An Ethical Appraisal of Posthumanism

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ABSTRACT

Technology has already been part of our way of life. It is being used in the social world for social innovation and communication. It has become significant in human world for creation, but has also become an instrument for destruction. It challenges human reason for it becomes the reason itself. Such human reason is the essence of humanity, hence, humanism is equated to human reason. Likewise, it claims the ending of humanism for it enters in the discourse of posthumanism in the technological realm. In this case, there is a need to clarify the idea of posthumanism that at same time uphold and will robust the sense of humanity. The study aims to articulate ethical concepts based on the idea of posthumanism as the study argues posthumanism as the synthesis of man and technology relation. The research design is qualitative in nature specifically a philosophical research employing two levels of analysis; synthesis and constructivism. The former is used to explicate and consolidate ideas on posthumanism and the latter is used to form concepts and principles on the ethical valuations. The study then presented threefold principles based on the ethical valuations on posthumanism vested in neutral position.

Key words: Technocentrism, technology, posthumanism, Ethical Appraisal

Introduction

The outcome of human deeds is the measure of his productivity. It makes things historical, how things evolve and how things are modified by human out of his necessity. All efforts he made are meant to change the world, that is, material in nature. It can be said that the material outcome defines his progress and changes in this human world. He crafts things for his improvement and improve his reality which suggests his development. One of the commendable parts is the invention of machineries vis-sa-vis (transformed to) technology.

Ours is the age of technology. All institutions such as education, government, family, and religion are undeniably deemed to using technology for social interaction making ourselves significant and our activity efficient in this world. Technology advances in facilitating the learning and learning becomes accessible any time. It is being used to make transparency. It serves as a tool for communication. It serves as avenue to transfer one’s perspective about morality. Technology facilitates humankind in his daily activity. Hence, technology becomes the full development (materially) of man.

Such aspects of technology in the daily life become, at the same time, the source of human reason. One cannot just fully rely on his senses and mind for validation of truth and veracity. He needs instrumental device to validate truth and give him veracity; in effect, it becomes the reason itself. He then becomes enslave of his own creation. Technology impedes his meditative thinking. And, he becomes fully submissive to technology. He lacks creativity in his effort to make things meaningful. This is the human condition. This is the context of man and society.

Given the relationship of man and society in the context of technology introduces the idea of posthumanism. Posthuman means many things. Posthumanism is the umbrella term for the different movements of school of thoughts in social, critical, and philosophical posthuman such as transhumanism, cyborgism, metahumanism, and antihumanism. This idea is supported by Pepperell’s idea that posthuman

1 Heideger, Memorial Address
2 Francesca Fernando, Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism and New Materialisms
3 Difference Relations, Existenz 8, no. 2 (Fall 2013):
Ibid., 26.
condition is indistinguishable so far. It can be distinguished if there will be an emergence of the posthuman era. Moreover, it will undergo profound transformation of human organism and technology to be distinguished, or simply biotechnological transformation.4 For Wolfe, posthumanism is opposite to transhumanism and any technological embodiment. It is not to lose human autonomy, rather it is a new mode of thinking based on the historical development and growth of man not only in the biological state but also in the technological world that comes after cultural repressions and fantasies.5 Posthumanism is already established in the socio-economic sphere as seen in socio-capitalism, production and consumption. Posthumanism is more or less a new entity that is capable to work efficiently through blending of human organism and techno-mechanical entity. This entity is the cyborgism), or cyber visionaries. This is the virtual consciousness that facilitates transference of organic being into a digitized form.6 Post-humanism is a new perspective in the materialistic world as human evolves and are capable to adapt. It is imminent for him to change and develop his perspective.7 For Hayles, to become post-human is simply to become robotics in mastering the technology, artificial intelligence that will give us a new way of thinking and new way of living in this world in the possibility in future.8 The notion of Hayles on posthumanism remains ideal for Nick Bostroms that he argued; it is just a possibility, and Hayles did not propose criteria of posthuman. He set criteria of post-human that has at least a capacity of long health-span and robotic cognition. This is through human enhancement without re-coursing to new technological means.9 Post-human is a condition of humanity; it is an interactive technique using the unconscious drives that persists when it comes to its crisis.10 The ideas presented on posthumanism also affirms the existence of mode of being of posthumanism, the possibility of or already existing mode of posthumanism in the way cyborgism and technological embodiment-as concept of Hayles and Botrom- will be banished in the future due that it is merely temporary. Possibilities are continuously existed and therefore, new material agencies beyond posthuman can be formed.11 Culturally, posthumanism is synonymous with the history of technology, a social transformation of humanity that is transformed by technology that is nevertheless the component is the technological change in the contemporary thought.12 The theory of posthumanism will go beyond to the thing so called human nature.13 To go beyond, because in the context of postmodernism, it is the decentering in humanity of humanity so it is the build ways of our being in the future.14 In the future, everything may be controlled by the technologies or machines; the body and technology that will make the fictious cyborg realized in this contemporary world.15 The new entity from becoming survival of mankind in the excessive environmental destruction and consumption is arising of the human-technology relationship.16 Socio-culture affects man, the technological condition ways of

4 Robert Pepperell, Posthuman Condition Consciousness beyond the Brain (Hardback USA, 2003), 1.
5 Carry Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xvii.
8 N. Katherine Hayles, How Do We become Posthuman? (University of Chicago, 1999), vi.
13 Pedro Bernaldes, Bringing the Human in (Humanism, Posthumanism, and Humancentrism) (Manila Philippines: PAP, 2006).
14 Neil Badmington, Theorizing Posthumanism (Project muse), 21-22.
15 Jennifer Wilson, Of Machines and Meat: Cyberpunk, the Postmodern Condition and a Posthuman Reality.
knowing and being (humanity) is approaching new form of subjectivity, a being that will alter and develop the dualistic sovereign subject by the humanist liberal model.\(^{17}\)

With the culture and different conceptions of posthuman, Rosi Broidotti arrived at that condition of posthuman that is a proliferation of the categorical construction of nature and society. Whereas, it is a new subject of new meta-narratives from the new way of thinking and living, a new subjectivity devising a new social, ethical and discursive schemes of profound transformation as we undergo. It is a life beyond self.\(^{18}\) On the one hand, there is a need to think of what we are doing, the possibility of the future, the biological nature, and our interactions on the earth, and the technoscience that transforms those to its development because public discourse has been left behind.\(^{19}\) Thereby, having posthuman condition is a performative agent that interacts in social sphere, enjoined with means of technologies. It is now then the interaction of science, technology, and culture in the society.\(^{20}\)

Addressing the problem in this paper about the technological alienation, it revolves solely on the intensification in socio-economic terrain; fetishism in commodity and machine labor that leads toward the estrangement and objectification. It is in the sense that the machines made by the capitalist for the commodity and fetish of man demoralize human and they become a subject of exchange-value within the economic sphere.\(^{21}\) This can now be in the existence of postmodern culture from the new technologies. We are experiencing a great transformation of human identity and social relations. It can be said that alienation is yet overcome by humanity. This is due to the complexity and conflict of human life in relation to human beings, nature, culture and technology.\(^{22}\) When it comes to alienation, it goes to depict isolation. Socially, it deprives the social connectedness and becomes an impediment of man’s well-being.\(^{23}\)

With all the manifold contentions on the idea of posthumanism set forth as the end of humanism, it poses a question, ‘how can we reconcile the idea of posthumanism that tries to resolve the man and technology relation? Our study clarifies in contrary the conception of posthumanism based on neutral or dominant conception of posthumanism that robust our sense of humanity making it ethical in the technological realm. To do this, there is a need to discuss the ideas on posthumanism transcribed by the posthumanists like of Rosi Braidotti, Carry Wolfe, Roselyn Deprose, and R.L Rutsky (I); Evaluate the Idea of technology in (II); Evaluate ethical arguments on posthumanism as ethical appraisal of posthumanism (III).

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17 Louise Lepage, *Posthuman Perspective and Postdramatic Theatre; the Theory and Practice of Hybrid Ontology in Katie Michelle’s the Waves* (Royal Holloway: University of London).
21 Amy E. Wendling, “Karl Marx On Technology and Alienation,” (Creighton University, 2009).
Conceptual Framework Model

Figure 1. Constructivist framework Model of the Ethical Appraisal of Posthumanism

Rosi Braidotti, Carry Wolfe, Roselyn Deprose, and R.L Rutsky transcribed neutral position on posthumanism. Their ideas need to be evaluated. Apparently two things are present, first, it is human-centered and second, it is the idea of overcoming technology. These ideas at hand are sufficient enough to have ethical valuation given the problematization on technology. Given such, it recourses to promote sense of humanity. Humanism as equated to reason, upholds autonomy of the self, promoting care of the body, and seeks for authenticity of the self. Given the technological realm, there is a challenge to robust the humanity thru posthumanism.

Methods

The study is qualitative in nature specifically a philosophical research. Two levels of analysis were employed in the study: synthesis and constructivist approach. Synthesis served as a tool to consolidate ideas and concepts making posthuman fitted in the objectives, that is, to clarify the idea of posthumanism based on neutral position. Constructivist approach served as a tool to construct ethical concepts according to ethical valuations of posthumanism. The main texts used are: What is Posthumanism? by Carry Wolfe, Mutation, History and Fantasy in the Posthuman by R.L. Rutsky, The Posthuman Challenge by Rosi Braidotti, Toward an Ethico-Politic of the Posthuman: Foucault and Merleau Ponty by Rosalyn Diprose. The materials for analysis are acquired from the main and secondary texts.
Discussion and Analysis

Man and society: Man is sent in his earthly life simply to live, while living he realizes the nature and society. He cannot but look for others and interact with others to make meaning and organize his life as part of society. It becomes fundamental to be with others, to use his reason, and to subscribe to the universal norm of idea of good that will guarantee sense of humanity and harmony. Technology, at instance, challenges such assumptions. It makes the living of man complicated. It tries to remove the capacity of human reason to dig deeper. It tries to become part of human body. It tries to impede human to interact with others. It becomes crisis of human reason.

Idea of Posthumanism in Dominant Position

The posthumanism in the dominant position affirms on the self-proliferation of posthumanism, thus, technological embodiment is not necessary. It is a means of using technology as the material. Rosi Braidotti roots the posthuman from Anti-humanism and humanism to arrive at critical posthumanism to end these two oppositions. The purpose is not to deny humanism nor anti-humanism but to construct and elaborate further an alternative view of human subjectivity. She cited three strands of posthumanism. First, posthuman is rooted on moral philosophy; second, analytic posthumanism is formed by science and technology and third, her conception of posthumanism that is beyond analytic posthuman and develop affirmative perspective on the posthuman subject. For Braidotti, Posthumanism is a critical theory. Its objective is however the humanity itself. She does not negate humanism. Hence, it is a reconstruction of two opposing disciplines - anti-humanism and humanism.

Carry Wolfe’s version takes an analogy of Lyotard’s rendering of postmodernism. For her, posthuman comes before and after cultural repression. She gave meaning of it through interpreting the historical and cultural context of humanity in contemporary world. Posthumanism comes before in a sense that human being is not alone and is not just a biological structure. Rather it is present in technological world that is continuously evolving with the technicity of tools and archival mechanisms. It comes after in a way that decentering humanity is having imbrication in technical, medical, and informatic world. The culture now in human history of humanity is no longer the issue of discourse. Rather it is the world and life sciences that surrounds humanity. This theoretical paradigm proceeds towards a new mode of thoughts that come after repression and fantasies in our culture.

Roselyn Deprose acknowledges the critical notion of human agency. Human agency that is based on free will, reason and voluntariness is the classical normativity of human. By this, human progress is inevitable. However, it is being criticized by human animality and nonhuman being (technology) in this contemporary time. Technology and human animality challenge human agency. With this scenario, (classical notion) human agency is being criticized, at the same time, nonhumanity is defining humanity. It limits human dominance over everything else. This becomes the pathway on posthumanism that is, to entertain technology. This becomes on the other hand the ontology of posthumanism. Human agency as decentered in critical ways yet, life can be reassembled through practice of nonhuman role (technology). Given this kind of framework, Deprose deals in socio-politics of posthuman that is, to open the world for ethics since posthuman is life and technology. It is still transformative through ethics that is taking care of responsibility of others, and attending to the invitation of the call of life.

24 Anti-humanism is a critique on humanism through historical events such as human crisis that decline the progress of mankind regardless of self-regulatory and teleological ordained reason. See Rosi Braidotti, Anti-humanism, The Posthumanism Challenge (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
26 Ibid.
28 Carry Wolfe, What is Posthumanism? (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xvii.
29 Ibid., xviii.
R.L. Rutsky believes that in this contemporary time, posthuman cannot be easily identified because of various trends and strands of Posthumanism. Yet, he still adheres to the concept of posthuman that is not necessarily technologically embodied. He said:

I want to argue here, in contrast to some claims about the posthuman, that the concept of the posthuman has nothing to do with a physical, genetic of biotechnological evolution of the human body or mind. The posthuman is not predicated upon historical evolution in the physical form of humanity; it does not depend on genetic research drugs or biotechnological prostheses to enhance or augment the human body.\(^{30}\)

This claim however proves the concept of posthuman in the dominant strand where it is totally opposite to the analytic posthuman. It is a negation of cultural patterns in decentering humanity through mutation. On the other hand, the focus can now be post in a query that –What now the posthuman given the negation of technological embodiment? With the principle and argument presented, for Rutsky, any notion of the posthuman is to be more than merely an extension of human that is moved beyond the dialectic control and lack of control.\(^{31}\)

Using these ideas, posthumanism is formed through twofold characters: Ontological notion and New Materialism. The former refers to the ideas of nature and existence of things that include and are governed by meta-narratives of the subject which give the notion of things. In this case, we can place Carry Wolfe’s and R.L Rutsky’s Posthumanism in the ontological notion. They depict the nature of Posthuman – as for Wolfe- instilling the autonomy of oneself, extension of humanity as a new way of living, a new mode of thought from the liberation of cultural repression, but not necessarily the technological embodiment. For R.L Rutsky, there are two important claims and points that are taken, posthuman cannot be easily identified but, any notion of posthuman should go beyond the ‘dialectic control’ and posthumanism has nothing to do with physical biotechnological evolution. These two describe the quiddity and entity of posthuman in the context of ‘what is and is not’ though materially, it is not concrete enough. They try to capture the totality of posthuman by giving some ontological characteristics. Still, it deters the incompleteness in seeing the posthuman in time and culture context. The latter refers to a category that deals with the presentation of technology. This practical characterization on how human must deal with it. Given the shift on material world (technology), new materialism is anchored on certain practices and practicality to arrive in the conception of posthumanism. In other sense, ontological notion pertains to the general level of term and ideas. New materialism pertains to the practical level to realize posthumanism. In the context of new materialism as a criterion, we can place Deprose’s and Braidotti’s Posthumanism. There are important assertions that they pose regarding posthumanism. For Braidotti, it is the relationship of non-human (technology) and humanity that we must reconstruct. The humanity is the object of posthumanism to arrive at an alternative view of subjectivity through technology and human means. For Deprose, this is taking care of the responsibility of others (to be governed by socio-political perspective and this is to open to ethics for the governing means in technology and humanity). Technology can be used in the field of health and Medicare through governmental policies. This becomes socio political ethic of Posthuman where technology is a means to practice nonhuman (technology) and to open ourselves in the ethical view of the human and technology relations.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Ontological Notion and New Materialism

The two categories are epistemological boundaries that help us to know and conceptualize posthumanism. Each of them has strengths and weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses need to be distinguished and qualified in order to fill and tie-up to arrive at the synthesis of posthumanism.

Ontological notion remains a notion and an idea that defines posthumanism and cease only in the culture context. This is not however, concrete in its form. Wolfe and Rutsky just made a form of posthumanism. Technological embodiment is not necessary and it is not to lose the autonomy of the self and to go beyond the dialectic control. These present to us of what should the posthuman be. As such, these become a general form of posthumanism for us to view its existence and nature. Given the context of our contemporary time, this already challenges the technological alienation by knowing and forming what posthuman is. This strengthens and extends our sense of humanity in our contemporary time given the extreme force of technology. However, it lacks practical operations and mechanisms to realize that ends of humanity are the ontological notion of posthuman. In addition, it is not materially concrete in a sense, it cannot be realized in the practical material

\(^{30}\) R.L. Rutsky, Mutation, History and Fantasy in the Posthuman (San Francisco State University), 05.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 111.
world especially in social interaction that includes and involves the society, technology, and man. Thus, to offer a form of posthumanism is not enough for it lacks practicability. This depicts a pure idea and form of posthuman which are generic in its nature without sense of practicability.

For new materialism, Deprose and Braidotti dealt on the practicability of how the posthuman must be. They show us the practicability of posthuman that through practices of man in relation to technology, we arrive at the conception of posthumanism. Such practicability is not far from ethical means. Through good means in technology towards the other, it becomes a form of (new) subjectivity as offered by the practicability of posthuman. In dealing with technology by man, it depicts man as an agent the technology represents the current (technological) society that requires to be seen in ethics. Posthuman in new materialism is materially concrete to arrive in such conception. Posthumanism becomes ethical by the spirit of the good means. But in every human act, it requires to have governing principles and ideas to do and to be in dealing the society and as the presentation of our ends. Hence, in new materialism it has no deep justification for it to be done. It is in the epistemic frame to conceive and arrive at posthumanism.

When we inquire of posthumanism, we subscribe to our cultural ideals that are vague as a whole, and we also subscribe to our practicability towards its conception. Yet, we cannot to identify given these two contrast classes. We could not refer whether where the best preference posthumanism. As such, what then is posthumanism? The answer will depend on the duality or multiplicity of posthumanism. But given the two classes, we can arrive at synthetic posthuman through tying up each category and filling the flaws by one another. However, such notion and practicability of posthumanism recommend us to reconcile those dualistic epistemological concerns for us to arrive at the holistic perspective of it. For posthuman to become synthetic, it has to be seen and synthesized from two epistemological boundaries. We can be fixed on such notion of posthuman as far as the objective is to defy the problem on alienation. It is seen on nature of ontological notion that is full autonomy of the self and detaching from the technological embodiment. This suggests that posthuman is feasible in identical idea as posthuman. It requires a posthumanistic practicability that is, the idea of ontological notion will be seen on it. The new materialism is not just the practicability, but the notion of posthuman as the extension of humanity manifested in the same practicability. Such practicability is the criterion for notion to be shown wholly as a posthuman.

Posthuman, ergo, is not the robot, cyborg, nor transhuman. We are the posthuman in this post/contemporary period – we are in the here and now. This is not to transform to any biotechnological embodiment. With our autonomous self we are able to extend our sense of humanity in this technological realm that suggests new way of life, new way of thinking and living that totally differs from the previous centuries. Given the background that humanity had lived with that is technocentric, we go beyond the dialectic control - control from our means of technology as we use it in our daily living. Through overcoming technological alienation, we practice and exercise our ability to have a new alternative subjectivity in a way of man-technology relation towards others in which we do not harm them and we become responsible to them. Through this, we can say that we are fully beyond dialectic control in this technological realm as our new way of life. Our new way of living and thinking should go beyond dialectic control with our autonomous self, at the same time, on practicability in finding our alternative subjectivity in being responsible(towards the good) of others, given the technology.

Ethical Appraisal of Posthumanism

Our idea of ethics is anchored on normative values like of virtue ethics, deontology, utilitarianism, and scholastic ethics that we hold dear deemed in our practical reason and action that promote sense of humanity. Therefore, any relational action in accordance to those norms becomes ethical. The ethical view on posthumanism in this study, given the extrapolations on posthumanism, is rooted in the (realization of)

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32 Virtue ethics is deemed to understand human character as a basis of ethics. (see Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics).
33 Deontology as normative ethics is principle based: act is ethical insofar it can be endorsed through universalizability test.(see Kant, Immanuel. Metaphysics of Morals)
34 Utilitarianism based on John Stuart Mill rests on the principle which states that ‘a greatest good of the greatest number’ suggests the equity of action for regardless of the nature of the act, insofar as it can promote happiness of the greater number it is ethic (see Mill, John Stuart. on Utilitarianism).
35 Scholastic ethics is the rigorous norm that oversees the nature of the act to be good towards the ends. (see Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologiae).
overcoming the dialectic control of technology and instill humanity as locus of discourse (human centered) as extension of humanism. In such a way, it promotes a sense of humanity through upholding A) sense of autonomy of oneself to actualize transcendence in society, B) care or respect to the body, C) promotion of authenticity, which in effect, offer a realization of good. Such idea of good is the valuation of human life while he is living in this world.

Posthumanism can be reflected in the overcoming of technology not in the embodiment of technology. This is possible given some realizations and principles that actions will accord. It becomes ethical given this idea to overcome from the control for it gives value in the sense of self and subjectivity. Hence, it becomes human-centered.

Such groundings of ethical appraisal of posthumanism suggest and promote sense of humanity that is the same goal of ethical systems. The paper argues the following concepts as part of ethics of posthumanism:

Uphold Sense of Autonomy of the Self
Posthumanism tries to strengthen oneself through valuation of one’s liberty of action. It is through overcoming technology as a new way of living, making his action not constraint of technology such as making a judgment based on his pure reason and supported by technology as a means. In this case, he has the self-control on his moral power on his conception of the good.

Care and Respect of the Body
Posthumanism does not promote to make a change of self and body through cyborgism and any technological embodiment. By this, it values the body that suggests respect to his nature. Nature is parallel to humanity. It is also biblical that our body is sanctified which body deserves a sense of care and respect.

Promote Authenticity of the Self
Given the explanations deemed in man, technology, and society, posthumanism as the reconstruction of these notions, gives an idea of the self, making himself as ethical to resolve the conflict through the conception of posthumanism. It tries to make meaning through his control of own self, reflected in his reason, judgment and interaction.

Conclusion

The study presented concepts of posthumanism making it ethical. Those concepts and the posthumanism perse are the proliferation of idea of the “self”. Taken from the neutral ground of posthumanism, the study provided ethical view of posthumanism as it is able to promote a sense of humanity from the intention of resolving the conflict on technology. Thus, threefold values and principles were articulated in the latter: upholding autonomy of the self, sense of care to the body, and authenticity of the self. Such principles characterize the ethical appraisal of posthumanism. The conception of posthumanism is possible by means of transcending ourselves from the dialectic control that which promotes conception of good and sense of humanity making posthumanism realizable in technological of realm. The idea of posthumanism then becomes the valuation of human life. Hence, it cannot be said as the end of humanism. Rather it strengthens sense of humanity.

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