

## Human Existence Through Philosophical Inquiry and Technological Transformation: An Analytical Study

*A Existência Humana Através Do Inquérito Filosófico E Da Transformação Tecnológica: Um Estudo Analítico*

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### ABSTRACT:

This article provides an analytical exploration of the concept of human existence within the realm of Western philosophy, tracing its evolution from ancient times through to the modern implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. By examining the philosophical progression from the ancients' view of humans as part of nature to the modern existential and Marxist perspectives, this study highlights the complex interplay between human self-awareness, moral capacity, and the dialectical unity of human existence. Furthermore, it delves into the challenges and opportunities presented by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, emphasizing the impact of technological advancements on human identity, relationships, and societal structures. This analysis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical discourse on human existence, providing a foundation for future research on navigating the existential challenges posed by rapid technological change.

**KEYWORDS:** Human Existence, Western Philosophy, Fourth Industrial Revolution, Technological Transformation, Existentialism, Marxist Philosophy.

## RESUMO:

Este artigo fornece uma exploração analítica do conceito de existência humana no âmbito da filosofia ocidental, traçando a sua evolução desde os tempos antigos até às implicações modernas da Quarta Revolução Industrial. Ao examinar a progressão filosófica desde a visão antiga dos humanos como parte da natureza até às perspectivas existenciais e marxistas modernas, este estudo destaca a complexa interação entre a autoconsciência humana, a capacidade moral e a unidade dialética da existência humana. Além disso, investiga os desafios e oportunidades apresentados pela Quarta Revolução Industrial, enfatizando o impacto dos avanços tecnológicos na identidade humana, nos relacionamentos e nas estruturas sociais. Esta análise visa oferecer uma compreensão abrangente do discurso filosófico sobre a existência humana, fornecendo uma base para pesquisas futuras sobre como navegar nos desafios existenciais colocados pelas rápidas mudanças tecnológicas.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Existência Humana, Filosofia Ocidental, Quarta Revolução Industrial, Transformação Tecnológica, Existencialismo, Filosofia Marxista.

## Introduction

The philosophical endeavor to comprehend the essence of human existence is a journey that stretches back to the very inception of philosophy itself. This article embarks on a meticulous examination of how this endeavor has evolved across various epochs of philosophical thought, navigating from the profound inquiries of ancient Greek philosophy to the contemporary complexities introduced by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It aims to critically assess the transformation in our understanding of human ontology, self-awareness, and the pivotal notions of human dignity, freedom, and identity, all within the context of significant technological shifts.

Philosophy has historically served as a critical mode of social consciousness, relentlessly probing the fundamental questions concerning the origins and essence of both the cosmos and human beings. This inquiry, nestled at the heart of ontology, strives to unearth the underlying essence of being. Early philosophical reflections on human existence were intricately woven into broader contemplations on humanity, often without clear demarcation. However, as philosophical discourse has evolved, there has been a marked shift towards a more focused engagement with human existence, examining it through the prism of core values that underscore the distinctiveness of individual personhood.

The trajectory of this philosophical journey has been significantly shaped by the scientific and technological revolutions, culminating in the unparalleled innovations characteristic of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This era has ushered in a paradigm shift in our comprehension of traditional values and has radically transformed human behavior (Meincke, 2023). These technological advancements pose complex challenges to the continuity of human life, notably influencing the contemporary understanding of human existence through the lens of both personal and collective values (Descombes, 2023).

Given these transformations, there is an increasing necessity to thoroughly examine the concept of human existence within the Western philosophical framework. This examination seeks to unravel the profound impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on our understanding and assessments of human existence (Mackay, 2022). By delving into these philosophical inquiries, scholars can enhance the ongoing discourse on the consequences of technological advancement for the essence of humanity and formulate strategies to navigate the emerging challenges of our era (Lie, 2021). The amalgamation of philosophical contemplation with technological progress underscores the dynamic nature of human existence and the continual evolution of our comprehension of self and society. This fusion of philosophical ideologies and technological advancements not only enriches scholarly conversations but also stimulates further exploration into the intricate relationship between human ontology and the societal changes brought about by technological innovation (Umarhadi, Lasiyo; Santoso, 2020).

In light of these developments, this article seeks to offer an exhaustive exploration of the concept of human existence as it has unfolded within the annals of Western philosophical tradition. It endeavors to dissect the subtle yet profound impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on our perceptions and valuations of human existence. Through this exploration, the article aims to enrich the ongoing scholarly dialogue, catalyzing further research into the implications of technological progress on the very essence of what it means to be human and delineating potential strategies to navigate the emerging challenges of our time.

## 1. The Evolution of Human Existence in Western Philosophy

Philosophical inquiry has long grappled with questions surrounding the essence and purpose of human existence. This fundamental curiosity spans across the epochs of human thought, from the ancient to the modern era, embodying the pursuit to understand what it means to be human. At its core, the exploration of human existence seeks to unravel the complexities of our consciousness, our place within the cosmos, and the values that define our personhood.

### 1.1 The Importance of Human Existence in Philosophical Inquiry

The significance of exploring human existence in philosophy cannot be overstated. It serves as a bridge connecting various domains of philosophical thought, including ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and political philosophy. By contemplating human existence, philosophers engage with questions of morality, purpose, freedom, identity, and social justice, seeking to articulate the conditions that make a life meaningful and worth living.

This inquiry into human existence is not merely academic; it reflects a deep-seated existential curiosity intrinsic to the human condition. Understanding human existence influences how we perceive ourselves and others, guiding our actions, our systems of belief, and our societal norms. It challenges us to consider the implications of our choices and the legacy of our actions in the broader tapestry of human history and future possibilities.

Moreover, the philosophical exploration of human existence encourages a reflective stance toward the rapid advancements in science and technology, prompting critical evaluations of how these developments alter our understanding of what it means to be human. As we stand on the brink of unprecedented technological transformations, these philosophical reflections become ever more critical, providing a necessary counterbalance to purely technocratic visions of human progress.

In sum, the philosophical inquiry into human existence remains a cornerstone of philosophical thought, offering insights into the perennial questions that have fascinated humanity throughout its history. It challenges us to reflect deeply on our nature, our purpose, and the kind of life we aspire to lead, anchoring our pursuit of knowledge in the lived reality of human experience.

## 1.2 Pre-Marxist Conceptions of Human Existence

The exploration of human existence has been a central theme in Western philosophy, evolving through various epochs—from ancient conceptions of humans as integral parts of the cosmos to the complex analyses of human consciousness and rationality in the pre-Marxist era. This journey reflects a deep-seated quest to understand the essence, purpose, and value of human life, a quest that has engaged philosophers for centuries.

In ancient philosophy, humans were viewed as a ‘microcosm’ of the larger ‘macrocosm,’ a perspective that emphasized the interconnectedness of human beings with the natural world. This notion, prevalent among early thinkers, laid the groundwork for subsequent philosophical inquiries into human nature. It posited that to comprehend human existence; one must consider its integration with the cosmos, thus establishing a foundational framework for understanding human beings as part of a more excellent universal order.

The emergence of Socratic philosophy marked a significant shift in the discourse on human existence. Socrates introduced a novel perspective by focusing on the soul as the essence of a human being (Core, Moore; Zinn, 2003). Contrary to the prevailing trends of his time, which might have favored an objective study of humans similar to that of physical objects, Socrates championed the subjective exploration of human essence. He posited that the soul, characterized by its capacity for self-awareness and independent thought, constituted the core of human existence. This introspective turn initiated by Socrates emphasized the importance of self-recognition and the inner life of individuals, setting the stage for deeper explorations of personal identity and consciousness (Adebowale, 2014, Roca-Royes, 2011).

The Medieval period it further expanded the philosophical examination of human existence through the contributions of Saint Augustine of Hippo. Unlike his predecessors, Augustine focused intensely on the individual's internal world, exploring the nature of the self in relation to the divine. His philosophical project was deeply introspective, examining the unique qualities of individual existence and its spiritual dimensions. Augustine's work underscored the significance of personal experience and the quest for understanding one's own soul and its relationship with God. This period saw a synthesis of theological and philosophical thought, enriching the discourse on human existence with considerations of faith, personal meaning, and the pursuit of divine knowledge.

The Renaissance and Early Modern periods witnessed a renewed emphasis on human dignity, individuality, and the capacity for reason. This era, marked by significant scientific and philosophical advancements, advocated for the application of rational thought and the scientific method as the means to understand and elevate human existence. Philosophers such as René Descartes and Francis Bacon played pivotal roles in this intellectual shift, arguing for a conception of human beings as fundamentally capable of reasoning and self-improvement. The period was characterized by an optimistic belief in the potential of the individual, a belief that was manifest in the burgeoning humanist movement and the development of philosophical rationalism.

The German Classical philosophy, mainly through the works of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, represented the culmination of pre-Marxist thought on human existence (Gardner, 2017, Kemp, 2017, Limnatis, 2008). Kant's critical philosophy, especially his division of metaphysics into natural and moral realms, emphasized the significance of human essence from a moral standpoint. He posited that metaphysics, as the foundational science, should offer a substantial basis for understanding human cognition and activity, thereby underlining the importance of moral considerations in the conception of human existence.

Fichte and Schelling expanded upon Kant's ideas by introducing cultural and aesthetic dimensions to the discussion of human nature. Fichte's notion of the 'I' and the 'not-I' opened new avenues for considering human existence in relation to cultural and societal structures, while Schelling's inclusion of aesthetic intuition and artistic creation highlighted the role of creativity and beauty in human life.

Hegel's philosophy further synthesized these views, presenting a dialectical approach that emphasized the centrality of reason and logic in understanding human existence. Hegel argued that true human essence could only be grasped through a systematic and coherent philosophical method, one that acknowledged the complexities and contradictions inherent in human life.

In summary, the pre-Marxist period in Western philosophy was marked by a profound and evolving inquiry into the nature of human existence. From the ancient view of humans as part of a more outstanding cosmic order to the introspective analyses of the soul and consciousness introduced by Socrates, and through to the rationalist and humanist developments of the Early Modern period, this intellectual journey has been characterized by a continuous effort to understand what it means to be human.

The contributions of medieval thinkers like Augustine, who explored the spiritual dimensions of human existence, and the advancements of the Renaissance and Early Modern philosophers, who emphasized human dignity and the capacity for rational thought, have enriched the philosophical landscape. The German Classical philosophers, building on these foundations, offered a comprehensive and systematic approach to the study of human existence, highlighting the importance of reason, morality, and aesthetic experience.

These philosophical developments set the stage for subsequent explorations of human nature, including Marxist thought and modern Western philosophy. The pre-Marxist conceptions of human existence laid the groundwork for a deeper understanding of the complexities of human life, emphasizing the interplay between individual consciousness, moral values, and the broader social and natural world.

As we reflect on the rich tapestry of philosophical thought on human existence, it becomes clear that this inquiry is not merely an academic pursuit but a fundamental aspect of the human condition. The quest to understand ourselves, our purpose, and our place in the universe continues to inspire philosophical exploration, challenging us to contemplate the essence of what it means to lead a meaningful human life.

### 1.3 The Dialectical Concept of Human Existence in Marxian Philosophy

The 19th century it heralded a pivotal era in the history of philosophical thought, particularly with the advent of industrial civilization. This period, characterized by significant transformations in the social and economic fabric of society, witnessed a profound shift in the understanding of human existence. Central to this shift was the philosophical doctrine of Karl Marx (Phuong Thi Nguyen;Nguyen, 2024), who, amidst the burgeoning industrialization and resultant alienation of labor, developed a nuanced theory of human existence that continues to resonate with contemporary philosophical discourse.

The industrial era marked a departure from traditional modes of production, leading to what Marx termed the alienation of labor. As Marx observed, this phenomenon led to a dehumanization of individuals, where workers became estranged from their essence as creative beings. Marx's critique was not merely an economic analysis but underscored a more profound philosophical inquiry into the nature of human existence under the conditions of capitalist production.

Although Marx did not explicitly use the term "human existence," his writings, particularly the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, offer a profound reflection on the subject. Marx posited human existence as a dialectical relationship between humans and nature, between the individual and society, and between one's natural dispositions and social essence (Abdul-Baki;Uthman, 2017). In this work, Marx asserted: Humans "are a natural being endowed with human properties" (Marx;Engels, 2000, p.234). Moreover, according to researchers, this proposition is perhaps the origin of a fundamental classical concept of humans in Marxist philosophy - that is, humans are a biological-social entity (Ho, 2007, p.74-75). This conceptual framework was a departure from the classical German philosophy of his predecessors and presented a scientifically reasoned understanding of human beings as both natural and social entities.

Marx's philosophy viewed humans as natural beings endowed with specific human properties, thereby situating human existence within the broader context of nature and society (Hornborg, 2013). Drawing from Feuerbach's notion of humans as part of nature, Marx expanded this view by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between humans and the natural world. This interaction was not passive but involved a continuous transformation of nature through labor, highlighting the role of human activity in shaping both the world and themselves.

One of Marx's critical contributions to the philosophical understanding of human existence is the concept of species-being (*Gattungswesen*). For Marx, humans are distinguished from other natural beings by their consciousness and purposeful activity (Akram, 2012). In this sense, human existence is not merely about survival but encompasses a conscious engagement with the world. This engagement

manifests in the capacity to transform the environment, a process through which humans realize their essence as species-beings.

At the heart of Marx's analysis is the centrality of labor to human existence. Labor, for Marx, is not just an economic activity but a fundamental aspect of human nature that mediates the relationship between individuals and the world. Through labor, humans express their creativity and affirm their social existence (Jungers;Gregoire, 2021). However, under capitalism, this potential is stifled, leading to alienation.

Marx's critique of capitalist society extends to the realm of social relations (Brincat;Gerber, 2015). He argues that the essence of human nature only fully reveals itself within the social context. Human existence, therefore, cannot be understood in isolation but must be analyzed in terms of the intricate web of social relationships that define the human condition.

Although Marx is often associated with a materialist conception of history and society, his philosophy also acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of human existence. Marx recognized that the alienation of labor under capitalism not only impacts the material conditions of life but also leads to a spiritual estrangement, where individuals become disconnected from their true human potential.

This holistic view of human existence, encompassing the biological, social, and spiritual dimensions, challenges the reductionist interpretations of Marx as solely focused on economic determinants. Instead, Marx presents a rich, dialectical analysis of human existence that considers the interplay between various aspects of human life.

The philosophical insights offered by Marx in the 19th century remain profoundly relevant in the contemporary era. The challenges posed by technological advancements, globalization, and continued capitalist expansion resonate with Marx's critique of alienation and his call for a reconfiguration of societal relations to allow for a fuller realization of human potential.

In summary, Marx's philosophical exploration of human existence offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interrelations between individuals, society, and nature. His dialectical approach, emphasizing the dynamic and interconnected nature of human life, provides valuable tools for critiquing contemporary social realities and envisioning alternative futures. By situating human existence within the broader context of labor, social relations, and the natural world, Marx's philosophy invites ongoing reflection on the conditions necessary for achieving genuine human flourishing.



The depth and breadth of Marx's thought challenge us to reconsider the essence of human existence in the modern world. It prompts an interrogation of the ways in which economic systems, social structures, and technological developments shape our lives and our understanding of what it means to be human. Marx's vision of human existence as a dialectical unity of the biological, social, and spiritual dimensions offers a critical lens through which to analyze and address the existential challenges of the 21st century, reaffirming the enduring significance of his philosophical legacy.

### 1.3. Modern Western Philosophy on Human Existence

The science and technology revolution is becoming increasingly powerful, causing significant changes in social life. However, modern times have raised higher demands for humans and pushed individuals towards "fears" of spiritual alienation, losing their own "freedom," "loneliness" in their existence; thereby, driving humans into a state of "anxiety," constantly pondering about their "responsibility" and "conscience" towards life. In such a contemporary context, modern Western philosophers have constructed philosophical theories that deeply reflect this concern. Furthermore, through that, the concept of Human Existence has been uniquely represented by philosophers.

#### 1.3.1. Freudian Psychoanalysis: Unconscious Impulses and Human Nature

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory represents a unique perspective of non-rationalist philosophical trends, advocating the search for human nature outside of its rationality. According to Freud, the human psyche consists of three foundations: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego (Frank, 1998).

While most modern Western philosophers regard humans as a unique entity or a particular type of existent - different from everything else, and therefore, allow us all to speak of humans as a rational being capable of thought, Freud recognized that often humanity is governed by the "non-rational" nature of humans. In his psychoanalytic theory, Freud discussed this issue and his significant discovery related to human life was the discovery of the unconscious. According to Freud, unconscious impulses and desires play a foundational role in all manifestations of the human spirit, including the most noble and holy expressions. Holding a unique position among these desires is the sexual force, which he expressed with the term "libido" (Do, 2006, p.231).

By acknowledging the unconscious, Freud not only challenged the philosophical and scientific paradigms of his time but also expanded the understanding of human nature. He portrayed humanity as a duality, bridging the lofty spiritual and the primal natural, underscoring the uniqueness of human existence (Oliveira Silva, 2022).

Further extending Freud's impact, the psychoanalytic perspective has reshaped the philosophical discourse on human existence, encouraging a reevaluation of phenomena previously overlooked by academia. This includes the significance of seemingly minor events or "micro-events," which Freud's discovery of the unconscious has brought to the forefront of psychoanalytic study, aligning with Theodor Adorno's notion of micrology - a methodology emphasizing the importance of minor details in philosophical inquiry (Oliveira Silva, 2022).

Moreover, Freud's analyses on fetishism underscore his broader psychoanalytic contributions, tracing its evolution within his corpus to highlight the development of a comprehensive theory of the human psyche. This progression illustrates Freud's methodical approach to understanding human nature, which, according to Da Silva (2021), follows a discernible chronological trajectory aimed at constructing a generalized theoretical framework.

Thus, Freudian psychoanalysis emerges as a pivotal philosophical and scientific endeavor, redefining our comprehension of human nature by illuminating the intricate dance between our rational faculties and the shadowy depths of the unconscious.

### 1.3.2. Husserl's Phenomenology: Consciousness and Self-Understanding

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology marks a transformative shift in philosophical inquiry, centering on human existence and consciousness's unique capacity for intentionality. His methodology, characterized by the epoché - the suspension of all judgments and presuppositions - reveals the direct experiences of consciousness, positing these experiences as the only undeniable truths. This approach allows for an exploration of existence through a lens of introspective self-awareness, significantly influenced by cultural and artistic engagement (Oliveira, 2023).

Husserl's insights into the intentionality of consciousness lay the groundwork for understanding human consciousness as inherently object-oriented. This fundamental aspect of phenomenology diverges from attempts to demystify the nature of the world and humanity, focusing instead on refining the cognitive processes that underpin our understanding of existence. His work illuminates the complexities of navigating the modern condition, particularly the crisis of spiritual alienation faced by individuals in Western societies. Husserl diagnoses this crisis as a disconnection from one's internal compass, exacerbated by the rapid pace of modern life and manipulative societal structures that obfuscate accurate value systems.

The influence of Husserl's phenomenology extends beyond its initial scope, paving the way for subsequent philosophical movements that delve deeper into the intricacies of human consciousness. His

exploration of self-understanding as the cornerstone of existential comprehension has informed the development of existentialism, philosophical anthropology, and hermeneutics, among others. This lineage is evident in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, who, building on Husserl's concept of intentionality, further elaborates on the dynamic, outward-oriented nature of consciousness. Sartre's phenomenological analysis, particularly in "Being and Nothingness," enriches Husserl's notions by highlighting the ontological freedom intrinsic to human reality, thereby confirming the enduring relevance of Husserl's phenomenological inquiry (Oliveira, 2023).

Through Husserl's phenomenology, a comprehensive framework emerges for understanding human existence as an interplay between consciousness and the world. This framework challenges conventional philosophical paradigms, advocating for a direct engagement with the phenomena of consciousness to unravel the essence of human nature and freedom. Husserl's legacy, as further developed by thinkers like Sartre, continues to offer profound insights into the existential dilemmas of modern life, emphasizing the pivotal role of self-awareness and cultural engagement in fostering a deeper understanding of our existence.

### 1.3.3. Existential Philosophy's Contribution

#### a) Martin Heidegger: Dasein and the Authentic Life

Martin Heidegger is one of the founders of existentialism and one of the most representative existential philosophers. Martin Heidegger's exploration of human existence, or Dasein, and authenticity presents a foundational shift in existential philosophy, profoundly influencing subsequent intellectual discourse across various fields. Heidegger delineates Dasein as a unique form of existence that is conscious of its being, capable of self-reflection, and inherently oriented towards its own finitude. This conceptual framework challenges the traditional metaphysical equation of existence with the being of entities, positing instead that the essence of human existence lies in its capacity to question and define itself (Marx;Engels, 2000, p.94). Central to Heidegger's ontology is the notion of being-towards-death, a state that underscores the existential dimension of temporality and the inevitability of non-existence.

In "Being and Time," Heidegger articulates the distinction between the ontic and ontological dimensions of existence, emphasizing the importance of authentic living. Authenticity, for Heidegger, involves a direct confrontation with one's own mortality and the rejection of societal norms that obscure genuine self-understanding. This perspective on existence challenges individuals to live in accordance with their own understanding of being, rather than succumbing to an unexamined life dictated by external forces.

The relevance of Heidegger's philosophy is underscored in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as examined by Azeredo et al. (2022). The pandemic highlighted the concept of care (*Sorge*) as central to human existence, resonating with Heidegger's emphasis on care as a fundamental structure of *Dasein*. This period of global crisis prompted a reevaluation of existential priorities, underscoring the interconnectedness of individual and communal well-being and the importance of addressing existential concerns in times of crisis.

Further exploring the intersection of Heidegger's thought with other disciplines, Alonso (2011) engages with literature, mainly through the existential trajectory of characters in Clarice Lispector's work. This analysis illustrates how literary exploration can echo and amplify Heideggerian themes of estrangement and existential anxiety, providing a rich canvas for examining the nuances of human existence.

The dialogue between Heidegger's existential ontology and the transcendence of being, as discussed by Moreira (2020), delves into the dynamic interplay between *Dasein* and the world, highlighting the ontological underpinnings of transcendence and its significance in the existential analysis. This conversation extends into the realms of digital ontology and the impact of technology on human existence, with De Miranda Cordeiro Dürmaier (2009) exploring the implications of digital life for Heidegger's ontology, reflecting on the challenges and transformations presented by digitalization.

Moreover, the contributions of Seibt (2010, 2015, 2017) elucidate Heidegger's impact on the foundation of knowledge and hermeneutics, emphasizing a shift towards facticity and the hermeneutic circle. This approach advocates for a phenomenological engagement with the conditions of knowledge, challenging the adequacy of theoretical models and highlighting the importance of grounding epistemological inquiries in existential facticity.

Language, as discussed by Maia and Dos Santos (2023), emerges as a crucial medium for articulating the truth of being, situating Heidegger's philosophy within the broader context of linguistic expression and its role in shaping human understanding of the world.

Finally, the influence of Kierkegaard on Heidegger, particularly in the domains of subjectivity and authenticity, as analyzed by Ericksen (2017), demonstrates the interplay between existentialist thought and Heidegger's ontological investigations. This influence underscores a move beyond individual isolation towards a communal understanding of existence, enriching the discourse on authenticity and the existential condition.

In summary, Martin Heidegger's existential ontology, with its emphasis on Dasein, authenticity, and the existential structures of being, has profoundly impacted a wide array of intellectual endeavors. From literature to the existential challenges of the digital age, Heidegger's philosophy continues to offer critical insights into the nature of existence, knowledge, and the pursuit of authenticity in the modern world.

b) Jean-Paul Sartre: Existence, Freedom, and Individualism

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, closely related yet distinct from Heidegger's existential ontology, categorizes human existence into being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Unlike Heidegger's binary of existence and being, Sartre's framework differentiates the inert nature of objects (being-in-itself) from the conscious, self-determining human existence (being-for-itself). Objects, or being-in-itself, exist without consciousness and meaning until perceived by a conscious being, highlighting the transformational role of consciousness in attributing qualities like beauty or significance to the external world. This ontological division underpins Sartre's exploration of human existence, emphasizing the individual's engagement with the world through consciousness (Vu Hao Nguyen, 2016).

Central to Sartre's philosophy is the concept of freedom, which serves as the ethical foundation of human existence. Sartre argues that humans must self-define their moral values and life purposes, as external metaphysical realms offer no pre-determined ethical guidelines. This stance on moral self-determination aligns with his broader emphasis on subjectivism and individualism, where freedom is not merely the absence of constraint but the alignment with one's ethical conscience. However, Sartre also acknowledges the limitations and responsibilities accompanying freedom, suggesting a nuanced understanding that freedom entails ethical self-consistency rather than arbitrary choice (Beltrán, 2023, Lo Feudo, 2023).

Sartre's engagement with the concept of contingency, notably in his early work "La Nausea" and its development into the notion of nothingness in "Being and Nothingness," illustrates his philosophical evolution and the complexity of his thought regarding human freedom and existence (Cotrina Cosar, 2023). This work, alongside his analysis of pre-reflective cogito and the intentionality of consciousness, showcases a departure from traditional existential concepts towards a more nuanced, non-egological understanding of self-awareness and freedom (Oliveira, 2023).

Moreover, Sartre's theoretical contributions are enriched by his dialogues with contemporary and historical philosophical positions, including his reinterpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis through an existential lens. This reinterpretation emphasizes the forward-looking, intentional aspect of

consciousness over Freud's backward-looking, trace-based model of psychic life, presenting an existential psychoanalysis centered on the emergent, ontological character of consciousness (Vinolo, 2023).

Sartre's exploration of human existence and freedom also delves into the ethical implications of action, as seen in his phenomenological ontology. Action, within this framework, is not only a manifestation of freedom but also a dialectical process that involves the constant reevaluation and redefinition of the self and the world. This dynamic understanding of action and its ethical dimensions highlights the inherent contradictions and challenges of human existence, where achievements can simultaneously represent progress and potential self-destruction (Basilio Cladakis, 2023).

In summary, Sartre's existential philosophy presents a complex, nuanced ontology of human existence, marked by the central role of consciousness, freedom, and ethical self-determination. His contributions to existentialist thought, from the categorization of being to the limits and responsibilities of freedom, reflect a deep engagement with the conditions of human existence, the nature of action, and the pursuit of meaning in a contingent world.

## 2. Challenges to Human Existence in the Age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

### 2.1. Redefining Humanity: The Dual-Edged Sword of Technological Advancements in the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has ushered in a new era of technological advancements, transforming every facet of our lives (Phuong Thi Nguyen;Nguyen, 2024, Thi Quyet Nguyen, 2022, Rotatori, Lee;Sleeve, 2021). From artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics to biotechnology and quantum computing, the pace of innovation is unparalleled. While these advancements promise to solve some of humanity's most pressing challenges, they also pose significant questions about the essence of human nature, our values, and the ultimate purpose of existence.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) profoundly alters the economic landscape, with automation and artificial intelligence ushering in an era of unmatched efficiency and productivity across various industries. This transformation, while heralding significant advancements, also presents considerable challenges, including job displacement and an expanding skills gap. These developments strain traditional concepts of work and purpose, underscoring the urgent need for a balanced approach that harmonizes technological progress with the preservation of meaningful employment opportunities.

In South Korea, the effects of the 4IR are particularly evident in the realms of life-convenience and blockchain technology. These areas have demonstrated considerable impact, signaling a critical need

for policy initiatives aimed at navigating the complexities of 4IR integration (Ahn,Jang;Rhee, 2022). Similarly, in South Africa, the 4IR has facilitated strides towards re-industrialization and enhanced work mobility. However, it concurrently poses the risk of exacerbating socioeconomic disparities, highlighting the dual-edged nature of technological advancement in society (Mtotywa et al., 2022).

In the political realm, technology has both democratized information and created avenues for misinformation and surveillance. Social media platforms have empowered voices from all corners of the globe, yet the same tools have been weaponized to undermine democracies and manipulate public opinion. The ethical implications of these technologies question the foundations of freedom and privacy, essential values of human society.

Culturally, the 4IR has reshaped human interaction and communication. Digital realities have blurred the lines between the physical and virtual worlds, altering perceptions of identity and community. While this has fostered global connections, it has also led to a sense of isolation and a loss of genuine human contact, raising concerns about the erosion of social bonds and empathy.

Furthermore, advancements in genetics and biotechnology are redefining the boundaries of life, challenging traditional beliefs about birth, death, and what it means to be human. The potential to edit genes and enhance human capabilities presents ethical dilemmas and sparks debate over the natural versus the engineered, questioning the core of human identity and values.

As we navigate the complexities of the 4IR, it becomes imperative to reflect on the true purpose of human existence. The intersection of technology and humanity demands a reevaluation of our values and priorities. It calls for a balanced approach that harnesses the benefits of technological advancements while preserving the essence of what it means to be human. The journey through the 4IR is about more than just about technological innovation but about redefining humanity itself, ensuring that in our quest for progress, we keep sight of the values that make us uniquely human.

## 2.2. Challenges to Human Existence in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Identity, Freedom, and Social Connection

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) heralds a transformative era marked by groundbreaking advancements in technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, the Internet of Things (IoT), and biotechnology. While these developments promise unparalleled progress, they also present profound challenges to human existence, fundamentally altering our notions of identity, freedom, and social connection (Soh;Connolly, 2021). These challenges demand a critical examination to navigate the

complexities of modern life and ensure a future where technology enhances rather than diminishes human value.

The 4IR introduces a digital economy, revolutionizing society's production modes and altering the fabric of production relationships. As digital technologies become more integrated into everyday life, human relationships within society are undergoing profound changes, which are predicted to grow even more complex. The introduction of AI and robotics into the workforce and daily tasks signifies a shift towards more intricate human-computer-robot communication dynamics. While these technologies can undertake tasks with efficiency surpassing human capabilities, they raise concerns about the displacement of human roles and the consequent impact on real human interactions. The essence of freedom is also under scrutiny in this new era. The omnipresence of connected devices and the potential for personal data misuse pose significant threats to privacy and autonomy, challenging the very notion of freedom in the digital age.

Despite the technological achievements of the 4IR bridging geographical distances and enriching spiritual life, they inadvertently contribute to a pervasive sense of loneliness and isolation. The paradox of increased connectivity, alongside growing emotional detachment, underscores a shift in the nature of human relationships. The abundance of both natural and virtual interactions brings new forms of happiness but also new miseries, highlighting the complexities of modern existence. Furthermore, advancements in technologies such as 3D printing and biotechnology present ethical dilemmas by blurring the lines between good and evil, right and wrong. As humans grapple with these moral complexities, they face heightened internal conflicts, underscoring the profound impact of the 4IR on the human psyche.

In the context of globalization, the 4IR intensifies the impact on cultural and individual identities. The concern over the loss of Homo Sapiens' identity amidst rapid technological change is palpable. Klaus Schwab, a prominent researcher, eloquently captures this sentiment, noting that the 4IR alters not only our work but our very selves. It influences personal identity, privacy, ownership concepts, consumer habits, and even our leisure and career pursuits. The prospect of technology that enhances human capabilities raises urgent questions about the essence of human existence (Schwab, 2018, p.166). Moreover, the application of technologies like 3D printing in medicine, while offering health improvements and potentially extending the human lifespan, also poses risks to the very identity of humans and society. This technological intrusion into the "inorganic body" of humans prompts a reevaluation of what it means to be human.



The challenges posed by the 4IR necessitate a comprehensive ethical framework to navigate the future. As technology continues to advance, it is crucial to maintain a balance that respects human dignity and freedom while embracing the benefits of innovation. The discourse around technology and ethics must evolve to address the nuanced dilemmas of the modern world, ensuring that advancements serve to enhance human well-being without compromising ethical principles.

The crisis of identity in the 4IR era calls for a reassertion of the values that define us as humans. Amidst the technological onslaught, maintaining a sense of self and community becomes paramount. Cultivating a strong sense of cultural and personal identity can act as a bulwark against the homogenizing effects of globalization and technology, ensuring that diversity and individuality are preserved.

Strengthening social connections in the digital age is another critical challenge. While technology offers new ways to connect, it is essential to foster genuine human interactions that transcend digital platforms. Encouraging community engagement, empathy, and face-to-face interactions can mitigate the feelings of isolation and loneliness exacerbated by the digital divide.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution brings to light the intricate dance between technological progress and the fundamental aspects of human existence. As we venture further into this new era, the challenges of identity, freedom, and social connection become increasingly apparent. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes ethical consideration, a recommitment to human values, and a concerted effort to preserve the richness of human relationships. By doing so, we can harness the potential of the 4IR to create a future where technology amplifies the best of humanity rather than diminishing it. The journey ahead is complex, but by prioritizing human dignity and connection, we can navigate the tumultuous waters of change and emerge more vital, more connected, and fundamentally human.

## Conclusion

Navigating the profound shifts ushered in by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) compels us to confront and reassess the essence of human existence within a rapidly changing technological landscape. This journey through the evolution of philosophical thought, from ancient musings to contemporary concerns, reveals a consistent endeavor to understand what it means to be human amidst shifting paradigms of knowledge, society, and technology. As we stand at the crossroads of an era marked by groundbreaking advancements in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital connectivity, the questions of human dignity, freedom, and identity are more pertinent than ever.

The challenges identified throughout this exploration—ranging from the transformation of social interactions and the erosion of personal freedom to the crisis of human identity—underscore the dual-edged nature of technological progress. While the 4IR holds the promise of solving some of humanity’s most pressing challenges, it also poses significant risks to the fabric of human society and the core values that sustain it.

Philosophical inquiry into human existence, enriched by centuries of thought, provides a vital framework for examining these challenges. It urges us to balance the technological imperatives of efficiency and innovation with the ethical considerations of human dignity and social cohesion. In this context, the philosophical legacy of questioning and self-reflection emerges as a crucial guide for navigating the complexities of modern existence.

As we forge ahead, the imperative to integrate ethical deliberation into the fabric of technological development becomes increasingly apparent. Through such integration, we can harness the potential of the 4IR in ways that enhance rather than diminish the human condition. This calls for a collective effort among technologists, policymakers, philosophers, and society at large to ensure that the advancement of technology proceeds with a conscious regard for the values and principles that define our humanity.

In conclusion, the exploration of human existence in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution reaffirms the timeless relevance of philosophical inquiry. It highlights the need for a balanced approach that embraces the benefits of technological advancements while vigilantly safeguarding the essence of what it means to be human. As we continue to navigate this era of unprecedented change, the philosophical endeavor to understand human existence not only enriches our grasp of the present but also illuminates the path towards a future where technology serves to elevate the human spirit rather than subdue it.

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Received: 04/2024

Approved: 04/2024