

### Reframing Social Responsibility of Humans in the Age of Posthumanism

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#### Abstract

*Humans are socially embedded beings. As social beings, they have to fulfil certain duties and responsibilities toward society. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is depicted as the age of highest development in the field of technology. Through technology, humans are embarking on a new venture in their existence. In the 21st century, humans are living a high-quality technological life, and technology continuously helps us to a great extent in overcoming the challenges of our day-to-day lives. Human beings are advanced enough in terms of their physical capabilities. The unification of technology with human beings has led to the emergence of posthumans. Posthuman is a techno-bio hybrid. Even though we are technologically advanced beings, this does not mean that technology will take over every responsibility in humans' social lives. Now, the primary concern of every human being should be to act responsibly for the well-being of society. To overcome this situation, every human, regardless of caste and creed, should act as a responsible world citizen. But, do they truly act as responsible citizen? Do they think of the well-being of society? Do they help their fellow citizens or detach themselves from everything? Thus, the primary concern of this paper is to analyse how technologically advanced human beings maintain their responsibilities in the present social scenario from philosophical and moral perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Human being, morality, posthuman, social responsibility, and technology.

#### Introduction

Humans are social beings. They abide by various social norms, values, and responsibilities. Humans' societal responsibility is exercised on the individual, group, or collective levels. Humans must choose a social goal within the context of a social project to demonstrate their societal responsibility. To manifest a responsibility towards society, an individual must possess the capacity for assessing mutual harmony and understanding of their interlocutor. To maintain social responsibility, humans should comprehend each other's emotions, attitudes, perspectives, and behaviours. Social values are understandable only when humans value each other's positions. Hence, responsibility is a task of care and concern for others. A responsible person would respect all other humans in society and also would accept others as they are, without any judgment. But one thing must be put in mind that social responsibility should be performed out of love and care, and not to be understood as a burden, or fear, or obedience. Social responsibility has four types: Economic, Legal, Ethical, and Philanthropic. Human beings should be responsible towards society in four key ways. In this paper, the ethical aspects of social responsibility are primarily focused on. Every human being must perform some responsibility towards society. People have a moral duty to act in the best interests of society, rather than just their own. But humans are changing, and so their attitude towards the responsibilities of society is also changing. Rapid technological developments in the domain of humankind are altering human behaviour and interests. The growth of human capacities through technological developments inspires humans to become posthumans. The 21st-century society is taking the form of a society where humans are not only individuals who can perform their duties towards society, but technological developments also have a significant impact on both humans' and posthumans' responsibilities towards society. So, the primary objective of this paper is to find out how social responsibilities are evolving in the 21st-century world by both humans and posthumans.

#### What is Social Responsibility?

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is now facing different types of transformation. In this age of transformation, society takes a leading role. As part of society, all human beings must have some responsibilities toward their society and, by extension, toward the world. Thus, social responsibilities start with the individual human being, then pass to the organisations, communities, and so on. Social Responsibility focuses on the matter that people belonging to any organisation should behave ethically and sensitively towards social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues. A positive thought for being socially responsible helps human beings, organisations, and governments to develop every field of society in a better form. The social responsibility of individuals indicates that they should engage themselves in the ongoing process of development without any pause and develop an interest in solving the social and communal problems of the community. Every community has its own social life, and everyone should take an active part, like teaching poor children and uneducated elderly persons, by organising self-help

camps, advisory camps, and making donations for marginalized groups of society for the betterment of the society or community. This social responsibility has two sides, one is the 'positive side', which follows a responsibility to act in a proactive manner with a good idea and intention. It helps the society to maintain the morality. Another is the 'negative side', which is the responsibility to refrain from certain actions. It is a resistant process of not doing the bad deeds, and through this process, it is possible for society to keep equilibrium. But one important point must be noted here: social responsibility should be fully free from any external force, i.e., it should be purely voluntary. When it is voluntary, it necessarily covers the legal responsibility as well, and this voluntary activity makes people proactive rather than reactive towards the social problems. This proactive attitude helps to eliminate the irresponsible, corrupt, and unethical behaviour, which might bring harm to society. But nowadays, this type of responsibility is almost absent from the social purview. People become technologically advanced and active, but socially inactive. A crisis is lurking in society regarding responsibility, social activity, and morality. Humans become self-centred and go far beyond the bond of the family and therefore of society. Advanced technology occupies a big portion of humans' lives and takes them away from social reality, and humans are more engaged in virtual reality. Therefore, the concept of responsibility now takes a new form and plunges society into constant and unprecedented risks.

#### **The Enhancement of Human Beings: The Posthuman**

After the well-known French Revolution, at the end of the twentieth century, some essential social, cultural, and technological shifts reshaped social life completely. Through all these extreme changes, the whole society of the 21st century has turned into a postmodern one, which has its effects in the field of art, architecture, literature, film, economics, politics, culture, society, human life, responsibility, values, morality, in one word, in the whole system. Along with these different kinds of achievements in various fields, such as scientific, technological, social, political, and economic growth, have been commenced in a revolutionary style in this age. Every idea, thought has moulded itself and tries to uphold a fresh and evolutionary theme. Technology mainly occupies the most important role at the present time. Nevertheless, all such developments directly affect humans' everyday life, body, culture, and society as well.

The highest development of the human body in recent times is that human beings have changed their identity from only a 'biological human' to a 'technological posthuman', which can typically be called a 'Cyborg'. Human biology and advanced technology have been mixed up to form a cyborg. According to Donna Haraway, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction."<sup>1</sup> So, a cyborg is a combination of human and machine. Human biology and mechanical technology mingled up here and form a new meta-human or mechanical-human, or better to say, a post-human. A question comes to the forefront, 'What exactly is a cyborg?' 'What is meant by this kind of admixing of human biology and mechanical technology?' The suggested answer is that any kind of equipment of a human with specified disability, such as a cane for a blind person, a hearing aid for a deaf person, or a pair of glasses that people wear, could be designated as a cyborg. Again, the people who implanted wearable electronic chips in their bodies are designated as true cyborgs. Some recognise cyborgs as different from normal human beings, whereas some prefer to admit post-human cyborgs as a being that contributes to a long range of human survival. Hence, cyborgs or posthumans are not something out of this world; they are a very part of our society. Cyborg plays the role of a medium between the organism and technology, the real world and the virtual world, social relations and cyber relations. Thus, biotechnology and social nature are part of the cyborg. As technology takes its role in our everyday life, it becomes highly possible for us to acquire a posthuman life, and too much use of technical gadgets makes us a cyborg in a wider sense. So, we are all some sort of cyborg, as we use technology randomly, though not fully immersed in those machines. This kind of enhancements in human life definitely changes the parameters of human existence. Nowadays, all achievements are coming forth more through technological intervention than human effort. So, the situation becomes more complex, and ultimately, no proper justice is done towards humanity. Hence, the relationship between humans and society changes considerably.

#### **The role of humans and posthumans towards social responsibility**

The concept of responsibility can be traced back to the ideas of Aristotle and Plato in classical Greek philosophy, as well as to the Kantian categorical imperative, Utilitarianism, and Existentialism of the modern era. Aristotle states that humans, by nature, are 'political animals' and politics are mutually reinforced with ethics. For him, an individual's primary duty is to contribute to the polis or community to ensure a stable and excellent life for all humans in society. Kant, in his 'Categorical Imperative'<sup>2</sup>, states that one (an individual) should act only by following the maxims (rules) in such a way that the individual without contradiction becomes a universal law for everyone and at the same time he also states that, one should view humanity (own-self or others) not merely

<sup>1</sup> Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, p.149.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, I. (2002). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785).

as a means to an aim, but rather as an end in itself. On the other hand, utilitarianism upholds the view of the 'Greatest happiness of the greatest number'. It follows that an individual should be responsible for choosing actions that result in the greatest happiness for the collective welfare. Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that humans have freedom, and a person's choice is fully entailed by that freedom.<sup>3</sup> A person's free choice, depending on that freedom, influenced both the individual and humanity. In the modern age, humans appear to adhere to these concepts and rules, acting collectively for the well-being of society. But after the Second World War, societal values changed, and so did individuals' responsibility towards society. It is a time of shifting societal responsibilities, as they move from collective to individual. With the shifting of social responsibilities, risks related to their rational or irrational use of responsibilities have emerged. However, with the emergence of technological development and the inventions in emerging fields, a risk to the survival of the human species is postulated.

On the other hand, the posthuman standard of social responsibility not only acts for humans but also for the well-being of other creatures in society, because posthuman thought challenges human exceptionalism. It does not mean it rejects humans or humanity, but it rejects the centrality of humans. So, by decentring humans and their sole well-being, posthumans perform their social responsibility by thinking 'beyond the humans', i.e., for humans, animals, machines, and environments. Thus, such a practice of responsibility towards all creatures of society produces novel and heterogeneous well-being in the field of social responsibility. The human exceptionalism mode of social responsibility emphasizes agency in individual actors, detached from the discursivity and materiality of the environment in which they work. But in the posthuman concept of social responsibility, posthumans perform their duties within the temporal and performative sphere. But when humans try to upgrade their capacities through various technological developments and detach their thoughts from human exceptionalism, they can perform their responsibilities too to 'beyond the humans' and no such dissimilarities between societal responsibility among humans and posthumans are seen.

When a human biology, i.e., any organ of the human body, is intertwined, inwardly or outwardly, with machine and technology, then human nature faces a kind of transformation, may not fully, but slightly, because the ground of amalgamation is nothing but the human body alone. But we have to admit that, as independent creatures, though not purely natural but scientifically developed, cyborgs or posthumans have their own reality, morality, virtue, and values of life. In spite of their own way of sensing things and the world, though they are simultaneously living in the current society, they also have a responsibility towards society. Although it would not be incorrect if it is remarked that, with the use of excessive technology in every step of our lives, we are all positively progressing to become posthumans. Thus, even if it is a human or posthuman, though both share the same society, both have certain responsibilities towards the society, nation, and the world too, and their responsibility should be alike, because nowadays both humans and posthumans behave in quite the same manner.

These recent advancements make people more self-oriented. People nowadays are striving constantly to attain personal success, which is purely materialistic in its nature. The height of success is measured only through the acquisition of money, power, and prestige. This insatiable desire for achieving career growth and economic success turns humans into machines. The life pattern becomes so mechanical that humans behave like a machine. Due to consumerism, the concept of a good life changes its characteristics, which are the effects of new economic policies of liberalization and globalization. Humans of the present posthuman era are very much associated with a kind of life-goal that ensures the sensuous pleasures, ultimate self-desires, and utmost comfort and luxury.

The world is now summarized as a 'Global Village,' and all kinds of objects of desire cater to humans with their varieties of attraction, and the more technological advancements are visible, the more it is a sign of progress in every area of life. It is here that the question of responsibility arises. The unrestrained desire for material values, natural human inclinations, and life-values, like morality, aesthetic, spiritual thinking, friendship, trust, love bonding, helpfulness towards others, performing one's own duties, are constantly overlooked by members of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Economic comforts, enjoyment of pleasure, and economic betterment are all required in life. But these are not the ultimate goal of life; rather, these are the important components of that goal. However, in recent days, components are taking the place of ultimate goals, and the value of friendship and love is being replaced by selfish individualism. The guiding principle of today's people is the wish fulfilment of 'self-happiness' only; no one is paying any heed to other members of the same society, not even to their own family, friends, and loved ones. Some humans develop such selfish characteristics within themselves that they somehow only care for "what others and society can provide for them, but not vice versa. They are only cautious and attentive about their own advancements, achievements, and success. In the process of all their progress, they use their

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<sup>3</sup> Sartre, J. (2007). (Trans. C. Macomber). *Existentialism is a humanism*. Yale University Press.

family, friends, and relatives' relationships with others merely as a means, not as an end, for achieving their entire desired goal. This is the rude reality of today's world; no one can escape from it. However, people have recently tried to modernize their talents, skills, and knowledge, not for the sake of a good society or to prepare themselves as good individuals, but only to pursue possible personal advantages. But the tragedy is that the young generations of society regard such self-seeking persons as their ideals. They come into existence as young people's virtues, including motivation, competitive spirit, and goal orientation, among others. However, there remain some individuals among those self-oriented persons who do not want to sacrifice their principles and true values in life for personal growth, the so-called material values, and happiness. These individuals are becoming an oddity in the developing society and, as a result, are successively turned into a 'vanishing' form of humans.

### Conclusion

From the above observation, it can be stated that everyone performs their duties and responsibilities for their own life alone, not for the well-being of society. Selfishness counts over responsibility. No one wants to carry out responsibility for others; it seems a kind of time waste to them. It remains alive only as a mere word for achieving goals, not as a set of performance of one's own duty intended for society. Therefore, society lacks responsibility due to a lack of duty, and duty is missed by people for their ego and selfish activity. So, selfishness, i.e., extreme individualization, is the root cause of every problem that lies in society. As the root cause, selfishness darkens every principle of traditional morality and upgrades a new kind of morality of personal good and well-being. Now, everyone thinks 'what is good for me is the only good', they do not care about the thought that their own good may not be good for society. Hence, through this egoistic thinking in relation to oneself and personal success, utmost chaos, tyranny, disorder, dynamism, and disruption take place in society. There remains no harmony, friendly behaviour, loving relationships, or stable values at all. The modern age ideal, the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number', is successively changing its nature to 'Personal happiness and growth'. Now, everyone claims to be right in their own actions, decision-making, thinking, and way of progressing, and thus, sometimes the laws of society break down to render proper judgment to humanity. The moral value of Immanuel Kant, 'Duty for duty's sake,' is being replaced because nowadays, no one wants to perform their duty solely for the sake of society; instead, everyone seeks equal rights, equality, and freedom from society. Due to an excessive egoistic nature, one's achievements never become fully accomplished for the greater good. Ultimately, it can be stated that, in recent times, people live in society primarily for their own benefit, without any genuine connection to it or to other individuals within the same society. Society has shifted its norms from community, companionship, and fellowship to extreme individualism.

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