



The Meaning of Life: Transformations of Meaning from Human to Posthuman

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Abstract

Human beings are social individuals. They live their lives with certain social codes and conduct. They carry a meaning of life, which helps them live peacefully in society together with other individuals. But difficulties occur when the question arises, 'What would be the meaning of life?', and 'How do we decide the true meaning of life?'. Again, in the 21st century, rapid enhancements are taking place in the human sphere through science and technology. Such advancements outrun the humanistic approach, giving rise to a new phenomenon known as posthumanism. Hence, one primary concern that arises is: 'Will the meaning of life in the humanistic approach and the posthumanistic approach be the same or not?' However, we can observe that, due to an excessive bent towards technology and its advancements, the meaning of human life is gradually changing day by day. Therefore, this paper explores the meaning of life and the differences between the humanistic and posthumanist approaches to it.



Received: 31.10.2025

Accepted: 25.11.2025

Published: 31.12.2025

CJHSSC, Volume: 1

Issue: 2, December 2025

Page: 142 - 149

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18259365>

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Published by: Seth Soorajmull Jalan Girls' College,
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Available at: www.ssjalangirlscollege.org.in/journal.php

Email: confluence.sjgc@gmail.com

Keywords: Human, Posthuman, Technological advancements, meaning of life, and Moral values.

Introduction

Humans are essentially an evolutionary being. The evolution process depends on the beginning of life. Life is not meant to be lived only, but rather the meaning of life signifies a worthwhile life, a system of living. This system of living has gone through continuous changes from ancient times to the present day. But human life is facing rapid transformations in the 21st century. The boundaries of humans' physical, social, and spiritual lives are blurring nowadays. We are aware that, from tradition, our society maintains certain rules and regulations to make human life worth living. Human beings always convey their own intrinsic values, which make them different from other creatures. This intrinsic value is nothing but human reason. Besides the reason, some sets of moral values and ethical principles are given to human life to enrich it with its true meaning. Although ethical codes and moral guidelines are dynamic. For that, we can see moral obligations are in constant change. How far humanity goes, morality finds its new and reformed paths. So, the moral obligations of traditional thought sometimes seem inappropriate in this new era. The meaning of a good life, a life full of worth, is not only associated with ethical codes and conduct but also with humans' own knowledge, thinking capacity, physical and mental health, and, overall, a style of living. To find a new way to understand the meaning of life, posthumanism challenges traditional humanist assumptions of being unique and exceptional. Science and technology offer immense opportunities to enhance human beings, while posthumanism critically analyzes how humanity can redefine itself in light of such advancements and what the place of human beings will be in the world.

Human, Technology, and a New Form of Life

Humans have believed in a supernatural being that controls our Universe, our World, and our lives since ancient times. This supernatural being is sometimes depicted as God or the Supreme Soul. Humans are the combination of both a material body and an immaterial soul. The body is changeable, being material in nature, mortal, and it deteriorates over time. But the soul is changeless and immortal. Humans always strive for eternal life. Hence, they are in a continuous quest to achieve eternal life. For centuries, various spiritual beliefs have led people to believe in the 'afterlife'. To follow this path to the afterlife, human beings live their lives in accordance with religious practices, so that the life of an individual can continue beyond biological existence. So, the concept of 'immortality of the soul' or 'reincarnation' gives our lives fundamental value and meaning. To understand different socio-political and cultural transitions throughout human civilization, several socio-political and cultural transitions have created various types of rituals, traditions, practices, and ethical frameworks depending on the concept of 'human dignity', 'human morality, value, or worth'.

Science and technology focus on the meaning of life by describing empirical facts about human well-being and by relating the 'why' of human biology rather than the natural 'how'. Biologically, the meaning of life for humans stands in the fundamental instinct to survive and transmit genetic information. From a biological standpoint, a successful meaning of life is defined as when humans systematically organize themselves to reproduce offspring, evolve over time, and prolong these processes. Technology offers various advancements that can help humans pursue happiness and well-being. When such happiness and well-being are united with humans' basic needs, the meaning of life for humans turns into self-actualization. Scientific and

Technological advancements carry the offshoot of humanism, i.e., transhumanism, in which, with the help of technology, human beings are enhanced and can overcome human limitations, such as mortality. Transhumanism suggests that a meaningful life would be one in which, through enhanced physical and cognitive capacities and extended life, traditional human problems could be solved.

In the recent period, despite the eternity of the soul, human beings strive to maintain the timeless existence of their bodies. Such desires give rise to a new contemporary philosophical ideology, known as 'Transhumanism'. Transhumanism focuses on the enhancement of human abilities, physical immortality, radical life extensions, and even the resurrection of humans with the help of intensely developed technologies and medical sciences. This ideology, which was only a prediction and a dream in an earlier stage, has now become a reality and is opening before the world under the name 'Posthumanism'. Posthumanism is a remarkable transformation that changes the identity of the human body. Humans transform their identity from only a 'biological human' to a 'technological posthuman'. Some recognize posthumans as different from normal human beings, whereas some prefer to admit posthumans as a being that contributes to long-term human survival. Basically, posthumans are not out of this world; they are very much a part of our society. They play as a medium between the organism and technology, the real world and the virtual world, social relations, and cyber relations. Thus, biology, technology, and social characteristics are all aspects of a posthuman. As technology plays an important role in our everyday lives, it becomes vastly possible for us to achieve a posthuman life. The craze for technology in daily life changes the entire scenario of human existence.

Ethical Concerns Regarding Changing Ideology

The rapid development of scientific knowledge and its technological applications inevitably affects human culture, society, and life in many ways, as well as challenging traditional understandings of human goals. Some philosophical and ethical questions arise when advanced technology keeps a biological body alive, even when consciousness and human mental capacities (such as rationality, self-awareness, and free will to make decisions) no longer exist. As consciousness is described as the general criteria of humanity since tradition, so the ethical questions regarding the quality of human life come to the forefront, like: 'What kind of life is worth living for?', 'If the rate of human mortality decreases, then how would the fair distribution of scarce resources be possible?', 'How would an individual hold his human dignity, individuality, self-interest, free will, and personhood?'

However, new technological movements bring together science, technology, society, and cyberculture, traditional and futuristic points of view, on the grounds of morality, rationality, emotions, ethics, materiality, spirituality, and bodily and mental enhancement. Thus, the new technological renaissance is moving away from the dualistic worldview and gradually bringing every concept under one umbrella of posthumanism. It has been mentioned earlier that rapid technological advancements and random uses of technology challenge traditional thought, and that moral values, ethical codes, and social structures are lagging. The global economy and consumer culture are two other aspects that make technological improvements more powerful and sustainable in the recent world order. These two aspects encourage people to think only about 'I' and 'here and now', rather than about the 'cause-and-effect' chain that would help them

consider the wider, radical social and ethical consequences of their every action. Individual choices expand their territory in the issues of birth, death, and life as well. Though consumerist culture seems to emphasize individual choices, in the end, it falls into a pseudo-individualistic culture. Even though it presents superficial choices and choices that are made from copying others, not one's own free will. However, sometimes an individual's unique idea seems illusory because human beings are now influenced by the collectivist ideals of life enforced by science, technology, market policies, and fashion industries. However, a concern about existential risk and the potential loss of meaning in life runs alongside technological upgradation. Technological advancements and the emergence of AI provide immense shortcuts for humans; as a result, humans tend to stay far from personal growth and self-discovery. On the other hand, human labour in every field of life is equally replaced by technological developments and AI. But,

Scenario of the Recent Era

Despite all such dilemmas and criticisms, it can be said that posthuman enhancement has opened a new horizon for human life. The aim of human beings of the 21st century is techno-centric. In the process of self-perfection, the stages of human life are gradually blurring. Global economy, cosmopolitan culture, medicine, fashion trends, and changing social atmosphere encourage individuals to strive for similar norms and ideals. Now, younger people want to look more mature, elderly people want to look ageless, and want to be active like younger people through bodily enhancement. Dark people want to be fairer, and fairer people want to look more beautiful than before by means of cosmetic transplant. Disabled people remove their disabilities through medical sciences. Through all these medical, cosmetic, technological, and scientific applications, we are forming a world of almost 'identical clones'.

Human beings' intense physical transformation through technology necessarily affects the nature of their existence. Human enhancement makes people more self-oriented. They are in a continuous striving for attaining personal success, which is entirely materialistic in nature. The achievements that human beings attain are merely measured through the acquisition of money, power, and prestige. However, such an insatiable desire for life achievements, career growth, and economic success constantly changes human values and morals. The lives humans prefer to choose nowadays set them apart from their real lives and hand them lives that are more like machines. Consumerism is the basis for the change in the concept and characteristics of a good life, and as a result, new economic policies of liberalization and globalization are emerging. The norms of sensuous pleasures, the fulfilment of unrestricted self-desires, and the acquisition of utmost comfort and luxury become the new goals of life.

Nowadays, Humans are trying to overlook natural human inclinations and the values of life. Human values, such as morality, aesthetics, friendship, trust, spiritual thinking, love, family bonding, helping others, and duties, are gradually being compromised by uncontrolled desires for material values. An economic upbringing and comfort, as well as the enjoyment of pleasure, seem important in life and are somehow required. However, these can never be the ultimate goal of life; they might be important components of that goal. Human inclinations and life values should be considered as life goals. However, components, by gradually removing human inclinations and life values, place themselves as humans' ultimate desired goal. For example, it could be said that human values such as friendship, love, bonding with others, and selflessness

are gradually being replaced by the rising respectability of selfish individualism. People are guided by the principles of wish fulfilment and self-happiness. No one is attentive towards others, neither to their own family, loving persons, and friends, nor to society. People only care about one quarry, i.e., 'what is in it for me?'. Today's people are very attentive and cautious about their advancements, achievements, and success. Having such a progression, people undoubtedly use their family, friends, loved ones, and relationships merely as a means. Hence, this becomes the reality of today's world, and it seems impossible to escape from it. Although people are trying to improve and modernize their skills, talents, and knowledge, they are neither doing so to prepare themselves, nor to become good individuals, nor for the sake of building a good society, but only to hold themselves for the opportunities of gaining possible personal advantages. The matter of concern is that such self-seeking, ambitious, and career-oriented professionals are becoming the ideal among the young generations of society. They come into existence as they seem to fulfil young people's virtues, like motivation, competitive spirit, goal-orientation, and so forth, through their highly talented skills and knowledge. Unfortunately, in a society full of selfish individuals, those who refuse to sacrifice their principles and true values of life for the achievement of so-called material values and happiness are becoming odd in a progressing society, and hence they have become a 'vanishing' human clan.

Changing Ideologies from Human to Posthuman

The standard of human life is the basis of all ethical debates and concerns. What should be the quality of human life? How can one decide the standard of human life? How can one make a good life? What would be the minimum standard to be a life worth living? These questions are present in every era, in every concept. Posthumanism is not free from this. Regarding posthumanism, it can be said that, before the advancements in human physical aspects, human intelligence was tied to the physical body only. Being finite in nature, the human brain cannot be expanded or transferred. The ideas and thoughts of other humans' brains cannot be known by us. But, with the help of technological advancements and artificial intelligence, in the near future, it seems possible to transfer the human mind to a computer disc. After such enhancement, our physical or biological body would no longer signify the limitations of our existence. The future is near where human existence as a bodily form could be converted into virtual reality, situated in a super-intelligent computer. But if the human mind is transformed into a virtual reality in a super-intelligent computer, then who would be the master? Who would maintain the operating systems? Whose mind would be copied to the computer, and what would be the basis of such transformations? If everyone's brain is transformed into virtual reality, then who would be left there to be a pure biological human? The answers to such questions are yet to be found. It is vital to note that rapid technological advancements in the human sphere will gradually transform human understanding of knowledge, space-time, spirituality, and the physical and mental forms of existence. The traditional dualistic interpretation of material and immaterial forms of existence is being replaced day by day with a holistic view of the universe, where the collective foundation of universal consciousness is the primary concern.

Posthumanism, by criticizing anthropocentrism, argues that technological shifts and integration decentralize human beings and blur the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. Anthropocentrism is a concept that upholds the view that human beings are distinct

and superior to all creatures that live in the world. Hence, the meaning of life is designed accordingly to an anthropocentric way. However, after decentering human supremacy, it could be reconsidered that meaning is not solely a human project. The meaning of life should be regarded as a web of existence which, in its true essence, is larger than the human sphere, as well as interconnected with both human and non-human agents and systems. The technological enhancement gives rise to several technological integrations, among which 'cyborg' is prime, which offers a new hope to human beings. Cyborg, being a 'cybernetic organism', an amalgamation of both human flesh and machine, helps to understand the self as a hybrid entity. Hence, in light of such changes, the meaning of human life needs to be reconceptualized. For such an upgradation in human life, the meaning of life is not solely found in fixed human identity, but rather it can be found in the creative enlargement of human and non-human relationships. Posthumanism advocates ethical rationality across both human and non-human life forms. As human beings are gradually enhanced with the help of technology and build a new life-form, the re-evolution of responsibilities should be revisited. Posthumanism promotes the idea that the true meaning of life emerges through mutual relationships rather than human dominance, priority, or supremacy.

Conclusion

Based on the above observations, it can be said that, at present, everyone acts primarily for their own benefit. The well-being of society often comes after personal well-being. Selfishness suppresses responsibility. The meaning of life remains alive merely as a word for achieving goals, not as a set of performances of one's own duty intended for society. The thought that leads everyone is, 'what is good for me is the only good'. They care less about the fact that their own good may not be suitable for society. Personal goodness and well-being become the main issue. Hence, through this egoistic thinking in relation to oneself and personal success, utmost chaos, tyranny, disorder, dynamism, and disruption take place in society. In society, there remains no harmony, friendly behaviour, loving relationships, or static value at all. In the 21st century scenario, the ideal of the modern age, 'Greatest happiness of the Greatest number', has changed its nature to 'Personal happiness'. Everyone carries an attitude that portrays them as always right in their own actions, decision-making, thinking, and way of progressing, and thus, sometimes the laws of society break down in order to render proper judgment to humanity. No one performs their duty for the sake of society, but wants their rights, equality, and freedom from society. Due to an excessive egoistic nature, one's achievements never become fully accomplished for the greater good. In the concluding remark, it can be stated that people live in a society where the ego empowers over all. People live apart because they dislike any kind of relationship with society and even with others within it. Extreme egoistic individualism is becoming the new norm in society, and earlier norms such as community, companionship, and fellowship are gradually being replaced.

Ultimately, it can be said that nowadays the meaning of life has undergone many changes, and an immense shift towards technological developments is making it quite complex and multilayered. The posthuman trend in life is situated in a position where it will one day free humans from all their mental and physical incapacities. The meaning of life would not be associated solely with reason, production, and human-centeredness; rather, it would be served

through self-actualization, such as creativity and personal growth. It is true that AI has recently occupied most of the world's functional knowledge. Nevertheless, the true meaning of life can be found uniquely in human attributes, such as creativity, relationships, consciousness, art, creativity, and compassion. However, what humans would like to do is up to them. The challenge is here. Humans either have to take on the challenge and utilize their unique human attributes along with technological enhancements, or they must be passive observers of technologically mediated lives. No one can deny that the present-day society belongs to a techno-scientific age. Hence, rather than questioning like, 'what does it mean to be a human?', and 'what would be the true meaning of life?', we must accept the truth that humans are evolving day by day, and the meanings of human life are also evolving and changing with both technology and ourselves. The posthuman development has broadened the scope of human existence. This broadened human existence suggested that the meaning of life is not restricted to human experience only. Human consciousness is defined solely by biology in the posthuman era. An enhanced human form or a cybernetic organism, i.e., the cyborg, can recognize life's vision and purpose more inclusively, as biology and technology are both integrated parts of the posthuman.

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