

**Research article**

# Human, Posthuman and Culture in the Digital Society

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this research was to outline the perspectives of the human and posthuman in the culture of the 'digital society'. The research used dialectical, typological and comparative methods, as well as methods of formalization, modeling and ascent from the abstract to the concrete. It was noted that the prospects for the development of 'human' were determined in the modern European classical thought, the culmination of which was the concept of unlimited improvement of his nature on the basis of reason, developed during the Enlightenment. In non-classical thought, this idea was questioned, which ultimately led to the denial of the prospects for the development of the human himself. It is shown that the formation of an 'information society' and a 'digital society' make it possible to increase the efficiency and productivity of labor, and improve the technical and technological components of the development of society, but do not guarantee the smooth development of its humanitarian component, i.e., the whole person. It is emphasized that the progress of the human presupposes the development of his nature, i.e., a certain totality of natural and socio-cultural constituents of his being, the main of which is the ability to carry out expedient activities to meet needs and realize interests, and also be aware of this process. The loss of this orientation as a result of disharmony in the development of material and spiritual production can lead to the leveling of the main goal of mankind — the achievement of the ideal of a 'whole person'. The domination of the culture of the 'partial man' creates the basis for the formation of the 'posthuman' — a hypothetical prototype of the future intelligent being, which, as a result of the introduction of advanced technologies — informatics, biotechnology, medicine, etc. — lost his human appearance, because he abandoned his nature. This process can lead to the gradual extinction of the *Homo sapiens* species, replacing it with a new species, *Post-Homo sapiens*.

**Keywords:** human, posthuman, culture, information society, digital society, digital economy

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**Dates**

4 February 2022

 Publishing services provided by  
**Knowledge E**

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the Culture, Personality, Society Conference Committee.


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## 1. Introduction

Trying to determine the contours of a possible future, philosophers, sociologists, economists, culturologists, and futurologists pay great attention to the “digital society”, often considering it as a natural result of the evolution of the “information society”. Despite the similarities, there are significant differences between these two ways of organizing social life. If in the “information society”, the production, storage, processing, and sale of information play a key role in material and spiritual production and in the field of human relations, then in the “digital society”, on the contrary, the most important characteristic is not the information itself, but its electronic-digital way of collecting, storage, accumulation, processing, and distribution, i.e., electronic digital support of social relations and public relations. This change in the role and significance of information in people’s lives entails a radical transformation of not only social but also human space and time.

On this issue, two opposite positions have been outlined in the socio-philosophical literature. Some authors consider the transition to a digital way of organizing society to be progressive and inevitable. They pay attention to the huge opportunities for human creativity, which are provided by the global communication network (Internet of things and services), rationally organized economy, artificial intelligence, electronic government, etc. A similar point of view is presented, for example, in the Program for the Development of the Digital Economy in Russia until 2035 [1].

Other authors question the necessity and feasibility of this process. They point to the negative social and humanitarian consequences of the global digitalization of communication, recording and transmission of information using digital devices. The creation of a “digital world” promotes the disclosure of people’s private lives, and the “digital revolution” makes individuals dependent on technology and the same in relation to them. Ultimately, the digitalization of the world will lead to increased surveillance, increased censorship, tougher control over individuals and their private life, and the establishment of a “new totalitarianism”, where social stratification will occur between those who will own and manage new technologies, and those who through these technologies will simply use [2, p. 74].

Prospects for the development of humans were identified in the European classical thought of the New Age, the culmination of which was the concept of the unlimited improvement of human nature on the basis of Reason, developed by representatives of the Enlightenment. Within the framework of this philosophical tradition, the social theory

of Marxism was formed, the ideas of which served as the basis for utopian projects and fundamental socio-economic transformations.

In non-classical thought, the idea of human nature capable of perfection was called into question. According to the apt expression of Scheler, in the modern era, “man has become completely “problematic” [3, p. 70]. The center of philosophical and anthropological research has moved from Reason to other constituents of human existence. Schopenhauer’s World Will, which makes the individual toss between eternal dissatisfaction and boredom or strive to continue the race, or Feuerbach’s Sensuality, which, being transformed in the religion of love, “I” and “You”, puts a person in the place of God, are clear confirmations of this.

Refusal from attempts to throw the worldview anchor of Reason into existence led non-classical thought to the denial of the prospects for the development of humans themselves, to the denial of the specifics of “human, too human”. In a situation of voluntarism, when “God is dead”, man is no longer considered “the crown of Creation” or “the pinnacle of Evolution”; he is just a “bridge”, a “rope” stretched from the monkey to the Overhuman (Superman, Übermensch), who is already dreaming of a posthuman: “Man is something that shall be overcome” [4, pp. 8, 9]. This understanding of man as “transition and destruction” by Nietzsche is comparable to the understanding of man as a “step of the organic” by Plesner, with the development of this idea by Gehlen, Landsberg, and other representatives of modern philosophical anthropology.

In a postmodern situation, two main areas of discussion of the human situation can be distinguished. On the one hand, it is the adaptation of the image-concept of the overhuman by Nietzsche in the works of Foucault and Deleuze. The superman is reanimated in connection with the problem of the “death of man” as an author and the need to designate the form of existence of a human being that arises later. Experiencing its heterogeneity, it disintegrates, realizes its disintegration.

Another direction of “anti-humanism” or, more precisely, “non-humanism” can be found in the philosophical work of Heidegger, in the works of Sartre, and, in part, in the concept of Derrida. This position is most clearly presented in the work *The Ends of a Human (Les fins de l’homme)*, in which the French thinker analyzes a series of peculiar “removals” (releve) of humanism in postmodern thought. Preservation of a loved one in postmodern culture is shocked and disturbed, therefore, a person is threatened with the loss of integrity [5, pp. 245–246].

Thus, in the 20th — early 21st century, the problem of the essence, nature, and purpose of man became the central problem of philosophy. The decline of traditional values, the deterioration of the demographic and ecological situation, the enslavement

of people by scientific, technical, and digital inventions and artifacts, the dominance of the “mass man” in society, the increasing alienation of the individual, the increase in aggressive tendencies, and other negative factors raised the question of the very existence of man, his social economic and spiritual and moral survival.

It became clear that the crisis of civilization is the crisis of man himself, of the social, cultural, informational world he created. Human has come close to changing his essence, directing development either towards the boundless improvement of his nature, or towards transhumanism and the subsequent anthropological catastrophe. All this naturally leads to attempts to identify and comprehend the deep foundations of being and the nature of people, to carry out a worldview reflection of the essence and purpose of man [6, pp. 4–5]. *The dilemma of the future existence of culture can be formulated as follows: the being of a Human or the being of a Posthuman.*

## 2. Purpose, Methodology and Methods

Of course, within the framework of a short report, one cannot consider the stated problem in detail. The purpose of this work is to outline the perspectives of the human and posthuman in the culture of the “digital society”. The methodological basis of the study is determined by its objectives. The work uses a combination of formal and meaningful methods: dialectical, comparative, formalization, modeling, the ascent from the abstract to the concrete, typological, comparative, etc. These methods are not new, but their combined application to specific socio-philosophical material allows obtaining new results. Currently, changes in society are deepening and accelerating, which presents a serious challenge for the scientific and philosophical communities, the ruling elites, and the popular masses. This process is difficult to comprehend from the standpoint of previous theories, which, until the end of the last century, more or less coped with solving the problems of social analysis and forecasting the development of humankind.

For a long time, the study of the influence of digital means on the organization of social life was carried out on the basis of structural and functional analysis. The methodology for studying digital processes, developed on the basis of the works of Castells [7], operated with the concept of “network society”, emphasizing the role of the Internet in the emergence of a new type of social organization [1]. However, the paradigm of cognition prevailing in the Modern era, dividing the object of research into many parts and directions, although it allows fixing individual fragments, does not give a single picture of the whole. Models of reality created on its basis are one-sided,

schematic, and insufficient for a systematic study of social and humanitarian relations, functioning according to rationally understandable and universal laws.

The question arises: what fundamental concept allows linking together the torn branches of knowledge into a single “fabric” of relations in modern society? In the authors’ opinion, such a key category is a *human* who, in the context of understanding challenges in a new technological reality, studying global dynamics, can be regarded as a “basic unit” of the analysis of social changes [8, pp. 10–11].

The reasons for the emergence of a “digital society” and the direction of its evolution can be understood on the basis of solving the problem of a human, whose improvement is possible on the way of eliminating all types of his alienation, harmonious development of the essential forces of individuals, natural and social inclinations of the individual.

Of course, for the study of digital forms of the modern organization of society, the uncritical application of naturalistic and idealistic approaches developed by Western European thinkers of the 17th-19th centuries is unacceptable. Within the framework of postclassical social philosophy and philosophical anthropology, a person cannot be reduced to his/her natural, bodily being, as in the concepts of Hobbes, Locke, and other materialists, or to the activity of his/her consciousness, as in the concepts of Kant, Hegel, and other idealists.

To solve this problem, the dialectical-materialist methodology of social and humanitarian research developed by Marx has heuristic significance, however, with one significant proviso: having formulated in general terms the problem of spiritual production as a universal collective activity to create ideas, values, and teachings, the great German thinker was never able to develop his concept in detail, limiting himself to pointing out the nature of the production of consciousness in a special social form, free from alienation, contributing to the formation of a comprehensively developed personality [9, pp. 279–282].

### 3. Results and Discussion

The “digital society” is not a type of “spiritual production”, just as it is not an aspect or part of the “information society”. It is not limited to a set of technical and technological characteristics for the use of digital information and certain models of interaction in business; but it is determined by the *choice* of social subjects who substantiate their decisions by means of moral norms, political and legal institutions, in which its anthropological component is manifested.

In a sense, the “digital society” can be considered as a stage of development of the “post-industrial society”, in the economy of which the innovation sector with a highly productive industry, the knowledge industry, aimed at producing not only goods but above all high-quality and innovative services, prevails [10, p. 293–296]. However, the connections and relations of the “digital society” cannot be completely reduced to the information processes of the post-industrial society, since, globally, digitalization seeks to cover all technological and social relations, among which there may be industrial and pre-industrial production structures.

The material basis of the emerging “digital society” is becoming the “digital economy”. In a broad sense, this term refers to a part of socio-economic relations that are associated with the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of information technologies. These are, first of all, modern trends caused by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. In a narrow sense, the “digital economy” is a special type of economic activity in which new methods of processing, storing, and transmitting data are applied. This includes electronic goods and services, as well as the entire spectrum of online businesses [10, p. 33].

In general, the “digital economy” implies a radical transformation of the world market. So, at the end of the 20th — beginning of the 21st century, technological development accelerated significantly. Certain sectors and industries of the economy are being transformed into “digital platforms” that unite various types of economic activities, small, medium, and large companies, manufacturers and consumers. By radically changing the forms of the interconnection of economic entities, the digitalization of the economy leads to the transformation of the system of social, political, legal relations on a global scale. However, the transformation of the social and political structures of the outgoing “industrial society” is proceeding more slowly than the technological foundations of the society, which is considered to be an “information society”, are being formed. These processes are a reflection of single social dynamics; they are interdependent and actively affect society and each individual.

Universal digitalization has also affected the sphere of culture. In its most general form, culture is a set of stable forms of human activity in various manifestations, without which it cannot exist and reproduce itself, including all forms and methods of human self-expression and self-knowledge, the accumulation of skills and abilities by a person and society as a whole. This is a system of historically developing supra-biological programs of human life (activity, behavior, and communication), ensuring the reproduction and change of social life in all its main manifestations [10, pp. 341–342].

As an ontological phenomenon, culture characterizes society as a whole, since it reflects the developed foundations that ensure its existence in all aspects of its activity. It is impossible to imagine a culture without a person and society. Associated with this is the most important property of culture, which manifests itself in the course of the development of society — its *transcending nature*. In the concept of transcendence, the world is given as the objectivity of being, which determines its fundamental laws, necessary and universal forms of structure, and in the concept of transcending — as an expression of human subjectivity that proceeds into objectivity. The subject of transcending can only be a human who, through epistemological, axiological, and praxeological acts, realizes the expansion, deepening, and complication of his world [11, pp. 10–13].

In the socio-philosophical literature, the following specific characteristics of “digital culture” are highlighted, associated with the qualitative transformation of social parameters: a change in the perception of time, the emergence of new forms of communication, the development of a different style of behavior of individuals, a change in the forms of employment of individuals, the formation of new institutional settings of everyday life [12, pp. 408–409].

Information-digital everyday life is the specifics of the reality of the “digital society”. Here, the key tool for socio-philosophical analysis is “digital anthropology”. She studies the peculiarities of human existence in the world created by digital, computer technologies, networked environments, as well as the consequences of the impact of virtual and technical innovations on people, explores their media dependence. The peculiarity of the environment formed by digital technologies, on the one hand, is due to its artificiality, and on the other, the impossibility of refusing to use these technologies in modern conditions [13, pp. 287–290].

## 4. Conclusions

In the authors’ opinion, the transcending nature of any culture is determined by two points. First, the activity of the subject, his/her ability to pursue various types of activities, which together can provide a high level and stable rate of progressive changes. In world history, there have been dynamic cultures capable of rapid development, and static, stagnant cultures, incapable of this.

So, the rapid growth of industry, trade, education, science, and technology in Western Europe in the 17th–19th centuries provided the nations inhabiting it with a leading position in comparison with the peoples and ethnic groups of Africa, Asia, and America,

where such conditions simply did not exist. Second, the integrity of the subject, his/her ability to set and solve common problems. All things being equal, whoever is better organized wins. The ability of countries and peoples to come to a reasonable agreement between elites and the masses is the key to success in achieving common goals.

The emergence of a “digital society” in the context of globalism, on the one hand, makes it possible to improve the technical and technological component of human development, increase the efficiency and productivity of labor, and, on the other hand, does not automatically guarantee the development of the humanitarian component, an integral person. For all the achievements of civilization, humans pay too high a price: increased alienation in public and private life, deterioration of the ecological situation, depletion of natural resources, etc. The prospects for the evolution of humankind on the paths of the Human or Posthuman primarily depend on how people cope with these problems.

According to the American researcher, the image-concept of the posthuman is an amalgam, an “umbrella term” that unites heterogeneous components, and this figurative-theoretical construction is continuously being completed and rebuilt. Therefore, it is more correct to talk not about a separate “posthuman”, but about “posthumanity” as the heterogeneity of a human being. A concrete “posthuman” is always a posthuman community, thereby transforming his “I” into a collective “We”. His desires and will are difficult (and even impossible) to identify and separate from the desires and wills of other people.

This necessitates a radical revision of the concepts and practices of both humanism and anti-humanism. With this approach, “natural man” in the spirit of the naturalistic methodology of Hobbes and Locke turns out to be a fiction, since it turns out that a human being is, in principle, cybernetic, regardless of epochs and situations and the corresponding technical and technological relations and methods of organizing production.

Posthuman is not a successor, not an improved model of man or superman: the human and the posthuman exist in a constantly changing mutual configuration, which depends on the specifics of the historical, social, and existential context. Contrary to fears, the concept of a posthuman, like the concept of a person, can be used to avoid the typical mistakes of “human, too human” [14, p. 371].



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