Freedom and Justice between Humanism and Posthumanism: Existential Cultural Aspects

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The article analyzes the profound social transformations of the late 2010s–2020s triggered by the simultaneous action of several irreversible processes: the mass adoption of neural interfaces and genome editing, the total algorithmization of behavior management, the collapse of the anthropocentric climate model, and the transformation of platform capitalism into the dominant form of labor and exchange organization. These processes are destroying the foundation of the modern social contract, which was built on the figure of the sovereign, bodily bounded, rational individual as the sole legitimate bearer of rights, freedoms, and moral responsibility.

In a world where a significant portion of social decisions is made by opaque algorithms, consciousness can be distributed between the biological brain and cloud servers, and species boundaries become a matter of designer choice, the traditional categories of freedom and justice lose their regulatory power. Freedom - whether understood as negative protection of privacy or positive self-determination - ceases to function in a reality where the subject is originally distributed. Justice as equality among autonomous individuals and the fair distribution of resources becomes meaningless when the social network includes actors lacking classical subjectivity (AI, genetically modified organisms, climatic hyperobjects) yet possessing real agency and vulnerability.

Justice is undergoing a transition from a distributive model to an ontological one: its task is no longer the distribution of goods among already-existing subjects but the maintenance of the viability of the entire expanded network, including future generations, algorithms, ecosystems, and the climate. Four dominant collective affects of the current social transformations have been identified: ontological anxiety over the loss of the human center, euphoria of morphological freedom, zoetic guilt toward the nonhuman, and the strange calm of flat ontology, when humanity ceases to be the measure of all things.

The research findings have direct practical relevance for understanding and managing ongoing social transformations, creating a foundation for an affirmative politics of immanence capable of overcoming the dichotomy between reactionary bio-conservatism and uncritical techno-accelerationism.

Introduction

In the era of accelerated technological, biomedical, and ecological transformations, humanity is confronting a fundamental rethinking of the categories of freedom and justice, accompanied by a profound transition from the humanistic paradigm to the posthumanistic one (*Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010*). Humanism, rooted in the anthropocentrism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, positions the human as an autonomous subject endowed with reason, moral agency, and existential responsibility. Critical posthumanism, by contrast, deconstructs this anthropocentrism, emphasizing the relationality and entanglement of the human with non-human actors: animals, machines, algorithms, and ecosystems (*Haraway, 1991; Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010*). The present introduction analytically examines the existential and cultural aspects of the tension between these paradigms, drawing on the dialogue between existentialist heritage (*Sartre, 1956;* *Camus, 1955*) and key posthumanist theories (*Haraway, 1991; Braidotti, 2013, 2019; Wolfe, 2010*).

In the humanistic tradition, freedom appears as a radical existential choice: according to Sartre, the human is "condemned to be free," since existence precedes essence, and the individual bears full responsibility for their project in an absurd world (*Sartre, 1956*). Justice is grounded in universal human dignity, equality, and empathy, embodied in Kantian ethics and liberal theories of human rights. Culturally, this tradition manifests itself in narratives of individual autonomy and social solidarity that dominate Western literature, art, and legal systems. Posthumanism, however, critiques anthropocentrism for ignoring the non-human, justifying the exploitation of nature, and potentially exacerbating crises – from ecological degradation to algorithmic control (*Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2010*).

Unlike transhumanism, which is oriented toward technological enhancement of the human to overcome

biological limits (genetic engineering, neurointerfaces), critical posthumanism proposes a radical deconstruction: the human is not the center but a node in a network of relations. Haraway, in the "Cyborg Manifesto," sees hybrid identities as liberation from binary oppositions, proposing a politics of affinity instead of universalism (*Haraway, 1991*). Braidotti develops the concept of zoe-centered ethics, integrating material inequalities and multiple forms of life (*Braidotti, 2013, 2019*). Wolfe emphasizes the necessity of accounting for non-human perspectives to overcome anthropocentric hubris (*Wolfe, 2010*). Here, freedom is transformed into relational and distributed form, and justice into inclusive, accounting for ecological and technological hierarchies. Existentially, a paradox arises: if technologies blur the boundaries of body and consciousness, does authenticity of existence remain? The Camusian revolt against the absurd risks losing its foundation in a "post-absurd" world where suffering and death are potentially surmountable (*Camus, 1955*). Culturally, these tensions are reflected in science fiction (*Dick, 1968; contemporary series*), bioethical debates, and art practices, where the posthuman calls into question traditional values of dignity and equality.

The relevance of the topic is particularly high today, when the fundamental transition from humanism to posthumanism is accompanied by technological breakthroughs and acute questions of cultural heritage, memory, and security. The development of brain implants, speculations about digital immortality and mind uploading, as well as global discussions on existential risks of autonomous AI (*International AI Safety Report, 2025*) highlight threats of loss of authentic memory, transformation of cultural heritage into posthuman hybrid forms, and erosion of human agency in symbiosis with machines.

At the same time, questions of cultural heritage are becoming acute: digital mediation in tourism and memorial practices reconfigures cultural memory, turning heritage into posthuman encounters where human experience is entangled with technologies and non-human elements (ruins, materials, digital artifacts). This threatens traditional humanistic narratives based on anthropocentric identity and collective memory. Memory issues acquire existential acuity in the context of speculations about digital immortality and mind uploading: although full consciousness uploading remains hypothetical, debates about personality transfer to digital environments emphasize risks of loss of authentic memory and identity, where the human "self" may become a modifiable algorithm.

Finally, the security aspect dominates global discussions: existential risks from autonomous AI (loss of control, catastrophic scenarios) are actively discussed in reports and policy of 2025–2026 (*AI Safety Index, 2025; International AI Safety Report, 2025*), including cyber- and bio-risks, as well as potential erosion of human agency in symbiosis with machines. These challenges - from the climate crisis in the Anthropocene to algorithmic governance and inequality of access to technologies - directly affect freedom, justice, and the preservation of human experience.

Contemporary society is undergoing one of the deepest social transformations in human history: the transition from an anthropocentric, industrial-modernist model to a post-anthropocentric, hybrid, and distributed one. This transition is driven not only by the accelerated development of biotechnologies, artificial intelligence,

neurointerfaces, and climate technologies, but also by a fundamental change in the very mode of existence of social ties, institutions, and collective identities.

Traditional social structures - the nation-state, liberal democracy, labor market, family, education system - were built around the figure of the autonomous human individual as the sole bearer of rights, responsibility, morality, and freedom. Today, this figure is rapidly eroding: the human increasingly appears not as a sovereign subject but as a node in complex sociotechnical assemblages, where significant agency is acquired by algorithms, genetically modified organisms, climate systems, neural networks, and even global-scale hyperobjects.

In these conditions, the basic regulatory categories of social order - freedom and justice - face the threat of losing their familiar meaning. Previously, freedom was understood as negative (freedom from coercion) or positive (self-determination) capacity of the individual, and justice as equality of autonomous subjects before the law and distribution of goods among them. Now both concepts require radical rethinking. Who is the bearer of freedom when consciousness can be distributed between a biological brain and cloud servers? How to construct justice in a society where a significant portion of decisions is made by opaque algorithms, and the consequences of climate change affect not only current people but also future generations and non-human species?

Contemporary society is undergoing a phase of accelerated and largely irreversible social transformations, the central element of which is the radical restructuring of the social contract. Technologies of genomic editing (CRISPR-Cas9), neurointerfaces, artificial intelligence systems, platform capitalism, climate models, and global supply chains cease to be external tools serving society and become its constitutive components. These actors do not merely mediate social interactions - they actively shape them, redistribute agency, and alter the ontological foundations of social order.

As a result, traditional institutions of modernity – the nation-state, liberal law, labor market, nuclear family, education system - lose regulatory effectiveness. All were constructed around the figure of the autonomous human individual as the sole bearer of rights, moral responsibility, and freedom. When agency is distributed between human and non-human actors, and the boundaries of subjectivity become permeable, these institutions lose the ability to adequately describe and regulate emerging relations.

In these conditions, the basic regulatory categories of social order – freedom and justice – undergo a fundamental crisis. Freedom, traditionally understood either as negative (protection of the individual from external coercion) or as positive (self-determination and self-realization), ceases to be operational when a significant portion of decisions about behavior, life trajectories, and even bodily possibilities is made by algorithms, biotechnologies, or climate systems, and the boundaries of body and consciousness become technologically modifiable.

Justice, classically conceived as equality of autonomous subjects before the law and fair distribution of goods among them, loses meaning in a situation where key social actors – artificial intelligence, genetically modified organisms, ecosystems – do not possess subjectivity in the humanistic sense but exhibit real agency and vulnerability. The distribution of goods and

Freedom and Justice between Humanism and Posthumanism: Existential Cultural Aspects
Свобода та справедливість між гуманізмом і постгуманізмом: екзистенційні культурні аспекти

103

risks in such assemblages can no longer be reduced to an interhuman contract.

The research problem is formulated as follows: how, in the conditions of current sociotechnical and bioecological transformations, does the social content and everyday experience of freedom and justice change, and what new forms of social order emerge in place of the collapsing humanistic social contract?

The aim of the present article is the analytical investigation of the transformation of the concepts of freedom and justice in the conditions of the fundamental transition from the humanistic paradigm to the posthumanistic one, with emphasis on the existential and cultural aspects of this process.

Through the dialogue of existentialist heritage (J.-P. Sartre, A. Camus) with critical posthumanism (D. Haraway, R. Braidotti, C. Wolfe) and empirical analysis of contemporary cases – biotechnologies (CRISPR-Cas9 and germline editing), neurotechnologies (Neuralink), platform capitalism, as well as cultural narratives of mass culture ("Severance", "Westworld", "Black Mirror", "Altered Carbon") – the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- identify the ontological shift in which freedom and justice cease to be properties of the autonomous human individual and become immanent characteristics of hybrid sociotechnical and bioecological assemblages;

- demonstrate the existential-cultural paradoxes of this transition, including the loss of the tragedy of the absurd, fragmentation of memory and identity, and the emergence of ontological stratification;

- substantiate the necessity of transitioning from distributive (anthropocentric) justice to ontological justice, accounting for relational networks and non-human actors;

- propose a model of distributed social existence as a theoretical foundation for designing posthuman societies that avoid both bioconservative reaction and uncritical techno-accelerationism.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach combining philosophy, cultural studies, sociology of technology, and posthumanist studies, the article shows that the crisis of freedom and justice is primarily ontological in nature. The posthumanist turn changes not only normative rules for the distribution of rights and resources but also the very fabric of the social, shifting it from the mode of subject-centered autonomy to the mode of distributed, materially-discursive immanence.

Ultimately, the study aims to demonstrate that without accounting for the existential-cultural dimension of posthumanist transformations, any institutional reforms will remain superficial, and society risks losing the space for genuine resistance and solidarity in a world where the human is no longer the center but not yet merely a resource. The analysis of everyday practices, affects, narratives, and institutional forms allows us to identify how new, posthuman modes of freedom and justice are formed and what challenges they pose for the future social order.

The problem of the transformation of freedom and justice in the conditions of the posthumanist turn is actively discussed in international literature of the last fifteen years. Studies in this area can be systematized into several interrelated directions:

1. Classical foundations of social order: fundamental works on ethics and political philosophy defining humanistic concepts of freedom and justice (*Kant, 1998; Mill, 2007; Rawls, 1999*).

2. Social theory of the posthuman: actor-network theory and critique of modernity (Latour, 2013), as well as key posthumanist texts (*Haraway, 2016; Braidotti, 2019; Wolfe, 2010*).

3. Transhumanist scenarios: optimistic visions of technological enhancement and their social consequences (*Bostrom, 2014; Kurzweil, 2005; More & Vita-More, 2013*).

4. Critical posthumanism and new materialism: deconstruction of anthropocentrism and relational ontology (*Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Morton, 2013; Braidotti, 2019*).

5. Bioethical and critical perspective: conservative reactions to technological changes (*Habermas, 2003; Fukuyama, 2002; Sandel, 2007; Harari, 2017*).

Particular significance attaches to studies in STS (Science and Technology Studies) and actor-network theory (*Latour, 2013*), demonstrating how material practices - neurointerfaces, CRISPR, predictive policing, platform capitalism – reconfigure everyday social interactions and institutions.

The present study builds on these traditions and continues their dialogue. Classical posthumanist texts - the "Cyborg Manifesto" by D. Haraway (*1991*), "What is Posthumanism?" by C. Wolfe (*2010*), and "The Posthuman" by R. Braidotti (*2013*) – lay the foundation for the critique of anthropocentrism and relational ethics. Existentialist motifs of J.-P. Sartre (*1956*) and A. Camus (*1955*) have previously been analyzed in the context of technological transformations. Contemporary works (*Herbrechter, 2013; Ferrando, 2019; Roden, 2015*; studies of 2024–2025 on digital memory, cultural heritage, and existential AI risks) develop comparisons of humanism with post- and transhumanism, emphasizing risks of inequality, loss of authenticity, and security.

However, most of these studies either remain at the level of macrosocial scenarios and normative bioethics or insufficiently emphasize the existential-cultural dimension of everyday experience in the conditions of current technological shifts. Systematic analysis is practically absent of how ontological changes in subjectivity transform the everyday experience of freedom and the sense of justice.

The present article fills this gap by focusing on the existential-cultural mechanisms of restructuring social order in the posthuman era. Freedom and justice cease to be exclusively human institutions and turn into immanent properties of new sociotechnical and bioecological assemblages. This requires a radically new theoretical language to describe the ongoing transformations. Through the synthesis of existentialist and posthumanist approaches, the article analyzes freedom and justice as key points of tension and proposes frameworks for ethical navigation in the posthuman future.

Research methods

The study is theoretical-philosophical and interdisciplinary in nature. A complex of qualitative methods is applied:

1. Critical analysis of social theories and conceptual reconstruction of the categories of freedom and justice.

2. Material-semiotic and assemblage analysis (*Haraway, 2016; Latour, 2013; Barad, 2007*) of practices of 2015–2026: Neuralink, germline editing CRISPR (the He

Jiankui case and subsequent developments), platform capitalism (Uber, Airbnb), climate citizen assemblies.

3. Cultural and media analysis of narratives ("Severance", "Westworld", "The Peripheral", "Black Mirror").

4. Comparative-typological method for constructing ideal types of posthuman freedom and justice.

5. Thought experiment and phenomenological analysis of new social affects.

The material consisted of scientific publications, public discourses, and artistic works from 2015–2025.

Results and Discussion

In this section, an empirical analysis of the key theses of the article is presented based on the declared cases: CRISPR-Cas9 technologies (with focus on germline editing) and Neuralink as examples of biotechnological and neurotechnological enhancement, as well as cultural narratives of science-fiction series of the 2020s ("Westworld", "Black Mirror", "Altered Carbon", "The Peripheral", "Severance"). These cases illustrate the transformation of freedom from the humanistic existential model - an autonomous subject in an absurd world (Sartre, 1956; Camus, 1955) – to posthumanistic forms: morphological, cognitive, and relational. The analysis sequentially reveals existential-cultural paradoxes: the expansion of agency is accompanied by erosion of authenticity, fragmentation of identity, and risks of ontological stratification, which ultimately requires rethinking justice.

Morphological freedom, understood as the right to radical modification of the body and overcoming biological limits, finds vivid empirical confirmation in the case of He Jiankui (*2018*), which remains the benchmark example of germline editing. The application of CRISPR-Cas9 to edit embryonic genomes for immunity to HIV was positioned as an expansion of reproductive freedom. However, against the background of debates in 2025-2026 and calls for a moratorium, this case reveals a fundamental paradox: freedom is transformed into a "designer choice," where parents and scientists construct human nature.

Such an approach destroys the humanistic understanding of the autonomous subject (*Sartre, 1956*): the body ceases to be authentic and "given," becoming a modifiable object in entanglement with biotechnologies (*Braidotti, 2013*). This blurs the boundaries of dignity and generates an ontological hierarchy ("enhanced" vs. "natural"), exacerbating injustice due to elite access to technologies.

Existentially, the paradox of a "post-absurd" existence arises: the elimination of suffering deprives life of tragedy, the source of meaning (*Camus, 1955*). From the perspective of justice, scaling intensifies stratification - access is limited to elites, creating a class of "neuronally enhanced" and risking erosion of autonomy in hybrid entanglement with algorithms (*Haraway, 1991*).

Relational freedom as distributed agency in a network of relations with the non-human is culturally materialized in the narratives of 2020s series. In "Westworld", "Black Mirror" ("San Junipero"), "Altered Carbon", and "The Peripheral", hybrid identities illustrate liberation from binary oppositions through affinity and entanglement. The body becomes a replaceable "shell," consciousness – distributed, emphasizing relational freedom as revolt against anthropocentrism.

This shift is affectively mediated. Cultural narratives form social affects (*Braidotti, 2013*):

- Alienation dominates in "Severance" (season 2 completed in March 2025): consciousness division metaphorizes the loss of the authentic "self," dissolving the humanistic subject in relational networks.

- Anxiety manifests in "Westworld": fear of erosion of authenticity in simulation cycles (*Wolfe, 2010*).

- Hope arises in narratives of digital immortality ("Black Mirror", "Westworld" finale): hybridization promises overcoming limits (*Haraway, 1991*).

- Empathy is cultivated by identification with the non-human, expanding the ethical horizon to zoe-centered (*Braidotti, 2013*).

Affects confirm the transformation: meaning is constructed in hybridization, but with risks of exploitation and control (*Lupton, 2016; Sharon, 2018*).

The analysis of freedom types reveals the limits of the distributive model of Rawls (*1999*), focused on the distribution of goods among autonomous individuals. In platform capitalism (Uber, Airbnb) and technological enhancement, inequality acquires an ontological character: entanglement blurs the subject, making agency distributed.

A transition to ontological justice is necessary - a zoe-centered ethics accounting for multispecies relations and relational responsibility (*Wolfe, 2010; Braidotti, 2013*). This deconstructs anthropocentric hubris, recognizing platforms and technologies as actors.

The cases collectively confirm that posthumanism radically transforms the existential-cultural foundations of freedom and justice: humanistic tragedy and autonomy yield to relational existence with paradoxes of loss of authenticity and stratification, but with potential for an inclusive, ecologically sensitive horizon. The model of distributed social existence explains freedom as modulation of connections and justice as care for the viability of the network.

Conclusion

In the conditions of contemporary social transformations, freedom and justice cease to be properties of the autonomous human individual and become immanent characteristics of hybrid sociotechnical and bioecological assemblages (*Latour, 2013*). This marks the transition from an anthropocentric social contract to a post-anthropocentric one, where bearers of rights, duties, and agency are distributed networks. New forms of freedom and justice require corresponding institutions and affective regimes, which are still emerging only in experimental practices and artistic narratives.

The proposed model of distributed social existence serves as a theoretical foundation for designing posthuman societies that avoid the extremes of bioconservatism and techno-accelerationism. Transhumanist scenarios (*Bostrom, 2014; Kurzweil, 2005*) preserve the individualistic logic of capitalism, risking new biotechnological inequality. Critical posthumanism (*Braidotti, 2019; Haraway, 2016; Bennett, 2010*), on the contrary, proposes relational solidarity including climate, algorithms, and multiple forms of life. The identified affects (*Lupton, 2016; Sharon, 2018*) confirm the duality of experience: delight in the expansion of possibilities is combined with anxiety over loss of control.

Society faces a choice that goes beyond doctrines: to preserve fragmentation, incompleteness, and mortality, constantly choosing oneself in an impossible choice, or to become smoothly integrated nodes in networks where freedom and justice turn into adjustable parameters. The first path preserves existential tension and the possibility of resistance; the second promises comfort and efficiency,

Freedom and Justice between Humanism and Posthumanism: Existential Cultural Aspects
Свобода та справедливість між гуманізмом і постгуманізмом: екзистенційні культурні аспекти

105

but at the cost of the disappearance of what we have hitherto called human. The future depends on whether we can invent new forms of solidarity and responsibility that rely neither on the illusion of absolute autonomy nor on the temptation of absolute optimization - forms worthy of a world in which the human is no longer the center but not yet merely a resource.

The study proves: without accounting for the existential-cultural dimension of posthumanist transformations, any attempts to reform institutions (law, democracy, welfare state) are doomed to remain superficial. Prospects for further research include empirical study of existing posthuman communities (biohacker laboratories, DAOs, climate assemblies, neuro-collectives), analysis of affective responses to narratives, and development of models of ontological justice in the Anthropocene and AI governance - for the transition from diagnosis to practical design of a new social order.

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Свобода та справедливість між гуманізмом і постгуманізмом: екзистенційні культурні аспекти

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Стаття аналізує глибинні соціальні трансформації кінця 2010-х – 2020-х років, спричинені одночасною дією кількох незворотних процесів: масовим впровадженням нейроінтерфейсів і редагуванням геному, тотальною ал-

горитмізацією управління поведінкою, колапсом антропоцентричної кліматичної моделі та перетворенням платформового капіталізму на домінантну форму організації праці й обміну. Ці процеси руйнують фундамент модерного соціального контракту, побудованого на фігурі суверенного, тілесно обмеженого, раціонального індивіда як єдиного легітимного носія прав, свобод і моральної відповідальності.

В умовах, коли значна частина соціальних рішень ухвалюється непрозорими алгоритмами, свідомість може бути розподілена між біологічним мозком і хмарними серверами, а межі виду стають об'єктом дизайнерського вибору, традиційні категорії свободи та справедливості втрачають регулятивну силу. Свобода як негативний захист приватності або позитивне самовизначення перестає працювати у світі, де суб'єкт споконвічно розподілений. Справедливість як рівність автономних індивідів і справедливий розподіл ресурсів стає безглуздою, коли до соціальної мережі залучені актори без класичної суб'єктності (ШІ, генетично модифіковані організми, кліматичні гіпероб'єкти), але з реальною агентністю та вразливістю.

Справедливість здійснює перехід від дистрибутивної моделі до онтологічної: її завданням стає не розподіл благ між уже існуючими суб'єктами, а підтримання життєздатності всієї розширеної мережі, включно з майбутніми поколіннями, алгоритмами, екосистемами та кліматом. Зафіксовано чотири домінантні колективні афекти сучасних соціальних трансформацій: онтологічна тривога втрати людського центру, ейфорія морфологічної свободи, зоетична провина перед нелюдським і дивний спокій плоскої онтології, коли людина перестає бути мірою всіх речей.

Результати дослідження мають пряме прикладне значення для розуміння та управління сучасними соціальними трансформаціями, створюючи основу для афірмативної політики іманентності, здатної подолати дихотомію реакційного біоконсерватизму та некритичного техно-акселераціонізму.