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Transformation of human essence in digital civilization

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Abstract: This article analyzes the transformation of philosophical ideas about the essence of the human being in the context of digital civilization from historical-philosophical and anthropological perspectives. It comparatively examines Eastern and Western philosophical approaches to the biological, social, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human nature. Drawing on the ideas of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Mirzo Bedil, Karl Jaspers, and Friedrich Nietzsche, the study reveals the human being as a changing subject capable of self-awareness and continuous self-transformation. Particular attention is paid to the impact of digital civilization and artificial intelligence on human cognition, self-awareness, socialization, and autonomy, as well as to the socio-cultural and anthropological meaning of the Homo Digitalis phenomenon. The study employs historical-philosophical, comparative, anthropological, hermeneutic, and systemic approaches. It argues that the key criterion of human development in the digital age is not the increasing complexity of technologies, but the human capacity to preserve spiritual autonomy, moral responsibility, and a sense of meaning in life.

Keywords: human essence, human evolution, philosophical anthropology, self-awareness, Eastern philosophy, Western philosophy, digital civilization, artificial intelligence, Homo Digitalis, digital self, digital subjectivity, human autonomy.

Introduction

In the 21st century, the rapid development of digital technologies and their deep integration into virtually all spheres of human life lead to a new stage of societal development—the formation of digital civilization. The process of digitalization transforms not only forms of economy, education, governance, communication, and information exchange, but also human worldview, thinking, social relations, and methods of self-awareness. In this sense, the necessity arises to investigate digital civilization not merely as a new technological environment, but as a new civilizational reality influencing human existence and social essence.

The problem of man is one of the oldest and most enduring issues in the history of philosophy, with various views forming across historical periods regarding its essence, purpose, freedom, intellect, spirituality, and place in society. While in antiquity man was interpreted as a bearer of reason and virtue, Eastern philosophical thought paid special attention to his spiritual maturation, moral responsibility, and aspiration toward perfection. In the Modern era and contemporary philosophy, however, such issues as human autonomy, freedom, subjectivity, existence, and self-awareness have occupied a central place.

The extensive penetration of modern technologies into state and societal governance, economy, education, medicine, industry, and other fields also alters the relationship between man and technology [1]. The contemporary digital environment necessitates reconsidering these philosophical concepts in new conditions. Especially, the growing proximity of artificial intelligence technologies to human intellectual activity brings to the agenda fundamental philosophical questions such as: "What are the primary characteristics that make a human human?", "How does the technologization of intellectual activity affect human independence?", and "Who remains the subject in relations between man and artificial intelligence?"

Artificial intelligence is not digital civilization itself, but one of its most important technological components, increasingly influencing human information retrieval, processing, analysis, decision-making, and creative activity. While this process serves, on the one hand, to expand human intellectual capabilities, on the other hand, it may generate risks of excessive reliance on ready-made information and conclusions, the weakening of independent thinking, and cognitive dependency. From this perspective, studying the human problem under the conditions of digital civilization is important not in terms of technology replacing man, but in terms of preserving human subjective status, independent thinking, freedom, responsibility, and spiritual autonomy in relations with technology. Consequently, digital civilization demands a philosophical investigation not of a one-sided view on the loss of human essence, but of its transformation in terms of content and form.

In investigating this problem, it is important to conduct a comparative analysis of the historical continuity and contemporary transformation of views on man formed in Eastern and Western philosophical thought. In particular, Abu Nasr al-Farabi's views on man, society, and a virtuous life; Mirza Abdulqadir Bedil's philosophical reflections on the human inner world, spiritual maturation, and relation to existence; as well as the ideas of Western thinkers such as Karl Jaspers and Friedrich Nietzsche concerning human freedom, existence, self-awareness, and self-creation serve as important theoretical sources for understanding today's digital reality. At the same time, under the conditions of digital civilization, the necessity of comprehensively investigating such issues as "Homo Digitalis"—the human phenomenon living and operating in the digital environment, new forms of human-technology relations, personal identity, intellectual autonomy, digital ethics, and human dignity is increasing. This requires re-understanding man not merely as a biological or social creature, but as a being entering into intrinsic relations with the technological environment while obliged to preserve its spiritual and social subjectivity.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the historical evolution and contemporary transformation of philosophical views on man under the conditions of digital civilization, and to philosophically and methodologically substantiate the impact of artificial intelligence and digital technologies on human social essence, independent thinking, freedom, responsibility, and spiritual autonomy.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks were defined:

- to analyze the historical development of philosophical views on man and their main substantive stages;
- to comparatively study the views on human essence, freedom, spiritual maturation, and social nature in Eastern and Western philosophical thought;
- to determine the content of the concept of digital civilization and its impact on human existence;
- to analyze the positive and problematic aspects of the impact of artificial intelligence on human thinking and social activity;
- to reveal the philosophical content of the problem of cognitive dependency and independent thinking in the digital environment;
- to analyze the transformations occurring in human identity, freedom, responsibility, and social subjectivity through the phenomenon of "Homo Digitalis";
- to determine the philosophical-methodological foundations for preserving human dignity and spiritual autonomy under the conditions of digital civilization.

The object of the study is the socio-philosophical existence of man and its transformation process under the conditions of digital civilization.

The subject of the study is the transformation of ideas regarding human social essence, independent thinking, freedom, responsibility, dignity, and spiritual autonomy under the influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence.

The methodological basis of the study comprises historical-philosophical, comparative-philosophical, anthropological, hermeneutic, axiological, and systemic approaches. These approaches make it possible to identify the continuity and differences between traditional philosophical concepts of man and the new anthropological condition taking shape in digital civilization.

The scientific novelty of the study is manifested in substantiating the transformation of ideas about man in the context of digital civilization not merely as technological changes, but as a philosophical process intrinsically linked with human independent thinking, cognitive autonomy, social responsibility, freedom, and dignity. From this perspective, the scientific position is advanced that artificial intelligence should be evaluated not as an alternative to human thinking, but as a tool expanding human intellectual potential, while its aspects capable of weakening human subjectivity must be controlled on the basis of philosophical-ethical criteria.

Literature Review

The nature and essence of man have been interpreted in Eastern and Western philosophical thought on various methodological bases. In Eastern philosophy, the human inner world, moral purification, the education of the soul, spiritual maturation, and the idea of the perfect man (insoni kamil) have acquired priority significance. In Western philosophy, however, issues of human autonomy, freedom, rationality, individuality, and social rights have occupied a special place. Nevertheless, making these two directions absolute opposites is incorrect. On the contrary, they allow us to understand the external and internal worlds of man from different perspectives.

N.N. Konrad, emphasizing the necessity of taking into account the theoretical heritage of Eastern thought regarding man and society, wrote: "It is necessary to take into account the theoretical thought of the East in all spheres of science concerning man and society" [2]. K. Jaspers also emphasized the significance of Asian thought for the West, putting forward the idea that "Asia serves as a necessary complement for us" [3].

In Eastern philosophy, the issue of the human inner world and moral maturation is manifested in a unique way in the views of Al-Farabi and Mirza Bedil. Al-Farabi connects human perfection with reason, knowledge, and the education of the soul. Distinguishing the intellectual, irascible, and appetitive forces in the human soul, he emphasizes the necessity for man to educate his own soul: "Humans must and are bound (necessary) to educate their souls" [4].

Meanwhile, Mirza Bedil's views on man are significant for his endeavor to connect the origin and perfection of man with the general development of existence. In his work Irfon (Gnosis), the emergence of man is interpreted in connection with the evolution of the vegetative, botanical, and animal stages. In this sense, in Bedil, man does not appear as detached from nature, but as a complex being formed during the gradual development of existence [5]. Bedil simultaneously sees two poles in man—greatness and defect, reason and cunning, the aspiration toward perfection and indulgence in passions. While recognizing man as a powerful being distinguished from other creatures by his reason, speech, and consciousness, he does not overlook his negative moral characteristics.

K. Jaspers interprets man as an existential subject who is not limited solely to external objective existence, but strives to comprehend the meaning of his own existence. His views on historicity, communication, and the limit situations (Grenzsituationen) of human existence provide an important theoretical vantage point for evaluating the relationship between man and technology under the conditions of digital civilization. Especially under conditions where the digital environment rapidly changes human life, the issue of man's ability to preserve the capacity for meaning-making and self-awareness harmonizes with Jaspers's concept of man [3].

In Western philosophy, the human problem was deeply studied from the perspective of rationality, freedom, and individuality. However, F. Nietzsche called for abandoning the acceptance of man as a ready-made and immutable essence. He criticized philosophers for regarding "modern

man as a starting point for their reflections" and emphasized that man cannot be separated from the historical-evolutionary process [6]. According to Nietzsche, man is a "product of evolution"; his cognitive capacity is also the result of evolution. Thus, the historical analysis of philosophical views on man makes it possible to understand man not as an immutable essence, but as a being that is constantly forming, re-comprehending, and recreating itself.

Methodology

In the study, historical-philosophical, comparative-philosophical, anthropological, hermeneutic, and systemic approaches were utilized. The historical-philosophical approach made it possible to determine the changes in views on man across various periods. The comparative approach served to uncover the similar and differing aspects of human concepts in Eastern and Western philosophy. The anthropological approach was applied in analyzing the relationship between human biological, social, spiritual, and digital existence. The hermeneutic approach allowed for interpreting the core ideas about man in the works of Al-Farabi, Bedil, Jaspers, and Nietzsche within their historical-cultural context. The systemic approach served as the basis for considering digital civilization, artificial intelligence, and the *Homo Digitalis* phenomenon in connection with the general process of human evolution.

Results and discussion

Bio-social and spiritual essence of man

Man, as a complex being, simultaneously embodies biological, social, and spiritual characteristics. As a biological entity, he possesses natural needs such as food, water, air, sleep, and reproduction. However, the fundamental features distinguishing man from other living creatures are language, consciousness, thinking, worldview, moral choice, and spiritual needs. The formation of the personality is also not a one-time process; it develops throughout life under the influence of the social environment, education and upbringing, culture, national values, and self-education. Consequently, the social essence of man is determined not only by his natural characteristics, but also by the environment in which he lives and his capacity for self-formation [7]. Digital civilization creates a new environment precisely for this process. While previously family, community, educational institutions, labor collectives, and the traditional cultural environment were prioritized in the formation of an individual, today digital networks, social platforms, algorithms, and artificial intelligence systems are added to them.

Digital civilization and the transformation of conceptions about man

Digital civilization alters not only the external conditions of human life, but also his self-awareness and relationship with others. Man manifests himself no longer solely in real social space, but also in virtual and digital space. In this sense, the harmonization of online and offline life generates a new form of human existence. The immersion of modern man into the digital environment expands his capabilities. Although computers, smartphones, and other digital tools were initially perceived as simple technical devices, they subsequently transformed into instruments of communication, socialization, and self-expression. Today, they have become an integral part of digital social reality, mediating the relationship between man and the world [8]. However, along with the expansion of human capabilities by technology, the risk of dependency upon it also intensifies. The constant need for digital tools can affect personal privacy, autonomy, reflection, and the ability to make independent decisions [9].

From this perspective, the phenomenon of the "extended 'I'" emerges in the digital environment. An individual's personal data, avatar, digital footprint, and activity on social networks constitute his digital profile. As a consequence, the distinction between the real "I" and the digital "I" becomes increasingly complex.

Artificial intelligence and the problem of human thinking

One of the most important phenomena of digital civilization is artificial intelligence. It increasingly penetrates human cognitive, analytical, and decision-making processes. Therefore, the issue of artificial intelligence is not merely technological, but also anthropological and philosophical. N. Bostrom characterizes artificial intelligence as intelligence created outside the natural biological environment and distinguishes between human-level intelligence and artificial superintelligence [10]. However, the issue of equating human thinking to a complex of algorithms remains debatable. The human mind is not limited solely to information processing; it possesses attributes such as goal-setting, meaning-making, emotion, intuition, moral choice, and responsibility. From this perspective, although artificial intelligence can model certain functions of the human mind, it cannot fully express the entire spiritual-existential content of human existence [11]. This issue requires reconsidering traditional conceptions of man. If we understand intelligence solely as the capacity for calculation and information processing, the gap between man and machine narrows. If we understand intelligence in unity with meaning-making, moral responsibility, and self-awareness, human uniqueness is preserved.

Homo digitalis: a new stage of human evolution

As a result of the development of the digital environment, the concept of "*Homo Digitalis*" is employed to express the new socio-anthropological condition of man. This concept denotes not merely an ordinary smartphone or computer user, but a human whose social identity, communication, decision-making, and self-expression are closely intertwined with the digital environment [12].

The first important feature of the *Homo Digitalis* phenomenon is the acquisition of a new quality in the relationship between man and technical devices. The technical tool is no longer an external object; it has permeated human daily life, communication, labor, and the process of self-expression.

The second feature is the formation of the digital "I." In the digital environment, man manifests himself through avatars, nicknames, photos, videos, texts, likes, and other digital footprints. Therefore, identity is not a ready-made and immutable state, but a process constantly being re-elaborated. This condition intensifies the manifestation of "identity as performance": man shapes his social "I" through how he presents himself in the digital environment.

The third and most important feature is digital subjectivity. In the digital environment, man becomes not only an information consumer, but also a subject creating his own digital profile. Although the diversity of the digital environment multiplies the forms of human self-awareness, it places before him a new task—the task of discovering, shaping, and creating meaning [13]. From this perspective, *Homo Digitalis* is not a new biological species of human evolution, but a new socio-cultural and anthropological configuration of human existence. Its main sign is living in a hybrid reality arising from the harmonization of real and digital environments. However, alongside the opportunities of digital man, risks also exist. The digital environment can blur the boundaries of privacy and autonomy, weaken reflective capabilities, and multiply superficial and short-term communications. Simultaneously, the constant dependence of man on digital devices brings the issue of his independence to the agenda [14].

Thus, under the conditions of digital civilization, the fundamental question concerning man is shifting from "Does man use technology?" to "To what extent does technology alter human self-awareness, social subjectivity, and mode of existence?" This change necessitates a separate analysis of the *Homo Digitalis* phenomenon, which expresses the anthropological condition of man in the new technological environment.

Human evolution: the dialectics of change and preserving identity

The analysis of the evolution of ideas about man demonstrates that in no historical period has man appeared as a completed and immutable being. While Al-Farabi linked human perfection with soul training and reason, Bedil revealed the gradual place of man in existence and his internal

contradictions. Nietzsche, meanwhile, interpreted man as a being capable of self-overcoming and in a process of constant change.

Nietzsche's remark that "Man is never a... fixed being. Man is constantly acquiring or losing something" expresses the dynamic nature of man [6]. This idea acquires special significance under the conditions of digital civilization, because the digital environment compels man to change rapidly, adapt to new technologies, master new roles, and repeatedly reshape his digital profile.

However, human change must not turn into the loss of his identity. In digital civilization, one of the most important tasks of man is to preserve his spiritual autonomy, moral responsibility, and the meaning of life while utilizing the opportunities of technologies. In this sense, Jaspers's interpretation of man as a being striving to comprehend the meaning of existence remains relevant for the digital era. In his view, "A great man is a reflection that reflects the wholeness of existence and illuminates it to an infinite degree" [15].

Consequently, human development cannot be measured solely by technological complexity. Technology can expand human capabilities, but its spiritual purpose, moral responsibility, and capacity for self-awareness are not determined by technology itself. This task remains with man.

Conclusion

Analyses demonstrate that the formation of digital civilization and the penetration of artificial intelligence technologies into virtually all spheres of human life necessitate reconsidering traditional conceptions of man. While previously human social essence was explained primarily through consciousness, thinking, freedom, social relations, and moral-ethical features, in the digital environment, a technological factor has also begun to directly influence these characteristics.

Research results show that evaluating the relationship between man and technology solely from the perspective of technological progress is insufficient. Artificial intelligence can expand human intellectual capabilities and facilitate information processing and decision-making processes. However, its excessive and uncritical utilization also generates the likelihood of weakening human independent thinking, critical thinking, creative activity, and personal responsibility in decision-making. In this sense, under the conditions of digital civilization, the primary issue is not the replacement of man by technology, but the preservation of human subjective status and spiritual autonomy during the process of utilizing technology. On this basis, as a priority direction of human development in the digital civilization, shaping digital-moral culture alongside digital literacy acquires crucial significance. While efficiently utilizing the capabilities of artificial intelligence, man must be able to critically evaluate obtained information, verify its reliability, avoid absolute trust in technological tools, and assume personal responsibility for the final decision. Furthermore, in the educational process, it is appropriate to view the utilization of artificial intelligence not as an alternative to human thinking, but as a tool supporting human intellectual potential. To achieve this, it is essential to further strengthen methods directed toward independent thinking, critical analysis, creative approach, logical reasoning, and substantiating personal position within the educational process.

Another important recommendation stemming from the research is paying special attention to the issue of preventing human cognitive dependency on artificial intelligence. Particularly among youth and students, developing educational approaches focused not on accepting ready-made information or conclusions, but on independently analyzing and re-comprehending them is vital. In addition, when evaluating digital technologies and artificial intelligence, human dignity, freedom, privacy, spiritual autonomy, and social responsibility must be regarded as among the fundamental criteria alongside their technical efficiency. Indeed, technological progress becomes a genuine factor of societal development only when it serves human interests. In this regard, it is appropriate to intensify scientific research aimed at a comprehensive study of "man–artificial intelligence" relations based on the mutual cooperation of philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, ethics,

and information technology. Specifically, systematically investigating changes in human independence, cognitive freedom, social responsibility, and spiritual profile within the digital environment can constitute one of the important directions of future scientific research.

Overall, digital civilization leads not to the loss of human essence, but to its transition to a new socio-cultural and anthropological stage in terms of content and form. Therefore, the primary task for the future should consist not merely in adapting man to technology, but in developing technologies in accordance with human dignity, freedom, spirituality, and social responsibility. The fact that man remains not a passive consumer of artificial intelligence, but a subject who consciously utilizes its capabilities and participates in determining its purpose and boundaries defines the humanistic criterion of digital civilization.

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