Redefining Reality and Identity in the Post-Human Age

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Abstract

Reality and identity have been significant intellectual, philosophical, theological, and socio-political concerns over the time. During the Renaissance, there was a transition in reality and identity from theocentric to anthropocentric models, giving birth to the cult of individualism, which has been a major element of Renaissance, Enlightenment thought, and Modernism. However, post-human thought, which theoretically arose from structuralisms and post- structuralisms, rejected humanism and argued that reality, identity and subjectivity are shaped by language, desire, socio-economic systems, media, and technology. This paper attempts to look at this new dimension of philosophical thought which is redefining our understanding of reality and identity. It explores the influence of globalization, capitalism, and scientific advancements on the transformation of human agency into post-human manifestations. The role of the internet and digital infrastructure in reshaping societal and personal identities, leading to the cultivation of virtual realities, is scrutinized. Furthermore, the paper delves into the ramifications of rapid technological progress, including AI and cybernetics, which have led to the creation of cybernetic organisms and the assimilation of technology into human existence. Further the paper inquires how post-human thought challenges the longstanding humanistic principles that have fortified modernity. By navigating through these multifaceted dimensions, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the redefinition of reality and identity in the context of an increasingly post-human world.

Keywords: Existence; Humanism; Identity; Post-humanism; Reality.

Introduction

Reality and identity have been crucial components of human conscious-

ness towards understanding the nature of world. In various disciplines reality and identity have remained major concern of human society either socially, philosophically, intellectually and religiously. From Ancient times, in philosophy, reality and identity discourse is popular but modern understanding of identity and reality emerged from the era of Renaissance. Renaissance provided the necessary impetus to shift the view of identity from a theocentric to homocentric model. This shift gives birth to the cult of individualism, which had been a vital tenet of Renaissance, Enlightenment philosophy and Modernity. This individualism and subjectivity have been key components during Romantic and Victorian periods; the various developments of isms, such as Marxism, Communism, Utilitarianism, Industrialism etc. were possible because of the humanistic principles. Postmodern culture marks the shift from individualism and subjectivity to centralised identity politics. This shift occurs under the influence of corpocracy and techno-science leading to the decentralization of the human subject and the dissolution of subjectivity and individualism.

In the contemporary age, due to emergence of internet, social media, media consumption devices and simulacra have played an essential role in redefining reality and identity. As Steven Best and Douglass Kellner point out globalised obsession with scientific development, political hegemony and commercial growth have put the ethical, philosophical, spiritual and ecological wisdom, civilizations and cultures in serious extinction. Similarly, techno science and late capitalism have created diverse mutations in human identity, nature and lived experience of everyday life (Shaheen, 2020). The post human age is fundamentally changing our idea of nature of reality, identity and as Lars Schmeink says "social, political and technological changes have wrought on the conceptualisation of the human" (Schmeink, 41).

Theorising Posthumanism: Cultural and Philosophical Perspectives

In light of ontological, epistemological, scientific, and biotechnological strides achieved during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a seminal conceptual construct emerged - the posthuman. This construct signifies a critical departure from conventional notions of humanity, encompassing a spectrum of ideologies such as posthumanism, transhumanism, new materialisms, and the variegated terrains of antihumanism, posthumanities, and meta humanities. In accordance with the explication provided by Bostrom (2013), the posthuman is characterized as an entity endowed with at least one distinct capacity. This spectrum of capacities, inclusive of cognition, health, and emotional dimensions, wields a profound influence

on the human condition, concomitantly triggering repercussions within the intricate tapestry of the Earth's ecological equilibrium. The metamorphosis from the human to the posthuman constitutes an intricate response to the burgeoning cognizance of burgeoning technological advancements, the risks they engender - particularly those entwined with terrorism and international security concerns. Bostrom posits that the contours of the posthuman encompass both the hybridization and the cyborg assimilation of the human form.

However, prior to a comprehensive assimilation of the posthuman concept, an imperative comprehension of Posthumanism is requisite. Contemporary literary and cinematic portrayals, along with the theoretical tenets elucidated by scholars such as Fukuyama and Robert Pepperwell, often emphasize technological augmentations to the human form and depict dystopian visions of machines subjugating humans. This prevalent interpretation, in truth, aligns more aptly with transhumanism, which constitutes a facet of the broader realm of posthumanism.

Posthumanism, in essence, denotes a departure from conventional humanism and anthropocentrism. It transcends the constraints imposed by the conventional human paradigm and the historical dominance of humanistic perspectives, both of which are rooted in hierarchical societal constructs and anthropocentric assumptions. Posthumanism, as an intellectual construct, can be perceived as an erasure of exclusivity, embodying an empirical philosophy of mediation that strives to harmonize multifarious facets of existence within its expansive contextual purview.

As elucidated by Ferrando (2011), the terms "posthuman" and "posthumanism" found their genesis within the realm of postmodern literature. The prefix "post" here should not be misconstrued within the context of despair or confusion, in contrast to Habermas's assertion that modernity constitutes an ongoing endeavor requiring further substantiation. Lyotard's postmodern stance, in contrast, engages with modernity by means of questioning, reevaluation, and Freudian-like explorations, thereby evoking a nuanced perspective on the "post."

Likewise, the prefix "post" in "posthumanism" does not signify an absolute rupture from the legacy of humanism. Posthumanists' discourse does not aspire to erect sepulchers of textual critique against humanism; rather, it ought to adopt the form of a critical praxis nested within humanism itself. This praxis entails not mere lamentation but an active engagement with the contours of humanist discourse, as expounded by Badmington (22).

The posthumanistic approach encompasses both postmodern and deconstructive methodologies for probing humanism. Woolfe astutely contrasts this approach with humanism, asserting that the discourse of posthumanism endeavours to redefine the peripheries enclosing the modern philosophical apprehension of the human condition. Posthumanism denotes an evolution of cognitive paradigms transcending contemporary sociocultural confines, wherein the quest for truth occurs within the tapestry of the postmodern context. In this pursuit, it decisively repudiates former humanistic endeavours to construct anthropological universals steeped in presupposed anthropocentric axioms (Wolfe).

Posthumanism manifests diverse categories, as illuminated by Roden (2010), characterizing it as both critical and speculative. Furthermore, Pramod K Nayar, in his seminal work on Posthumanism, delineates two principal branches: ontological and critical posthumanism. The ontological variant mirrors the contours of transhumanism, while critical posthumanism rebuffs the pedestals of human exceptionalism and instrumentalism. Andy Miah, in his insightful essay on the "Critical History of Posthumanism", discerns a bifurcation into philosophical and cultural posthumanism. The latter probes the sociocultural nuances, scrutinizing notions of acceptance and alterity within the posthuman society, with an emphasis on medical augmentations fostering societal equity. Cultural posthumanism also dismantles anthropological presumptions and the hegemony of human superiority, advocating for parity between animate and inanimate entities. Conversely, philosophical posthumanism critiques humanistic tenets through a philosophical lens, underscoring a multifaceted redefinition of humanism across cultural, political, and philosophical dimensions.

The Enlightenment's prevailing notion of human supremacy has encountered formidable challenges within the milieu of posthumanism. Moreover, humans have consistently exhibited resistance to the prospect of subordination or equivalence, thereby underscoring the intricate interplay of acceptance and acceptability inherent in human psychology. This palpable humanistic superiority complex finds itself subject to scrutiny and subversion within the contours of posthumanist thought. Reflecting upon the Enlightenment's subversion of humanistic boundaries, posthumanism decisively rebuffs an array of entrenched human assumptions—ranging from anthropological to political and scientific—effecting a profound recalibration of the very essence of human identity. Effecting such recalibrations necessitates not solely the decentering of the human within a mosaic of discourses, including those of evolution, ecology, and technology, but also a comprehensive investigation of these discourses to unveil

the latent underpinnings of humanism's anthropocentric and normative constructs of humanness.

Posthumansim categorically is divided into two different views in the book of Hayles. The first, identified as apocalyptic, propounds a reduction of human identity to an intricate informational pattern. This perspective posits the detachment of the human form from this flux of information, facilitating the potential transference of conscious cognition into computational systems. Termed "apocalyptic," this stance is marked by the proclamation of an impending demise of humanity by its adherents. Hayles, however, inclines toward an alternative interpretation of posthumanism as an impetus to reevaluate the very essence of human existence. This second viewpoint underscores the reconsideration of the core components of human nature. Posthumanism, possibly seen as an extension of anti-humanist thought, disrupts conventional paradigms without heralding the absolute demise of humanity. Instead, it signifies a shift in perceiving humanity, engendering contemplation on the essence that distinguishes humans from mere machines. This dichotomy prompts a reflective examination of the facets that constitute human identity and provokes contemplation on the intricate differentiation that elevates humans beyond mere mechanistic entities. (Hayles)

Critical voices within the realms of the humanities and arts, entrenched within the ethos of posthumanism, often critique transhumanism for its perceived entwinement with the very values emblematic of Enlightenment humanism and classical liberalism. Notably, philosopher Shannon Bell contends that transhumanism unwittingly perpetuates the tenets of Enlightenment values such as scientism. This perspective emerges from the contention that technology, often harnessed as a tool of empowerment within humanist paradigms, was, in fact, borne out of the crucible of industrialization, predicated upon utilitarian precepts that prioritized human utility.

Further in Zaretsk's *Bio art* in Question Interview describes a similar discourse that "altruism, mutualism, humanism are soft and slimy virtues that underpin liberal capitalism. Humanism has always been integrated into discourses of exploitation; colonialism, imperialism, democracy and of course, American democratization one of the serious flaws in transhumanism is the importation of liberal humanism values to the bio techno enhancement of the human. Posthumanism has a much stronger critical edge of attempting to develop through enhancement new understandings of self and others, essence, consciousness, intelligence, reason, agency in-

timacy, life, embodiment, identity, and the body" (Zaretsky). In sum, this discourse underscores the tectonic shift transpiring from Enlightenment's humanistic ideals to the critical dimensions of post humanism, prompting a revaluation of fundamental human concepts within a rapidly evolving technological and philosophical landscape.

As posited by Lars Schmeink, posthumanism encapsulates a vantage point that engages contemporary society through the lens of a posthumanist paradigm. This paradigm comprehends the ramifications of technological strides on the very essence of human existence, probing the intricate ramifications arising from societal, political, and technological metamorphoses that have inexorably reshaped our comprehension of the essence of humanity (Schmeink 41).

Evolution of Identity and Reality

In the contemporary milieu, the confluence of the internet's emergence, the ubiquity of social media, the proliferation of media consumption devices, and the proliferation of simulacra have orchestrated a pivotal role in the nuanced redefinition of the constructs of reality and identity. This transformative narrative is vividly underscored by the assertions of Steven Best and Douglass Kellner, who contend that the fervent pursuit of scientific advancement, political dominance, and commercial expansion on a global scale has imperilled the very fabric of ethical, philosophical, spiritual, and ecological wisdom, thereby precipitating the impending extinction of civilizations and cultures. Equally consequential is the symbiosis between techno-science and late capitalism, engendering a plethora of permutations within the realm of human identity, the natural world, and the quotidian lived experience (Shaheen, 2020).

Indeed, the epoch of the posthuman has ushered in a transformative epoch, fundamentally remolding our conceptions of reality and identity. As aptly articulated by Lars Schmeink, this paradigm shift bears testimony to the profound impacts that social, political, and technological paradigms have wrought upon the very contours of our conceptualization of humanity itself (Schmeink, 41).

Identity is as an integral facet of subjectivity, a notion highlighted by Corner (2011) who characterizes it as the "space of self" encompassing both conscious and subconscious strata. Mansfield (2000) delves into the intricate realm of identity, deeming it a constructed entity moulded by discourse. In the contemporary landscape enriched by advancing technolo-

gies, the convergence of identity and subjectivity assumes a crucial stance. The fabric of human subjectivity, viewed expansively, remains intricately intertwined rather than segregated, an intrinsic thread interwoven across diverse life forms. In this intricate narrative, media's role emerges as noteworthy, casting its influential mantle within the context of identity and subjectivity.

Social media platforms have become a conduit for the exploration and experimentation of our identities and realities, a natural inclination intrinsic to human nature. By utilizing digital platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram, individuals can forge digital identities, enabling the creation and dissemination of personal profiles and events to both familiar and unfamiliar audiences. This process, facilitated through online access, engenders a fusion of mass and personal communication, fostering a virtual milieu within the contours of one's living space. In the contemporary technological age, media exercises a pivotal role in shaping not only our perceptions of reality and identity, but also our beliefs and values. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that various factors within society, including personal interactions and real-world events, also contribute significantly to the formation of our reality and identity.

Media, within the digital environment, fosters a pluralistic arena, affording the recognition and articulation of myriad ideas and sentiments without necessitating physical presence—a salient feature of the post human era (Gunduz). Notably, the creation of digital identities finds multifarious applications, particularly within the realms of e-commerce and academia. The commercial landscape, exemplified by Amazon, Flipkart, Zomato, and Swiggy, highlights how digital identities enable remote transactions devoid of physical presence, concurrently accumulating data to delineate our preferences and inclinations, often surpassing our own awareness.

In academia, the paradigm shift spurred by the post-Covid era has amplified the influence of virtual identities. Academic institutions now employ digital personas to engage with students, especially in partially remote learning setups. This virtual escapism facilitates uninhibited expression and interaction, enabling individuals to transcend the limitations of physical reality.

The creation of virtual identities offers a realm of possibilities, enabling users to establish multifaceted personas that may deviate from their actual attributes—altering gender, social status, or even assuming fictionalized personas in an intricate web of advanced technology. These virtual

constructs, though distinct from physical communities, construct novel patterns of interaction and communication (Castells, 2005, p.479), thereby accentuating the blurring boundaries between virtual and real-life roles.

Ultimately, our conception of identity is shaped not solely by social media, but also by the ever-evolving vistas of advanced technology, biotechnology, neural science, and genetic engineering. According to Stuart Hall (1996) the notion of personal identity is unveiled as a historically contingent and inherently fragmented construct, resisting a singular unifying essence. The profound inquiry into the complexities of human identity reverberates through the dimensions of culture, history and language, engendering a tapestry of interrelated queries. Henceforth, the human self is cast as an intricate continuum of becoming, ceaselessly engaged in an evolutionary process of evolving. The redefinition of human identity, evident in the synthesis of postmodern culture, is inexorably intertwined with these transformative forces.

The swift advancement witnessed in communication technologies has facilitated a global convergence of cultures, amplifying intercultural interactions. Within the virtual landscape, digital platforms offer a conduit for individuals to establish connections, effectively creating a virtual identity through which they engage in interactions. (Khazree) This resonates with Albert Einstein's assertion that "Imagination is more important than knowledge," highlighting the expansive potential of imagination to fuel innovation and evolution, particularly in the realm of modern technology within the posthuman epoch.

The contemporary proliferation of advanced technologies, such as AI, robotics, and Full Immersion Virtual Reality (FIVR), has engendered a transformative environment known as the virtual realm. This environment, often indistinguishable from physical reality, heightens the sense of presence, exemplifying the fusion of reality and virtuality characteristic of the posthuman era. Films like "Avatar: The Way of Water" epitomize this trend, where technology, such as motion capture (mo-cap), is harnessed to bridge the divide between the real and virtual, offering audiences an immersive experience that blurs the boundaries between the two realms. AI algorithms also contribute to the film's intricate facets, influencing everything from special effects to plot development.

Contemporary technology's reach extends beyond social media, permeating various sectors, including online gaming. The gaming industry's exponential growth is evident, encompassing platforms such as playstations,

PCs, and mobile phones. These platforms, fostering a virtual space, enable individuals to assume identities and engage in activities within realms like PUBG, Apex Legends, and Diablo. This trend extends to online casinos and sports betting, epitomizing the diverse application of technology. Technological advancements, including blockchain implementation, have fortified online gaming environments, ensuring secure transactions. AI services enhance gaming dynamics, while new graphics technologies and augmented/virtual reality (AR/VR) interfaces replicate real-life and immersive gaming experiences.

In essence, technology serves as a vital conduit, reshaping narratives across domains, from filmmaking to social media and online gaming, redefining realities within the posthuman era. It is this technological canvas that aids in the creation of new dimensions, enabling individuals to traverse alternate realms, reimagine identities, and ultimately contribute to the reconfiguration of human existence within the context of postmodern culture.

In the broader context, the redefinition of our identity and reality extends beyond the realm of social media, encompassing advanced technology, biotechnology, neural science, and genetic engineering. The ascent of technology-driven machines, in particular, underscores a shift that diminishes the prominence of human individuality, physical embodiment, consciousness, and the inherent cognitive prowess—a transformation perceptibly discernible. Dinello highlights an alternate approach to the enhancement of the human form, as biotech researchers channel their efforts into refining the human body via genetic manipulation, rather than substituting organic elements with mechanized components. This recalibration of human essence harbours implications deemed disconcerting by Fukuyama, who apprehensively explores the transformative potential of contemporary biotechnology. This transformative power, with the capacity to reshape human nature, portends the advent of a posthuman phase, prompting a shift in the paradigm of human existence. Schmeink delves into the frontiers of genetic engineering, examining the instrumental tools at its disposal, such as DNA splicing, germline engineering, and human genome mapping. These tools, by virtue of their biochemical agency, engender the potential for the creation of genetically augmented posthuman entities.

The discourse surrounding human identity holds a longstanding position within anthropological discourse, historical narratives, religious doctrines, and cultural frameworks. The underpinnings of human subjectivity and

consciousness are regarded as products of cultural constructs that wield considerable influence over the contours of human identity. However, it is equally imperative to acknowledge the pivotal roles played by individual diversity, intuitive cognition, the processing of social information, and physical attributes in the intricate mosaic of human identity and reality formation. Recent strides in biotechnology and genetic engineering have precipitated a re-evaluation of entrenched perspectives on human identity, traditional humanism, and the very fabric of our reality comprehension. The exploration of posthuman identities and the interplay between humans and posthumans furnish invaluable insights into the nuanced nuances of human identity, casting a revealing light on the potential dystopian consequences embedded within contemporary advancements in genetic engineering.

Conclusion

Posthumanism becomes an alternative thought which helps in comprehending human existence by challenging conventional notions of human identity and reality. By decentring the anthropo-centric assumptions of humanism, posthuman thought acknowledges the coexistence of humans with other non-human entities such as animals, machines and ecosystems. Technology has become a prominent factor influencing the identity and reality in post-human age. With the development of virtual social media accounts, AI, search engines, websites our identities have been digital. Further, the growth in biotechnical field, with the introduction genetically modified organisms have led to revolutionary change in nature of human identity and reality. Hence the rapid change in identity and reality need not be considered as end of humanity in Fukuyama's term, but instead it is an extension of anti-humanist thought where one form of thinking ends and a different form emerges into discourse.

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