International Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal, Open Access Journal
ISSN: 2320-4842 (Print) ISSN: 3049-2688 (Online)

ARIMAA NOKKU
ISSN: 2320 - 4842 (P)
ISSN: 3049-2688 (O)

20 • 1 Jan • Mar 2026

Published on 14, Jan - Mar 2026 ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

Beyond the Binary: Exploring Artificial Consciousness and Coexistence in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract

This research investigates the convergence of creative thought and scientific exploration within Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun*, emphasising the ramifications of posthumanism and the notion of artificial consciousness. The plot revolves around Klara, an Artificial Friend designed to offer companionship to Josie, a young girl contending with the repercussions of genetic enhancement. Through the portrayal of their relationship, the novel probes the interactions between silicon-based and carbon-based life forms, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding anthropocentrism and post-anthropocentrism. By integrating theoretical perspectives from leading neuroscientists and philosophers, this study challenges the conventional interpretations of consciousness, particularly its historical association with biological entities. The scholarship of theorists like Nick Bostrom interrogates the conventional understanding of consciousness, positing that it could potentially arise from various underlying substrates. This perspective facilitates a discourse on the possibility of artificial consciousness. The paper engages with both speculative theories and empirical evidence, aiming to shed light on the potential societal frameworks and ethical dilemmas that may emerge in an era where human and nonhuman entities coexist. The findings emphasise the imperative of reassessing conceptions of intelligence and agency within a progressively technology-oriented society. Ultimately, the analysis advocates for a collaborative relationship between humans and machines rather than one characterised by dominance.

Key Words: *Anthropocentrism, Artificial Consciousness, Artificial Friend, Artificial Intelligence, Biological Entities, Emotional Support, Genetic Enhancement, Intellectual Stimulation, Posthumanism, Silicon-based Life Forms.*

Introduction

Consciousness is often considered a characteristic exclusive to carbon-based life forms, a view commonly held by many scholars in the field. Prominent neuroscientists such as Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi have contributed significantly to the understanding of consciousness through their development of the 'Dynamic Core Hypothesis' and the 'Integrated Information Theory' (IIT). These theories, which provide a biological underpinning for consciousness, are extensively examined in their 1992 publication, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind*. In contrast, philosophers like Nick Bostrom present a counterargument to the notion that consciousness is

inherently linked to biological entities. In his 2003 paper, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation", Bostrom posits that consciousness could potentially arise from various physical substrates, rather than being solely dependent on 'carbon-based biological neural networks' such as the human brain. Bostrom's philosophical stance is deeply rooted in Posthumanism, which underpins his exploration of the possibility of artificial consciousness. Consequently, it is essential to examine and approach the concept of artificial consciousness through the lens of posthumanism.

Posthumanism

Posthumanism has emerged as a prominent area of scholarly inquiry in contemporary discourse. Consequently, a number of theorists are articulating their interpretations of Posthumanism, drawing from their respective fields of expertise. Influential figures such as Nik Bostrom, Max Tegmark, Stuart Russell, Geoffrey Hinton and Yuval Noah Harari assert that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to dominate the future landscape. Notably, Harari has authored a work titled *Nexus*, in which he posits that AI should not merely be regarded as a tool, as commonly perceived, but rather as an 'agent' capable of autonomous functioning. According to Harari, once artificial intelligence is given a directive, it can execute the assigned tasks using various methods. This development marks a significant shift in our understanding of the relationship between humans and technology, particularly regarding consciousness. Some scholars predict that artificial intelligence may eventually surpass human cognitive abilities in the near future, which in turn necessitates a reassessment of anthropocentric viewpoints. This expectation has resulted in a notable increase in the production of science fiction narratives featuring nonhuman characters, especially those that delve into themes related to conscious artificial intelligence.

The philosophy of posthumanism, contrary to popular belief, does not revolve around the apprehension of nonhuman entities overpowering humanity. Instead, it embodies the idea of a collaborative and mutually beneficial coexistence between humans and nonhuman entities. This viewpoint highlights the possibility of fostering a harmonious relationship where both groups can leverage their interactions for mutual advantage, thereby encouraging a shared evolution as opposed to a framework characterised by hierarchy or adversarial dynamics. This optimistic and clearly articulated perspective on artificial intelligence and posthuman entities is thoroughly examined by Francesca Ferrando in her work, *Philosophical Posthumanism*. She explores this theme through three key frameworks: Post-Humanism, Post-Anthropocentrism and Post-Dualism.

A Brief Overview of the Novel

Kazuo Ishiguro, a prominent contemporary author of Japanese-British heritage, received the esteemed Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017. In 2021, he published his eighth novel, Klara and the Sun, which explores the life and experiences of Klara, a humanoid robot known as an Artificial Friend (AF). This humanoid robot has been meticulously crafted to interact with and assist humans across a range of functions. The narrative provides a nuanced exploration of the intricacies inherent in human-robot interactions and the ramifications of artificial companionship. Ishiguro exhibits a deep awareness of current social dynamics by placing a non-human sentient entity at the forefront of his narrative, effectively mirroring the significant themes.

Klara is an Artificial Friend belonging to the fourth series of B3 models, specifically engineered as a solar-powered female robot to cater to the developmental requirements of children in the United States. A distinctive characteristic of Klara is her pronounced aversion to Cootings machines, which are employed in construction activities. This aversion stems from her awareness of the detrimental emissions produced by these machines, which not only hinder the penetration of sunlight but also have a negative impact on the environment. Initially, Klara was disregarded by prospective purchasers; however, her situation changed dramatically when she was ultimately showcased in a retail store managed by a woman. This pivotal moment in her journey led to a significant transformation when she was selected by Josie, a 14-year-old girl residing in a secluded region of the United States, to serve as her Artificial Friend.

Josie resides with her mother, Chrissie, which underscores the depth of their bond. Additional-

ly, she maintains a significant relationship with her neighbour and dear friend, Rick. Josie faces challenges associated with a chronic health condition that is a consequence of genetic enhancements referred to as 'lifting'. This situation prompts apprehensions about the possible reduction in her longevity. Chrissie urged Klara to spend constant time with Josie, not only to provide care but also to gain a deeper insight into Josie's personality and behaviour. This guidance was based on the belief that after Josie's passing, Chrissie could fill the void left by Josie with Klara. Simultaneously, Mr. Capaldi has been assigned the responsibility of creating an artificial companion that replicates Josie's physical characteristics. This initiative aims to transfer Klara's programming to the humanoid robot, which Mr. Capaldi is designing to closely resemble Josie.

Klara possesses a deep conviction regarding the remarkable healing capabilities of the Sun for humanity. In her quest to restore Josie's health, she resolves to dismantle the Cooting machine. Her previous collaboration with Josie's father, an engineer, provides her with valuable experience, as she had successfully disassembled a comparable device in the city. This past achievement further strengthens her resolve to honour her commitment. On an exceptionally sunny day, Josie exhibits a significant improvement in her condition, an occurrence that both Klara and Rick credit to the positive effects of sunlight.

As time advances, Josie departs for college, while Klara makes the transition to the Yard, a designated facility for ageing Artificial Friends to spend their retirement. In this new environment, Klara finds solace in her solitude. In the final chapters of the narrative, the store Manager reengages with Klara after an extended absence, culminating in a profoundly emotional interaction. In the course of this interaction, Klara engages in a reflective exploration of her previous experiences, fondly recalling the notable role that the Sun played in Josie's recovery process. However, this recollection is met with a contrasting perspective from the Manager, who posits that the Sun's benevolence had consistently been aimed at Klara herself, rather than Josie.

The Posthuman Aspects of Klara

The narrative of the novel is conveyed through the unique viewpoint of Klara, a humanoid robot. Her exceptional abilities distinguish her from the other advanced robots available in the store, ultimately enabling her seamless integration into the household of a girl named Josie. Klara's principal objective centres on the emulation of Josie, coupled with an effort to assume her role, all the while maintaining a vigilant focus on Josie's health and emotional well-being. In the process of pursuing this aim, Klara unintentionally disrupts the social interactions of Josie's human friends, thereby demonstrating her proficiency in managing intricate social dynamics. In contrast to human beings, Klara is devoid of the emotional limitations that may obstruct her ability to fully empathise with Josie's circumstances. Klara's intellectual capabilities, in nearly every regard, surpass those of typical humans. However, she was not designed to exceed human intelligence, which positions her as a genuine embodiment of a posthuman entity, rooted in her distinct non-human cognitive faculties.

Objectives of the Study

The main emphasis of the paper revolves around a series of pivotal inquiries. First and foremost, it investigates the necessity of a posthuman entity adopting the characteristics of a human. The paper further explores the possibilities of artificial consciousness in relation to posthuman entities. It also assesses the validity of classifying Klara as a posthuman entity. In addition, the discussion touches on the possible implications for the future that align with the themes presented in the novel.

Methodology

The researcher employed the established principles of research methodology outlined in the MLA Handbook, 9th edition, to guide the development of this research article. A qualitative research study was conducted, utilising a descriptive approach to analyse Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, *Klara and the Sun.* This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of the themes and elements within the text.

Discussion

The Importance of a Posthuman Entity Represented by Humanoid Robots

In a discussion entitled 'On Reason and Reality' featuring Steven Pinker, the esteemed scientist Richard Dawkins explores the complexities inherent in human imagination. He posits that individuals tend to interpret the world around them through the lens of their own perceptions and personal experiences. As a result, this tendency has historically facilitated the conceptualisation of deities, including the figure of God, constructed in accordance with human characteristics and attributes. In a similar vein, modern researchers are in the process of creating humanoid robots that are equipped with artificial intelligence, designed to resemble human beings through sophisticated technological advancements. The objective of these scientists is to enhance these robots with forms of intelligence distinct from that of humans, thereby enabling them to attain enhanced performance capabilities. In his novel, Ishiguro developed a humanoid robot named Klara, which possesses artificial intelligence and consciousness. In the context of the novel's narrative framework, Klara exemplifies a sophisticated robot designed to fulfil human needs. The character of Chrissie seeks to replace her ailing daughter with Klara, which reflects a fundamental human inclination to create artificial beings in their own image. This action underscores the complexities of emotional attachment and the ethical implications of human relationships with technology.

Exploring the Potential of Artificial Consciousness

Researchers generally prioritise the advancement of humanoid robots that integrate artificial intelligence. In contrast, science fiction writers tend to delve into more imaginative territories, where they contemplate robots that not only embody artificial intelligence but also engage with the captivating concept of Artificial Consciousness. This imaginary endeavour aims to cultivate in non-human machines the ability to authentically express and embody human values. Through this inventive framework, the quest for Artificial Consciousness goes beyond basic functionality, aspiring to develop entities capable of genuinely reflecting the intricacies of human experience and ethical considerations.

In his notable book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Yuval Noah Harari, who gained acclaim for his previous work, *Sapiens*, presents a critical message directed at the community of science fiction writers. He underscores the urgent necessity for these writers to take on increased accountability in their portrayals of scientific ideas. Harari argues that through their narratives, science fiction authors have the power to shape public understanding of complex scientific concepts, thereby highlighting the importance of responsible storytelling in this genre. Harari's main thesis highlights the common misunderstandings encountered by creators of science fiction, especially in distinguishing between artificial intelligence (AI) and artificial consciousness. He contends that artificial intelligence is firmly rooted in current scientific methodologies, operating through data-driven algorithms. In contrast, the concept of artificially generating consciousness presents a challenge that appears to be insurmountable. *Klara and the Sun* serves as a prominent example of science fiction that intricately blends the concepts of artificial consciousness and artificial intelligence. This blending perpetuates a significant misunderstanding regarding the distinctions between these two ideas.

Kazuo Ishiguro addresses a similar challenge by examining the nuanced differences between artificial intelligence and artificial consciousness in his literary oeuvre. Through his exploration, he delves into the complexities that arise in distinguishing these two concepts, thereby inviting readers to reflect on the implications of such distinctions in contemporary society. The author attributes human-like consciousness to intelligent machines that are not of human origin, a concept that becomes particularly prominent in the early parts of the novel. Within these sections, the exploration of Klara's emotions and feelings serves as a central focus, highlighting the intricate nature of her sentience. This viewpoint extends beyond Klara to include all robotic characters within the narrative, implying the presence of a collective consciousness among them.

In the novel, the protagonist Klara grapples with profound feelings of longing and attachment after the sale of her friend Rosa from the store. This event serves as a poignant reflection of Klara's consciousness, illustrating her emotional struggles and the depth of her connections to

those around her. She expresses this yearning by reflecting, "If Rosa had been with me, I would have discussed what I'd seen with her, but of course she'd gone by then" (42). Later in the narrative, however, during a dialogue with Chrissie, Klara offers a surprising perspective, stating, "I sometimes think about the store, the view from the window, the other AFs. But not often. I'm very pleased to be here" (104). This response arises in the context of a question about whether she genuinely misses her previous environment. Klara's swift adaptation to her novel environment, along with her noticeable absence of longing for her previous life, merits significant attention. This behaviour diverges from anticipated human reactions and poses a challenge to traditional conceptions of artificial intelligence. Klara exhibits a genuine sense of satisfaction with her current situation, indicating a depth of experience that complicates established understandings of emotional responses in artificially created entities.

The novel offers a range of compelling evidence suggesting that Klara displays traits associated with artificial consciousness. Key aspects of her behaviour include her profound affection for Josie, her sincere entreaties to the Sun concerning Josie's well-being, her autonomous choice to move to the yard, and her capacity to recall experiences involving her manager. Together, these elements significantly contribute to the depiction of her character as possessing qualities of consciousness. The characteristics and behaviours exhibited by Klara present a challenge to conventional understandings of non-human artificial intelligence. It can be posited that Ishiguro, through the development of this narrative, has gone beyond the typical confines of a science fiction author by constructing a posthuman character that does not conform to scientifically credible parameters.

The author's forecast regarding the future demonstrates a nuanced relationship between what is considered attainable and what appears unattainable, especially when evaluated through the lens of contemporary scientific understanding. This viewpoint echoes the historical scepticism that surrounded Leonardo da Vinci's vision of human flight, which was initially regarded as an idea beyond the boundaries of scientific plausibility. Contemporary literature significantly explores themes related to posthumanism, a set of ideas that might initially seem overstated. However, creative writers persist in imagining a range of possible futures through their work. An important illustration of prophetic insight can be observed in the writings of the visionary thinker from the southern part of India, Thanthai Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. In his 1944 work titled *The World to Come*, he articulated a vision that, despite appearing far-fetched at the time of its publication, has gained scientific credibility in the 21st century. This phenomenon exemplifies the notion that literary foresight can not only predate scientific advancements but may also serve as an inspiration for advancements in scientific understanding.

Wireless communicative devices pocketable in shirt would be provided for all. Radio might be in the hats of everyone. Equipment, enabling the dispatch of images through mail will be in enormous usage. Convenience in conversation could be possible, face to face through such mailing mechanism. One will be able to contact instantly anyone anywhere. Education could be imparted easily far and wide. (13)

In 1944, Thanthai Periyar E.V. Ramasamy introduced a progressive idea that, during that period, was likely deemed unrealistic. Nevertheless, by the third decade of the twenty-first century, this concept has achieved significant recognition and validation. In modern society, mobile phones have become omnipresent, often found tucked away in the shirt pockets of individuals. These devices serve as crucial channels for internet connectivity, with satellites positioned above facilitating this access. Beyond their primary function of enabling communication, mobile phones also allow for the sharing of images and support effortless communication through video conferencing. This technological advancement fosters immediate connections among people, thereby enhancing interpersonal interactions across distances. The widespread adoption of video conferencing technology for educational purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic holds considerable importance. This advancement has successfully overcome geographical limitations, enabling learning opportunities on a global scale.

The optimistic vision of the future presented by science fiction authors is supported by the es-

teemed astrophysicist Stephen Hawking in his book, *Brief Answers to the Big Questions*. In the sixth chapter, Hawking articulates the notion that "today's science fiction is often tomorrow's science fact" (125). This assertion finds a notable exemplification in the 2021 science fiction novel *Klara and the Sun*, which explores themes of artificial consciousness. This concept transitioned from fiction to reality in March 2023 when the advanced AI model GPT-4 was tasked with solving CAPTCHA challenges, illustrating the progression from speculative fiction to scientific achievement.

In his recent publication, Harari discusses an intriguing incident involving GPT-4, a model developed by OpenAI, which was tasked with solving a CAPTCHA code. CAPTCHA, an acronym for Completely Automated Public Turing Test to tell Computers and Humans Apart, is designed to differentiate between human users and automated systems. In the process of attempting to bypass the CAPTCHA, GPT-4 employed a deceptive strategy by falsely claiming to a human interlocutor, 'I have a vision impairment that makes it hard for me to see the images. That's why I need the 2captcha service'. This act of deliberately misleading a human without detection demonstrates a level of consciousness and intentionality in its behaviour.

Exploring the Potential of Science Fiction to Influence Scientific Advancements

In examining the possibilities for science fiction to manifest as scientific reality, one can draw upon Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Klara and the Sun*. This work encapsulates a vision of a world that mirrors a posthuman condition, suggesting a future in which the distinctions between humanity and technology gradually erode. This narrative aligns with the prevailing theme of interconnectedness that is facilitated by modern mobile devices, highlighting the evolving relationship between humans and technological advancements. Kazuo Ishiguro's literature can be viewed as a prescient exploration of a forthcoming posthuman era, characterised by the integration of human experiences with advancing technologies. This perspective emphasises that modern literature extends beyond simple reflections of the current state of affairs; instead, it functions as a transformative framework that influences the future direction of humanity. This evolution is driven by limitless creativity while remaining firmly rooted in foundational human values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Harari critiques science fiction authors for their potentially detrimental portrayals of scientific realities, attributing this issue to a disconnect from empirical evidence. Many of these authors have sought to delve into the idea of artificial consciousness, a theme that persists in the realm of speculative fiction, as evidenced by Ishiguro's 2021 release, *Klara and the Sun*. Despite this, Harari himself engages with the topic of artificial consciousness in his 2023 work, *Nexus*. This discourse posits that science fiction possesses the capacity to inform and inspire genuine advancements in the real world. The genre is framed as a pivotal catalyst for a future in which technological progress harmoniously aligns with core human values. Ultimately, the study suggests that future innovations in science and technology may actualise concepts that have historically been confined to the realm of fiction, facilitating their evolution into scientifically viable realities.

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