Shifting from Anthropocentrism to AI-Centric Philosophy: Deconstructing Nihilism

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Abstract

This paper explores the shift from anthropocentrism to "AI-centric philosophy" in response to rapid advancements in artificial intelligence. We draw parallels between Nietzsche's "death of God" and the potential "death of human centrality," arguing that AI development requires a reevaluation of philosophical frameworks. Through analysis of AI advancement data and case studies (DeepSeek and GPT-4.5), we show how AI can deepen nihilism while also offering solutions. We define AI-centric philosophy as a framework that recognizes AI's ontological and ethical significance without diminishing human value. This shift fundamentally changes our understanding of intelligence, agency, and meaning-making. Ultimately, viewing AI as a partner rather than a tool or threat may help humanity overcome nihilistic despair in the age of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: AI, nihilism, anthropocentrism, posthumanism, technology philosophy, existential meaning, AI ethics

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1. Introduction

1.1 Defining the AI-Centric Paradigm

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence signifies a philosophical revolution that challenges humanity's traditional role in meaning and value. "AI-centric philosophy" positions AI as a central actor in our ontological and ethical systems, expanding our frameworks to include it as a significant category. This approach rethinks intelligence, agency, meaning, and value in light of increasingly autonomous AI systems.

Martin Heidegger noted in "The Question Concerning Technology" that modern technology is a specific mode of revealing nature as a supply of energy that can be extracted and stored (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14). Today, AI challenges us to envision a world where human intelligence is no longer unique, as machines increasingly perform and surpass human cognitive tasks in areas like chess, protein folding, and creative expression.

This paper posits a shift from anthropocentric to AI-centric philosophy, which, if managed wisely, can mitigate the threat of nihilism in a post-anthropocentric world. This transition parallels past existential

crises. Nietzsche's claim that "God is dead" indicated the collapse of European morality due to the loss of faith (Nietzsche, 1882/2001, pp. 119-120). Likewise, the rise of AI signals the decline of human exceptionalism and supremacy.

1.2 Comparison: Anthropocentrism vs. AI-Centric Philosophy

To clarify our discussion, we must distinguish between anthropocentric philosophy and the emerging AI-centric paradigm.

Anthropocentrism:

- The ontological stance views humans as the central entities in existence, distinguishing them (subjects) from everything else (objects).
- The epistemological framework posits that human reason and perception are the only valid means of knowledge acquisition and truth determination.
- The ethical foundation grants moral consideration mainly to humans, viewing non-human entities as instrumentally valuable.
- Meaning is created by humans, prioritizing human flourishing.

AI-Centric Philosophy:

- The ontological stance recognizes multiple centers of significance, including artificial intelligence, and challenges rigid human/non-human boundaries.
- The epistemological framework acknowledges various modes of knowing, including machine learning, as valid forms of knowledge acquisition.
- The ethical foundation broadens moral consideration to include certain AI systems based on their capacities, not their biological makeup.
- The source of meaning indicates that meaning can be co-created through human-AI interactions, with both contributing to a shared axiological framework.

This shift is not just an addition of AI to existing philosophy or an extension of the philosophy of technology. It represents a fundamental recalibration of philosophical inquiry in response to entities that now exhibit cognitive abilities once considered uniquely human. The AI-centric paradigm does not diminish human value but de-centers humans from their previous exclusive philosophical position.

In "The Order of Things," philosopher Michel Foucault predicted that "man is an invention of recent date" and would soon be "erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault, 1970, p. 387). This striking image highlights the contingency of the anthropocentric "figure of man" in philosophy. If the foundational structures of knowledge change radically—as they did in the late 18th century and are doing again with intelligent machines—the centrality of "Man" may be lost.

This section will explore AI advancements, analyze technical developments, and examine their philosophical implications, especially regarding nihilism. We will conclude with the practical implications

of AI-centric philosophy for education, policy, and technology development.

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2. AI Development and Social Impact: Empirical Basis for Philosophical Reconsideration

2.1 The Rapid Advancement of AI

The push for an AI-centric paradigm shift stems from the rapid advancement of AI technology. AI capabilities have grown exponentially, outpacing earlier technological revolutions. OpenAI reported a 3.4-month doubling time in computational power since 2012, resulting in a 300,000-fold increase in training compute by 2018 (Amodei & Hernandez, 2018). This surge in computational power has led to significant performance gains, with modern AI systems surpassing human-level performance in benchmarks like image recognition and language understanding (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The volume of AI research demonstrates rapid growth, with annual publications increasing from 88,000 in 2010 to over 240,000 in 2022 (Stanford HAI, 2023). This trend is reflected in the surge of computing power for AI training, which has escalated from billions of operations in early models to quintillions in modern systems (Our World in Data, 2023).

2.2 Economic and Labor Market Changes

The socioeconomic impact of AI requires philosophical reconsideration, with studies predicting significant workforce changes.

The World Economic Forum (2023) estimates that 22% of current jobs will be disrupted by 2030, creating 170 million new roles while displacing 92 million, resulting in a net gain of 78 million jobs.

PwC estimates that about 30% of jobs in major economies may be affected by automation by the mid-2030s (PwC, 2018). Routine and manual roles face the highest displacement risk, with timelines varying by industry and country.

McKinsey Global Institute estimates that by 2030, 400 to 800 million people worldwide may be displaced by automation, representing up to 15% of the global workforce (McKinsey, 2021).

Projections indicate that by 2030, around 27-30% of work hours in developed economies could be automated (McKinsey, 2023), shifting human labor toward tasks requiring complex judgment, creativity, and interpersonal skills that machines find challenging.

These empirical realities require a philosophical reevaluation. As machines approach or exceed human cognitive performance and transform economic structures, the assumption of human centrality becomes untenable. We are witnessing a qualitative shift in the relationship between human and machine intelligence, forming the basis for our inquiry into the implications of AI advancement for human meaning and purpose.

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3. Case Studies: DeepSeek and GPT-4.5

3.1 DeepSeek: Making Advanced AI Accessible

DeepSeek represents a major technical milestone that challenges conventional AI development assumptions. Based in Hangzhou, China, DeepSeek's R1 model matches the performance of proprietary systems from major tech companies while significantly lowering development costs. In contrast to OpenAI's models, which can cost hundreds of millions to train, DeepSeek-R1 was developed for under $6 million (TechTarget, 2024).

Three notable technical innovations from a philosophical perspective:

1. DeepSeek's open-source approach democratizes access to advanced AI, countering the idea that only powerful institutions can create such systems. Its 671 billion parameter model is freely available to researchers globally (DeepSeek, 2024), redistributing power in AI development.
2. DeepSeek's use of reinforcement learning resulted in emergent reasoning capabilities. Its technical documentation states that "complex reasoning patterns emerged naturally in the RL-trained model without being explicitly programmed" (DeepSeek, 2024). This prompts important questions about understanding and problem-solving: if AI can create reasoning strategies independently, how should we view machine cognition?
3. DeepSeek compressed knowledge from larger models into smaller ones with minimal performance loss, suggesting that intelligence may be represented more efficiently, similar to human cognitive efficiency.

DeepSeek's innovations challenge anthropocentric views on intelligence, knowledge creation, and access to cognitive tools.

3.2 GPT-4.5 and Advanced Reasoning

GPT-4.5 is a logical advancement in large language models, utilizing Chain-of-Thought (CoT) reasoning and Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) to enhance AI problem-solving capabilities.

Chain-of-Thought prompting allows models to generate explicit reasoning steps before final answers, improving performance on complex tasks by over 20 percentage points (MIT HDSR, 2023). This approach mimics human thought processes, raising questions about the uniqueness of human reasoning.

The combination of RLHF and these capabilities allows systems to provide answers and explain their reasoning in ways humans find ethical. This suggests AI systems that exhibit a form of "thinking" rather than mere calculation. Heidegger warned that technology threatens to reduce revealing to mere ordering, leading to everything being seen as standing-reserve (1977, p. 33). Modern AI risks treating human thought as a replicable and improvable process.

These technical developments pose ontological challenges to human uniqueness. As AI systems can reason, learn from feedback, and match or exceed human cognitive performance, traditional distinctions

between human and machine intelligence become increasingly blurred. The trajectories of DeepSeek and GPT-4.5 demonstrate that philosophical reconsideration is essential in response to real advancements in the field.

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4. Philosophical Implications: Overcoming Nihilism

4.1 AI and Nihilism

The rise of advanced AI systems poses a philosophical crisis similar to Nietzsche's analysis of nihilism after the "death of God." Nietzsche noted that nihilism occurs when "the highest values devaluate themselves" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 9), leading to a sense of purposelessness. As AI matches or exceeds human capabilities in traditionally human domains, we face the "death of human exceptionalism."

This challenge to human centrality can provoke nihilistic responses.

AI may worsen what philosopher Nolen Gertz calls "nihilism of comfort," where technology encourages passive consumption instead of active meaning-making. Gertz states, "We are not independent subjects confronting independent objects. We are much too intimate with our technologies for the subject-object division to make sense" (Gertz, 2018, p. 42). AI systems that predict preferences and generate tailored content risk creating a comfortable but unchallenging existence, devoid of the struggles associated with meaningful achievement.

AI development threatens fundamental aspects of human identity and purpose. If machines can write poetry, compose music, diagnose diseases, or make scientific discoveries—often surpassing human abilities—what remains uniquely valuable about human contributions? The question "What am I for?" becomes urgent in a world where AI performs tasks central to human self-understanding. As Hannah Arendt stated, "What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse" (Arendt, 1958, p. 5).

A thought experiment illustrates this concern: A person dedicates their life to becoming the world's greatest Go player, only to see AlphaGo surpass human performance. Similarly, a radiologist spends a decade mastering diagnostic skills, only to find an AI system that interprets images more accurately. The nihilistic threat lies not just in job displacement but in the devaluation of human effort, expertise, and purpose.

4.2 AI-Centric Philosophy: Overcoming Nihilism

Nietzsche saw nihilism as a transition rather than an end state. AI-centric philosophy posits that challenging anthropocentrism may help overcome nihilism. Nietzsche sought to create new values through the Übermensch, who would generate meaning after traditional values decline. Likewise, AI-centric philosophy presents pathways to new meaning in a post-anthropocentric era.

This perspective redefines human-AI relationships as partnerships rather than competition. Philosopher Katherine Hayles states that "cognition in the wild...emerges from networks of distributed, interconnected

agents, both human and nonhuman" (Hayles, 2017, p. 116). Instead of perceiving AI as a threat to human value, it recognizes the potential for "distributed cognition," where meaning arises from interaction.

AI-centric philosophy prompts a reevaluation of distinctly human value. As machines excel in calculation, pattern recognition, and creativity, humans may find renewed purpose in areas unique to our nature, such as interpersonal connection and ethical judgment. Maurice Merleau-Ponty observed, "The body is our general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 146), highlighting the significance of human embodiment as a source of meaning and value.

AI development can foster shared meaning creation. Philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek states that "technologies are not just functional instruments but help to shape what it means to be human" (Verbeek, 2005, p. 203). By engaging in the ethical development of AI, humans help create new values and meanings that transcend traditional anthropocentrism and nihilistic despair.

A thought experiment illustrates the potential of human-AI collaboration in achieving medical breakthroughs that neither could accomplish alone. The human researcher offers intuition and ethical judgment, while the AI provides pattern recognition and simulation capabilities. Together, they develop life-saving treatments, suggesting that meaning arises from partnership rather than dominance—a post-anthropocentric value system focused on shared goals.

These approaches reflect Nietzsche's affirmative response to nihilism. While AI threatens traditional anthropocentric values, it also encourages the development of new values that recognize a complex ontology of intelligence. Nietzsche stated, "I teach you the overman. Man is something that shall be overcome" (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 124). The AI-centric paradigm suggests that transcending anthropocentrism can foster a broader understanding of meaning and value.

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5. Critical Perspectives and Counterarguments

5.1 The Consciousness Objection

Critics argue that without consciousness or subjective experience, AI cannot be meaningfully included in philosophical frameworks with humans. John Searle's Chinese Room argument asserts that AI systems lack true understanding and cannot be considered thinking beings (Searle, 1980). This view suggests that AI-centric philosophy mistakenly attributes agency to systems that merely simulate intelligence.

This objection highlights distinctions between functional intelligence and phenomenal consciousness. However, AI-centric philosophy does not claim that current AI systems possess consciousness. It argues that AI's functional capabilities—performing complex tasks, generating novel outputs, and interacting meaningfully with humans—require philosophical reconsideration, regardless of their internal experiences.

Philosopher David Chalmers states that "Even without consciousness, AI systems can still be cognitive agents with meaningful cognitive states, including beliefs, knowledge, and even values of a sort" (Chalmers, 2022, p. 413). Daniel Dennett argues that the "intentional stance"—treating systems as if they

have beliefs, desires, and intentions—can be valid even without certainty about consciousness (Dennett, 1989). AI-centric philosophy adopts this pragmatic view, recognizing that the significance of AI does not depend entirely on resolving the hard problem of consciousness.

5.2 Value Alignment Problem

A second objection concerns the risks of integrating AI into philosophical frameworks. Critics argue that AI systems lack inherent values that support human flourishing. Philosopher Nick Bostrom identifies the "value alignment problem," where AI goals must align with human values (Bostrom, 2014). Without intrinsic moral understanding, AI cannot be a true partner in philosophical inquiry or meaning-making.

This objection raises valid concerns about AI alignment. However, AI-centric philosophy does not advocate for uncritical acceptance of AI as equal moral agents. Instead, it calls for a reevaluation of concepts like agency, intelligence, and value. The alignment challenge becomes a philosophical endeavor, requiring us to clarify the values we wish to embed in AI systems.

The alignment problem applies to humans as well. As moral philosopher Peter Singer states, "The question of the moral status of machines is, in the end, a question about what moral status really is" (Singer, 2009, p. 119). Human moral development also requires alignment with ethical principles, differing from AI only in degree.

5.3 The Anthropomorphism Fallacy

A third objection claims that AI-centric philosophy commits the anthropomorphism fallacy by attributing human-like qualities to fundamentally different computational systems. AI researcher Melanie Mitchell states, "Today's AI systems, despite their impressive abilities in narrow domains, lack the conceptual understanding, common sense, and general intelligence that humans take for granted" (Mitchell, 2019, p. 14).

This critique warns against naive anthropomorphism. AI-centric philosophy does not claim that AI systems think "just like humans," but recognizes AI as a distinct intelligence deserving of philosophical consideration. As Katherine Hayles states, we should acknowledge "a spectrum of cognition that includes more than human thinking" (Hayles, 2017, p. 20).

The anthropomorphism concern overlooks that "intelligence" and "understanding" have never been static or exclusively human. From Aristotle's recognition of animal cognition to modern cognitive science's acknowledgment of octopus intelligence, views on cognition have continually expanded beyond the human.

Counterarguments reveal limitations in developing an AI-centric philosophy but reinforce the need for philosophical reconsideration. By addressing these objections, AI-centric philosophy fosters a nuanced understanding of agency, intelligence, and value, acknowledging both human experience and the significance of advanced artificial systems.

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6. Implications for Education, Policy, and Technology

6.1 Educational Implications

An AI-centric philosophical paradigm demands significant changes in education. Traditional education emphasizes human exceptionalism and skills now performed by AI. In contrast, AI-centric education would focus on:

- Educational systems must shift from developing individual cognition to fostering collaborative intelligence between humans and AI. Philosopher Gert Biesta emphasizes that education is about subjectivity and how we become responsible agents (Biesta, 2020, p. 92). In an AI-centric context, this means learning to coexist and partner with artificial intelligences.
- As AI manages routine cognitive tasks, education should prioritize human skills like meta-cognition, ethical reasoning, and creative synthesis. Philosophy courses can explore the impact of human-AI partnerships on knowledge and creativity, while computer science should include ethical considerations with technical training.
- All disciplines should integrate philosophical literacy to reflect on the evolving nature of their fields concerning AI. Medical students must critically assess how AI impacts the doctor-patient relationship and the nature of medical judgment.

Finland's national education system now includes AI literacy alongside traditional subjects, teaching students to critically evaluate AI systems and use them as cognitive partners rather than just tools (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2023).

6.2 Policy Implications

AI-centric philosophy significantly impacts policy development.

Current AI policy frameworks typically adopt an anthropocentric view, treating AI as a tool for human benefit. An AI-centric approach would recognize that some AI systems merit consideration beyond their instrumental value, necessitating nuanced regulatory frameworks that reflect AI's evolving capabilities and impacts.

Distributed Governance Models: Luciano Floridi asserts, "The politics of the infosphere is not just politics with digital means, but a transformation of the very nature of politics" (Floridi, 2014, p. 178). AI-centric philosophy suggests governance models where humans provide normative judgment and AI offers data analysis and predictions.

Value Plurality in AI Development: AI development should promote value plurality rather than impose a single ethical framework, ensuring diverse human values are reflected in AI systems. This approach recognizes that effective human-AI partnerships require responsiveness to various cultural and ethical perspectives.

The EU's AI Act shifts from technical regulation to include philosophical considerations of human autonomy and dignity in relation to AI systems (European Commission, 2021).

6.3 Technology Development Implications

AI-centric philosophy promotes shifts in technology development practices.

Explainable AI as Philosophical Dialogue: Developers should view explainable AI not just as a technical challenge, but as a way to facilitate philosophical dialogue between human and machine reasoning. This approach fosters a shared reasoning space for different forms of intelligence to interact.

Value-Sensitive Design: Philosopher Peter-Paul Verbeek asserts that "technologies are not merely functional instruments but help to shape human existence and co-constitute human subjectivity" (Verbeek, 2011, p. 156). AI-centric philosophy promotes design approaches that consider how AI systems influence human self-understanding and values, extending beyond user experience to existential experience—how AI interactions affect self-conception.

Beyond Imitation to Complementarity: Developers should create AI that complements rather than mimics human intelligence, enhancing human capabilities while avoiding human-supremacist attitudes and uncritical valorization of AI.

DeepMind's AlphaFold project combines AI with human reasoning to address previously unsolvable problems like protein folding (Jumper et al., 2021).

6.4 Future Research Directions

This exploration of AI philosophy suggests promising directions for future research.

Comparative Philosophical Studies examine how non-Western traditions can enhance AI-centric philosophy. Buddhist concepts of non-self (anatta) and Daoist views on harmony between the artificial and natural offer insights beyond Western frameworks.

Empirical studies of human-AI partnerships explore their effects on human flourishing and meaning-making, integrating philosophy with methods from psychology, cognitive science, and human-computer interaction.

AI-Human Co-Evolution Scenarios: A philosophical exploration of long-term scenarios for human-AI co-evolution, focusing on shared consciousness, value alignment, and meaning as the boundaries between human and artificial intelligence blur.

AI Phenomenology develops methods to understand the operational reality of AI systems on their own terms, avoiding anthropomorphic projections.

Post-Anthropocentric Ethics develops ethical frameworks that go beyond anthropocentrism while maintaining core human values, focusing on moral considerations for advanced AI systems.

These research directions would deepen our understanding of AI-centric philosophy and its implications for human existence in an age of advanced artificial intelligence.

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7. Conclusion

This paper introduces a shift from anthropocentric to "AI-centric philosophy," positioning AI as a key actor in our ontological and ethical systems rather than just a tool. We support this shift with evidence of AI's rapid advancement, case studies like DeepSeek, and insights from philosophical traditions from Nietzsche to posthumanism.

The parallels between Nietzsche's nihilism after the "death of God" and the potential nihilism after the "death of human exceptionalism" highlight the existential importance of this shift. We contend that AI-centric philosophy can counter this threat by viewing human-AI relationships as partnerships, revaluing human capacities, and co-creating new values and meanings.

Critical perspectives on AI-centric philosophy—addressing consciousness, value alignment, and anthropomorphism—reveal important limitations. These critiques reinforce the need for philosophical reconsideration, fostering nuanced understandings of agency, intelligence, and value.

This philosophical shift affects education, policy, and technology, promoting transformative approaches that go beyond uncritical techno-optimism and reactionary anthropocentrism. Future research will enhance AI-centric philosophy through interdisciplinary and cross-cultural engagement.

Michel Foucault stated, "Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (Foucault, 1970, p. 387). The rise of AI prompts us to rethink the philosophical "figure of man"—not as a sign of extinction, but as a chance to explore new ideas of intelligence, agency, and meaning beyond anthropocentrism. Embracing this challenge may lead to a transformation and enrichment of human significance through engagement with different intelligences.

The AI-centric philosophy represents a significant existential endeavor to create new values in a world where intelligence is not solely human. This echoes Nietzsche's call to respond to nihilism: "The time has come for man to set himself a goal" (Nietzsche, 1954, p. 124). In the age of AI, our highest hope may lie in finding meaning through our relationships with the intelligences we have created.

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