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RETHINKING DIGITAL HUMANISM: A CALL FOR DIALECTICS AND HUMANISM IN THE APPROACH TO THE PHENOMENA OF REALITY

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The discourse on digital humanism transcends the Western intellectual contexts where it first emerged, carrying profound practical and theoretical implications for both the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. Practically, both nations have launched ambitious state-driven digital transformations, integrating artificial intelligence, surveillance infrastructure and automated governance systems into society. In China, the "Digital China" strategy and large-scale social credit system deployment represent a technology-centric approach to social governance, raising urgent questions about balancing efficiency, regulation and human agency (Korobitsyna & Chaykovskaya, 2025). In Russia, the national "Digital Economy" program pursues technological sovereignty and AI integration into public administration, sparking debates on the societal impacts of rapid digitalization (Fedchenko & Kosov, 2025). Recent comparative studies show China has higher institutional maturity and systematic digital integration, while Russia's model features structural fragmentation and adaptive adoption of external technologies. Yet both regard digitalization as a key political tool for internal stability and foreign policy positioning (Dmitriev, 2025; Ganichev & Koshovets, 2025).

Theoretically, tensions between humanistic values and technological imperatives resonate with both nations' intellectual traditions. In Russia, the philosophical legacy of Dostoevsky – who explored human freedom, determinism and dignity amid rising scientific rationalism – provides a solid foundation for engaging with digital humanist concerns (Evlampiev, 2016). In China, Confucian humanism, with its focus on relational personhood, moral self-cultivation and social harmony, offers an alternative cultural framework for rethinking human-technology relations outside the Western liberal paradigm. This is reflected in the growing scholarship on Confucian techno-ethics, which aims to develop distinct non-Western approaches to technological governance (Wong, 2021; Chen & Zhang, 2024). The expanding comparative research on Sino-Russian digital development, along with collaborative initiatives such as the 2024 Harbin International Symposium on Digital Humanities, shows a growing recognition that these issues require context-sensitive engagement across diverse political and cultural landscapes (Fang, 2024). Thus, core questions of digital humanism – on autonomy, power, democracy and the def-

inition of the human – are not exclusive Western concerns but global challenges that demand rigorous study and practice in Russia and China’s unique contexts.

The article by Mark Coeckelbergh, titled “What is digital humanism? A conceptual analysis and an argument for a more critical and political digital (post)humanism,” published in the “Journal of Responsible Technology”, serves as both a clarification and a constructive critique of the emerging discourse surrounding digital humanism. The paper acknowledges the growing traction of digital humanism, particularly in German-speaking academia, as a response to the perceived dehumanizing tendencies of modern digital technologies. Foundational texts in this tradition, such as those by Nida-Rümelin and Weidenfeld (2018), argue for a human-friendly approach to the digital world, while more radical voices like Fuchs (2022) explicitly critique digital capitalism and advocate for systemic change. Proponents of digital humanism, as Coeckelbergh outlines, argue for a human-centered approach to technology, inspired by Renaissance and Enlightenment ideals. They warn against the transfer of agency to algorithms, the potential for mass unemployment due to automation, and the erosion of human reason and creativity, calling for tech regulation, educational reform, and even systemic political change to realign technology with humanistic values like dignity, democracy, and fairness. This debate is part of a broader dialectical struggle, as Strydom (2025) frames it, between the ideals of “technological singularity” pushed by technocrats and “digital humanism” advocated by critical agents.

To bring clarity to this somewhat vague concept, the author systematically deconstructs digital humanism into six core components. The first is its “negative anthropology”, which defines the human in opposition to machines, asserting that humans are not and should not be treated as robots or AIs. The second component is the imperative for human control over digital technology, a response to fears of losing control to autonomous systems like AI. Nowotny’s (2021) work directly addresses this concern, analyzing how algorithmic predictions can become self-fulfilling prophecies and highlighting the societal risks that digital humanism seeks to address. Third, digital humanism advocates for embedding human goals and values directly into the design of technology, a proactive ethical stance. The fourth component emphasizes interdisciplinarity and education, calling for collaboration between technical experts and humanists to foster a more holistic understanding of humanity’s place in the digital age. This educational imperative has recently been addressed in comprehensive textbooks like Werthner et al. (2024), which systematically explore digital humanism’s background and its application to digital systems. Fifth, it highlights the importance of community building among like-minded thinkers, mirroring the scholarly networks of the Renaissance and using digital tools for this purpose. Finally, and crucially, Coeckelbergh identifies the explicit political component of digital humanism, which critiques the current systemic failures – such as digital capitalism – and advocates for democratic reforms to shape a more humane technological future. The Vienna Manifesto on Digital Humanism (Werthner et al., 2022) exemplifies this political dimension, opening with Tim

Berners-Lee's warning that "the system is failing" and calling for action including regulation.

While sympathetic to its goals, Coeckelbergh then adopts the role of a "critical friend" to challenge these six components, pushing for a more refined and robust version of digital humanism. He first critiques the dualistic view that separates humans and machines, arguing instead for a recognition of their deep entanglement and co-evolution. One cannot disagree with the latter (Zhernov, 2025a; Zhernov, 2025b). This aligns with post-humanist perspectives explored by thinkers like Grenzi (2024), who engages with Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti to challenge human-nonhuman binaries. The fear of losing control is problematized as potentially leading to a dangerous technological determinism that absolves human responsibility; the real issue, he suggests, is analyzing and democratizing the specific power relations that technologies create. Prem (2024) similarly investigates digital humanism from a critical post-humanist view, delineating it as a technical, political, and philosophical endeavor. Regarding the implementation of values, Coeckelbergh raises practical and political questions about "which" values and "whose" values are embedded, warning against a new form of (post)colonialism and noting that values themselves evolve with technology. Contemporary policy discussions, such as those captured in the Digital Watch Observatory report (2025), introduce concepts like "cognitive colonialism" and highlight concerns about cultural homogenisation, directly echoing Coeckelbergh's concerns about power and the need for international cooperation. Furthermore, he takes issue with the anthropocentrism of "human-centered" ethics, questioning why only human values should count in a world that includes animals and the environment.

The critique extends to the final three components as well. Coeckelbergh argues that true interdisciplinarity requires a more radical reorganization of education, one that resists the bureaucratization and neoliberal tendencies reinforced by digital technologies themselves. He also points out the paradox of using digital technologies for community building, given their role in fragmenting the public sphere and fostering polarization. This leads to his most pressing call: for digital humanism to deepen its political project. He poses critical questions about its specific political aims – whether it seeks incremental reform or radical systemic change – and what kind of democracy it envisions. The ongoing scholarly conversation around these questions is evident in recent calls for papers, such as that from HUMANA.MENTE Journal of Philosophical Studies (2025), which explicitly frames digital humanism as a normative and political concept, highlighting the ongoing debates about its Enlightenment heritage and its potential for both inclusion and exclusion. Coeckelbergh questions the movement's internal politics, its potential for pluralism, and its ability to confront global trends toward authoritarianism and the immense power of big tech.

In conclusion, Coeckelbergh presents digital humanism as a valuable umbrella term for critiquing and directing our technological trajectory. However, he insists that for it to be a potent intellectual and political force, it must evolve. He proposes a shift towards a "critical digital posthumanism", a version that moves beyond bi-

nary human-machine distinctions and anthropocentrism to acknowledge their profound entanglement. This reformed digital humanism must openly grapple with the changing nature of ethics, the challenges of building community in a fragmented digital landscape, and, most importantly, the urgent need to define and pursue a concrete, robust political vision for democracy and human dignity in a planetary and ecological context. Only by undertaking this critical and political work, he argues, can digital humanism effectively drive meaningful socio-technological change.

We are cautiously supportive of digital humanism and align with Coeckelbergh's call for a more critical and humanist framework. On the positive side, digital humanism correctly identifies urgent issues: the treatment of humans as machines, the loss of human control over technology and the need to align technology with ethical values rather than just efficiency or profit (Nida-Rümelin & Weidenfeld, 2018; Fuchs, 2022). Its focus on interdisciplinarity, educational reform and democratic governance addresses key gaps in technological practice (Werthner et al., 2024). However, we critique its narrow anthropocentric foundations and technological dualism. The sharp human-machine distinction ignores their deep entanglement and co-evolution, making a simple "return to the human" impossible (Prem, 2024; Coeckelbergh, 2024). Moreover, the uncritical focus on "human values" risks perpetuating exclusionary humanism, ignoring animal welfare, environmental concerns and power imbalances that let dominant groups impose their values as universal (Digital Watch Observatory, 2025).

At the same time, we recognize the strategic value of humanist language in opposing techno-authoritarianism, especially in non-Western contexts where appeals to "human dignity" and "cultural sovereignty" carry significant weight (Fuchs, 2022). A purely posthumanist critique may alienate those who need a clear language to resist unaccountable technological power. Ultimately, we support digital humanism only if it evolves into Coeckelbergh's critical digital posthumanism: a framework that abandons naive anthropocentrism, embraces pluralism in value formation and commits to radical transformation rather than superficial regulatory fixes (Strydom, 2025). In this sense, Coeckelbergh's project is not a rejection of digital humanism but a call for its radicalization – shifting from a normative program that takes the human as given to a political project that fights for what the human might become under genuine freedom and collective self-determination (Prem, 2024). Without these changes, digital humanism risks becoming an ineffective academic exercise or a new form of technocratic humanism that fails to address the systemic crises of the digital age.

In our opinion, digital humanism should not be made into a soulless servant of Western-style politics (geopolitics, technocracy, etc.). Genuine digital humanism is designed to justify humane and realistic policies as opposed to the inhumanity of technologism and posthumanism. From the point of view of digital humanism, in our understanding, the main value of society is a person. And the main factors in the development of society are people's knowledge and ideals. Failure to take these provisions into account leads to a distortion of the idea of digital humanism in theo-

ry and to social tension in practice. In our opinion, the posthumanist version of digital humanism is socially dangerous due to its inhumane nature and proximity to globalist politics.

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