character, which holds emotional intelligence like humans. It does not check any boxes of gender and identity. It is not a single entity but an accumulation of various elements coming together. In a post-gender world, it explores the possibilities of violence and segregation in humanist traditions while introducing a space for creativity and ingenuity.

The existence of Klara also raises a concern of human replacement through artificial intelligence. The fatal illness of Josie, had made her mother accept the death of Josie as the only future possible for her. That is why, she even wanted Klara to be the substitute of Josie after she dies. Josie's personality could be transferred into the system and memory of Klara, making the robot fill up the void of a human's life. It also highlights the identity of a human, merely as data which could be transferred to another. However, the disposal of Klara's body after the completion of her work and the recovery of Josie's health prioritises the anthropocentric nature in the use non-human elements. The dominance of humans in the universe has very lesser possibility to be diminished at any condition.

Moreover, the novel also raises an ecological concern towards the environment. Through artificial intelligence, robots can observe the various responses and instructions given to them and can improve their decision-making abilities. At one hand, where humans were continuously exploiting the natural environment through pollution and over-use of its resources, Klara offers a sacrifice which would save the world from pollution. Humans don't question the ethical and moralistic responsibilities of using nature and technology. As in the novel, human progressed through pollution, genetic interference and social division in society, without valuing the essence of mother earth. However, Klara being a robot values the sun and its eternal powers and destroys the Coatings machine to protect the sun. Her reverence and faith towards the sun emphasise the valuable non-human agencies.

The novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) by Philip K. Dick, is a science fiction which surrounds a dystopian world, affected by global nuclear war. The novel raises a question on the empathetic and humanistic aspects of society while dealing with the consequences of technological advancements. The story uncovers the life of Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter given the task of hunting down the humanoid robots. He is in a post-apocalyptic world, where social environment is destroyed and most animals are killed. He has to identify the rogue androids and destroy them. However, the identification of these highly intelligent robots is not quite easy as they seem to be the exact replica of humans. The only factor separating them from humans is their lack of empathy. These humanoid robots are called Nexus-6 models, which can easily mimic human behaviours and emotions. Deckard's journey of hunting down these robots makes him question his legitimacy of killing them. The constant killing of these robots, eventually blurs the difference between human and machines. In a post humanistic world, where the only trait to differentiate between human and machine is humanity or empathy, questions the level of empathy present in humans itself. While killing some of the androids, he starts feeling emotional towards them and questions his human values in a whole.

Moreover, Deckard meets a special character, John Isidore who was once affected by the war and has limited cognitive abilities. He lives alone in a ruined building and holds affection for the androids. He becomes a friend of one of the rogue androids, Pris. The robot becomes a source of attachment to Isidore and gives a sense of belonging to him in a world where he is unsociable to others. Through the character of Isidore, the presence of extreme loneliness, marginalised people and social alienation is portrayed. The recurring belief of humans to be the most humane creatures on earth, is consistently questioned in a dystopian world. Towards the end of the novel, Deckard finished his task and brings an artificial toad with himself. The toad, however, was ordered by his wife to be eaten by artificial flies.

In the novel, a device is invented to catch these androids, in which androids can be recognised on the basis of their biological data. The ironical element is the identification of a soul or human is done through the capillary movement and eye muscle reaction, which was supposedly passed by one of the androids. "But then the Voigt Empathy Test had been devised by the Pavlov Institute working in the Soviet Union. And no T-14 android—insofar, at least, as was known had managed to pass that particular test." (Dick ch. 3) This assessment makes the robots more human and humans more robotic in nature. Moreover, the religion of "mercerism" and "empathy box" works as a network for people to connect with each other. Isidore explains these things to Pris as,

But an empathy box," he said, stammering in his excitement, "is the most personal possession you have! It's an extension of your body; it's the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone. (Dick ch. 6)

The empathy box is something which separates the human and machines in the novel. It is a machine which allows them to merge their consciousness. Through the dominant use of electric devices, humanity remains to be merely a social structure than biological state. The dream of an "electric sheep" in the title, signifies to the presence of subjectivity attained through the various unconscious and internal thoughts of the androids. The "dream" is the only limitation given to the machines, which somehow appears to be losing its legitimacy to the humans.

The novel explores through the world of posthuman identity with the androids running loose and escaping their deaths. The creatures were created to be utilised by the humans and disposed right after the destructive results of the war. The clash between the humanist and post humanist notions of identity as the rough androids run continuously for their survival in an anthropocentric world. The saving of a toad by Deckard, showcases the renewal of moral beliefs in his heart. Even after learning that the toad was electric, he wanted to keep it as his own. This raises a question whether emotions lose its essence if it is electric in nature.

Cyborg is positioned to work as a hybrid identity, filling the gaps between humanism and technology, natural and mechanical. It questions the marked boundaries between the natural and artificial, while submitting a post humanist framework for the world. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology and genetic engineering, however mechanical in nature, work as a representative of identity, power and social relations. Klara and Pris symbolise the exterior

amalgamation of machines with the humans as they work as suitable partners to Josie and Isidore respectively. They are posthuman organisms, capable of working as an independent entity. They are neither fully machine nor fully human, yet possess the essential qualities of both. They have survive instincts, empathy, desires, self-awareness and societal functions. This proves the notions of posthuman identity, which is not innate but can be formed through observation and emulation. As mentioned by Haraway, "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden." (Haraway 6) Therefore, the posthuman world is capable of formulating its own structure of living and nature of being in the world.

Conclusion

Therefore, Ishiguro in his novel *Klara and the Sun* presents a common interference between human and non-human agencies. While he adopts a humanistic perspective in his work, he also presents a possible world of technological advancements and human ethical failures. The posthuman portrayal through Klara questions the superiority of humans over emotions and intelligence as compared to the other beings in the universe. Moreover, the method of genetic advancement "lifting" enables the transhumanistic ideals in the society. Transhumanism propagates the idea of enhancement of human condition through genetic engineering, cybernetics and biotechnology. It holds the intention of becoming "super humans" to diminish the human limitations and weaknesses. However, the misuse of technology through genetic interference can bring unimagined complications, which can end the precious lives of humans. Josie's character merges as a fine example for this, as she herself suffers due to genetic engineering. At one hand, where humans have forgotten their traditional and spiritual values in a technologically advanced world, robots like Klara entrust their complete faith towards them. Klara preserves the spiritual practice of humans in a world devoid of humanity. The framework of the novel reshapes the nature of humanity through the humanistic attributes given to robots- loyalty, nurturing, dedication and love. It highlights how technology reshapes human values and often diminishes it. The fear of non-humans conquering the world created by humans, should not remain to be a fighting cause against them. It should embrace the non-human existence while monitoring our inhuman activities. The shift from human to posthuman should change the pattern of thinking, not species.

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