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Posthumanism from Haraway's Vision - Challenging the boundaries between human exceptionalism and limited individualism

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Abstract:

This study explores the idea of posthumanism from Harawiseborg's vision, which challenges the boundaries between human exceptionalism and limited individualism. Haraway defines the cyborg as a fusion of machine and organism, emphasizing the close connection among humans, technology, and nature. Posthumanism advocates dehumanization and puts human beings in an equal "ontological state" with other beings, subverting the traditional definition of humans. Haraway points out that with the advancement of technology, the boundaries among humans and animals, humans and machines, as well as natural and non-natural entities have become blurred, and humans are no longer a special existence in the natural world. She profoundly criticized the limitations of human exceptionalism and limited individualism, emphasizing the importance of focusing on ethics and social responsibility during the process of technological development. At the same time, Haraway's ideas prompt us to re-examine human identity and self-cognition, and to redefine the essence and value of humanity.

Keywords: Cyborg, posthumanism, human exceptionalism, limited individualism

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and significance

In Haraway's cyborg-based vision, posthumanism is a powerful current of thought that challenges the solid boundaries between human exceptionalism and limited individualism. Haraway's unique vision of cyborg is a perfect fusion of machine and living organism, which is not only a subversion of the traditional definition of human, but also a dissolution of binary opposition models such as technology and nature, mind and body. In contemporary society, Haraway's concepts of the cyborg and posthumanism serve as the dawn light, illuminating a new path of thinking for humanity about its own existence, tech-

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nological ethics, and relationships with nature.

The theory of human exceptionalism has placed humanity at the center of the universe, while limited individualism emphasizes the independence and freedom of the individual. However, both reveal their limitations in the broader historical context. The philosophy of Haraway is like a sharp sword, piercing through these outdated concepts and guiding us into a new era filled with transformation and possibilities. In this era, the boundaries between humanity and machines, nature and technology become blurred, compelling us to reassess our relationship with ourselves, others, and the world.

1.2 Objectives and questions of the study

The study aims to demonstrate the significance of Haraway's cyborg and posthumanist ideas in challenging human exceptionalism and limited individualism by exploring their implications for contemporary society, culture, and technological development.

2.The cyborg of Haraway and the posthumanist concept

Before understanding what a cyborg is, we need to first comprehend what posthumanism is. Like postmodernism, posthumanism is a form of "post-theory." Posthumanism advocates for a de-anthropocentric philosophical perspective, asserting that humans and other entities should be placed in an equal "ontological status," thereby subverting the traditional notion of humanity as the center of all things. Within this framework, the body is no longer viewed as a biologically fixed "entity," but rather as something that can evolve into various new forms through the integration and extension of technology. This process endows the body with unprecedented flexibility and variability, leading humanity into a "posthuman" era filled with infinite possibilities.[1]

The rise of posthumanism is an inevitable product of the rapid development of technology and science. In the perspective of posthumanism, the boundaries between humans and technology become blurred, intertwining and co-evolving with each other. The cyborg is a significant concept in posthumanism, or it can be said that the cyborg is a form of realization of posthumanism.

Cyborgs, also known as androids, mechanized humans, modified humans, or biohumans, are mechanized organisms composed of inorganic materials that serve as part of the body of an organism (including humans and other animals), with all actions and thoughts controlled by the organism. In our impression, cyborgs are commonly seen in films, such as Iron Man from the Avengers, which falls under the category of cyborgs. The main distinction between cyborgs and robots is that the inorganic components are controlled by the organic entity. Many science fiction films feature robotic soldiers, whose actions are based on electronic commands received from a central electronic brain, whereas cyborgs, like humans, are biological entities capable of freely controlling their mechanical components.

'Haraway defines the cyborg as: "a creature in which organism and machine are combined, a product of social reality, and at the same time a fictional creation." [2] Haraway claims, "In the late 20th century, our era, a mythic age, we are all Chimeras, theoretical and patchwork hybrids of machines and organisms; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology." [3] Why do we say we are all cyborgs? A simple example is that elderly people wear dentures; those who wear dentures are cyborgs. The deeper meaning of everyone being a cyborg is that humans and technology have become inseparable, and the relationship between humans and technology has turned into an inextricable symbiosis. Currently, the technology that humans find most difficult to part with is the mobile phone, which has gradually integrated into our bodies and lives. For instance, one of our classmates accidentally lost his phone one day, and he felt as if he had lost his soul, finding it difficult to navigate life until he retrieved his phone and stepped out of his dormitory, posting an update titled 'Finally not a cave dweller.' I will pause here on posthumanism and cyborgs, and in the following content, I will conduct a more in-depth analysis and application.'

3.Critique of Human Exceptionalisms and Limited Individualism

The theory of human exceptionalism originated from the early recognition of humanity's uniqueness, positing that humans possess intelligence and moral capabilities not found in other organisms. This concept manifests differently across various cultures, yet consistently emphasizes the superior status of humanity. With technological advancements, human exceptionalism has propelled progress, but it has also resulted in negative consequences such as environmental degradation. Simultaneously, it has influenced social structures and ethical perspectives, asserting that humans have the right to dominate nature, leading to numerous social issues.

Limited individualism emphasizes the independence and autonomy of individuals, but it has limitations in the relationship between individuals and society, as well as between nature and the environment. It overlooks the influence and constraints that society imposes on individuals, as well as the harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. In contemporary society, limited individualism faces multiple challenges such as globalization, technological development, and environmental protection. It struggles to address the integration of diverse cultures, the complexities of technological advancement, and the se-

verity of environmental issues, which further highlight the limitations of limited individualism in modern society.

4.The challenge of Haraway's posthumanism to human exceptionalism and limited individualism

Haraway profoundly observes that the scientific and technological culture of late 20th century America has crossed three crucial boundaries, fundamentally challenging the foundations of human exceptionalism and limited individualism.

First of all, the boundary between humans and animals has become blurred; two centuries of development in biological and evolutionary theories have significantly weakened the traditional distinctions between humans and animals, rendering such distinctions both unconvincing and unnecessary. In fact, since Darwin's theory of the evolution of apes to humans, the line between humans and animals has been obscured. There is essentially no difference between humans and other animals; humans are mammals, just like cats and dogs, and there is nothing particularly special about humanity. However, some still cling to the notion of being superior to other beings, which in itself reveals their acknowledgment of being similar to animals. Is not the "master of all" still a part of the material world? Haraway points out that we can no longer confidently delineate a clear boundary between humans and animals, and this breakthrough directly undermines the view of humans as a unique presence in nature, namely human exceptionalism.

Secondly, the boundary between humans and machines has also been broken. Haraway emphasizes the co-evolution of humans and machines, considering this evolution to be a fluid process. In this process, humans and machines are interdependent and mutually influential, jointly driving social progress and development. This co-evolution challenges the notion of human centrism, making us realize that humans are not the sole rulers of nature, but rather products of co-evolution with other organisms and technologies. Haraway opposes viewing technology as an entity independent of society, arguing instead that technology is a product of social construction. She believes that the development and application of technology are influenced and constrained by various factors such as society, culture, and economy. This integration of technological determinism and social constructionism breaks down the human-centric view of technology, leading us to understand that technology is not entirely controlled by humans, but is a product of interaction with human society. In the late 20th century, the development of machine technology blurred the traditional distinctions between nature and the artificial, thought and body, self-development and external design. Haraway observed that machines became lifelike, while humans appeared to lack vitality in certain aspects. This was reflected as early as the mid-20th century in Chaplin's "Modern Times": there was little distinction between humans and working machines; everyone was merely a component on the assembly line. To make a living, individuals could no longer afford to be individualists like superheroes or lone cowboys roaming the western plains; they had to collaborate with others and with machines. This shift challenges the traditional notions of human nature and capability within limited individualism. A more pertinent example is the research conducted by the Neural Engineering team at Tianjin University. They collected brain signals using an EEG cap and converted them into commands, successfully controlling external devices to achieve "thought control." Two university students could wear the EEG cap and collectively imagine a Chinese character; their brain signals were captured and transformed into commands, ultimately resulting in a robotic arm writing the character " 福 " on red paper. This marked the first instance in the world of using a collaborative approach to control a robotic arm with multiple minds, "writing" Chinese characters through thought, fully demonstrating the blurred boundaries between humans and machines. Haraway's posthumanism states: "Humans are no longer purely biological entities, but rather composites interwoven with technology." This concept effectively breaks the shackles of anthropocentrism, allowing us to recognize that humans are not a special existence in nature, but rather a part of a complex ecosystem formed in conjunction with other organisms and technology.

In the perspective of cyborgs, individuals are no longer isolated entities but rather complex beings closely interconnected with technology, environment, and society. This concept prompts us to re-examine the independence and autonomy of individuals, recognizing that they are not absolute and eternal, but rather influenced and constrained by various factors such as technology, environment, and society. For instance, the team from Southeast University achieved a score of 90 and won the championship in the "Upper Limb Prosthesis" category at the "CYBATHLON 2024," the third global assistive technology Olympics (also known as the "Cyborg Bionic Olympics") held in Zurich, Switzerland, creating the best result for a Chinese research team in a top-tier global assistive technology competition. The emergence of bionic arms exemplifies the materialization of cyborgs; currently, cyborgs like robotic arms are primarily used in the treatment of individuals with disabilities. However, it is not difficult to imagine a future where the impact of cyborgs will lead people to actively pursue self-modification, such as many students hoping to have a memory chip to directly access knowledge during exams, or others wishing to become immensely strong, or to run incredibly fast to achieve perfect scores in 800-meter and 1000-meter tests. The advent of cyborgs has created a

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space of expectation for many, rather than mere fantasy.

Finally, the boundary between the natural and the non-natural has also been broken. Modern machines, especially microelectronic devices, have become ubiquitous and difficult to detect. Haraway emphasizes that these machines are composed of light, are light and clean, and are no longer material entities but rather signals, electromagnetic waves, and spectral fragments. In this context, the distinction between the natural and the non-natural becomes meaningless, as the two have deeply merged. The wireless network, invisible and intangible, has nearly completely integrated into society and nature; a society without a wireless network is difficult to operate, as timely information is hard to reach everyone, and weather forecasts cannot be updated in real-time. People have long been accustomed to the presence of the wireless network, which exists in people's lives like water and air, existing within nature. Haraway describes this new state as "the cyborg is ether, is essence," further emphasizing the disappearance of boundaries between humanity and technology, as well as between the natural and the non-natural.

5.The insights of Haraway's concept on contemporary development

5.1 Ethics of Technology and Social Responsibility

Haraway's philosophy reminds us that in the midst of the rapid development of technology, attention must be paid to its ethical and social responsibilities. We need to ensure that the development of science and technology benefits humanity and promotes social progress, rather than negative impacts. This requires us to fully consider the long-term interests and sustainable development of human society in the process of scientific and technological research and development and application. The development of cyborgs is not wanton, but needs to be controlled, and it is understandable that if someone transforms their arm into something that can pull out a mountain, and that person is a social terrorist, then people's safety cannot be guaranteed. So for now, even if there is a cyborg, it is basically applied to the disabled, rather than modifying some war machines.

5.2 The reconstruction of human identity and self-awareness

Haraway's posthumanism and cyborg ideas prompt us to re-examine our human identity and self-perception. In this era of change, we need to accept and adapt to the new relationship between human beings, technology and nature, and redefine the essence and value of human beings. At the same time, we also need to maintain respect for the essence and value of human nature, and ensure that the warmth and care of human nature are not lost while the development of science and technology. Haraway's cyborg and posthumanist ideas have profoundly influenced our understanding of our own identity and self-perception. With the advancement of technology and biology, the boundaries of the human body have become blurred, and mechanical prosthetics and bioaugmentation technologies have become more and more popular, and people have begun to re-examine "what it means to be human". This reconstruction of identity and self-perception challenges many notions in traditional culture, such as the "parents of the body, hair and skin" in traditional Chinese culture.

In traditional Confucian culture, "the body, hair, and skin are received from one's parents" is regarded as the cornerstone of filial piety, emphasizing that the body is a gift from parents and should be cherished. However, from the perspective of cyborgs and posthumanism, the body has become a malleable and technologized object, which conflicts with traditional cultural views. For instance, through technologies such as gene editing and biological enhancement, humans may possess physical capabilities that surpass the natural.

Moreover, the concepts of cyborgs and posthumanism have prompted profound reflections on the relationships between the individual and the collective, as well as between the natural and the artificial. With the advancement of technology, the definition of individual identity has become increasingly ambiguous, raising urgent questions about how to ensure that technological development does not undermine human dignity and rights. Therefore, while we enjoy the conveniences brought by technology, we must also remain vigilant about the ethical and social risks it may pose, ensuring that technological progress aligns with the overall interests of humanity.

6.Conclusion

The posthumanism under the cyborg vision of Haraway challenges traditional notions of human exceptionalism and limited individualism, leading us into a new era of deep integration between technology and humanity, as well as nature. Haraway defines the cyborg as the perfect fusion of machines and living organisms, a concept that not only subverts traditional definitions of humanity but also dissolves the binary opposition between technology and nature, as well as mind and body. In her vision, the boundaries between humans and machines, nature and technology become blurred, and humanity is no longer a special existence in the natural world, but rather a part of a complex ecosystem formed together with other organisms and technology.

The post-humanism of Haraway profoundly critiques the limitations of human exceptionalism and individualism,

pointing out that they can no longer adapt to the multiple challenges of globalization, technological development, and environmental protection. By revealing the blurred boundaries between humans and animals, humans and machines, as well as nature and the non-natural, she emphasizes the close connection and symbiotic relationship between humanity, technology, and nature. This concept urges us to re-examine human identity and self-awareness, redefining the essence and value of humanity.

Moreover, the philosophy of Haraway provides important insights for our consideration of technological ethics and social responsibility. In today's rapidly advancing technological landscape, we must ensure that technological development benefits humanity and promotes social progress, rather than causing negative impacts. At the same time, we need to maintain respect for the essence and value of humanity, ensuring that we do not lose the warmth and care of humanity while advancing technology.

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