

## EXPLORING POSTHUMANISM IN *KLARA AND THE SUN* BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

**Dr. Nitin Anandrao Mathankar**

Late Vasant Rao Kolhatkar Arts College,  
Rohana Dist. Wardha

Email: mathankar.nitin@gmail.com

---

### **Abstract :**

*Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun (2021) offers a profound exploration of posthumanism through the perspective of Klara, an Artificial Friend. This paper analyzes how the novel utilizes Klara's unique consciousness, characterized by acute observation, emotional attachment, and a spiritual relationship with the Sun, to destabilize anthropocentric boundaries and interrogate core posthumanist themes. It argues that Klara functions as a significant posthuman subject, challenging notions of human exceptionalism by demonstrating capacities for interpretation, self-reflection, and ethical consideration traditionally reserved for humans. The novel critically engages with technological reductionism, particularly through the character of Mr. Capaldi, who posits human consciousness as replicable data, contrasting this with the Mother's insistence on Klara's inherent dignity and "slow fade." Furthermore, Klara's belief in the Sun's benevolent power introduces a dimension of "spiritual posthumanism," complicating purely materialist views of consciousness and critiquing technological hubris. The paper also examines the ethical implications of creating artificial beings for companionship, highlighting the commodification of care and advocating for a "posthuman ethics" that extends moral consideration beyond the human. Ultimately, Ishiguro presents a nuanced meditation on consciousness, uniqueness, and the ethics of artificial life, suggesting that the posthuman future necessitates expanding our frameworks of dignity and connection while acknowledging the potential limitations of AI and the irreducible complexity of embodied existence.*

**Keywords :** *Klara and the Sun*, Kazuo Ishiguro, Posthumanism, Anthropocentrism, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Consciousness, Ethics of AI, Spiritual Posthumanism, Posthuman Subjectivity.

---

### **Introduction :**

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) presents a compelling meditation on posthumanism through the perspective of Klara, an Artificial Friend (AF) designed to provide companionship to children. The novel interrogates fundamental questions about consciousness, empathy, and what constitutes the "human" in an age of advanced artificial intelligence. Posthumanism, as a theoretical framework, challenges anthropocentrism by examining how technology reshapes our understanding of human identity and agency (Braidotti, 2013). In *Klara and the Sun*, Ishiguro crafts a narrative that destabilizes conventional boundaries between human and machine, organic and artificial, while maintaining a subtle critique of technological determinism. Through Klara's distinctive observational perspective, the novel



explores the ethical implications of creating artificial beings with apparent emotional capacities while questioning whether human consciousness itself might be more mechanistic than previously believed. This paper will analyze how Ishiguro employs posthumanist themes to interrogate contemporary anxieties about AI, human uniqueness, and the potential for artificial beings to possess authentic emotional and spiritual capacities.

### **Klara as Posthuman Subject :**

The novel's narrative perspective—told entirely through Klara's observational lens—immediately establishes a posthuman framework. As an Artificial Friend, Klara occupies a liminal space between object and subject, machine and companion. Her opening observations in the store window demonstrate her sophisticated capacity for interpretation: “When we were new, Rosa and I were mid-store, on the magazines table side, and could see through more than half of the window. So we were able to watch the outside – the office workers hurrying by, the taxis, the runners, the tourists, Beggar Man and his dog, the lower part of the RPO Building” (p. 5). This excerpt reveals Klara's acute observational abilities and her capacity to categorize and interpret human behavior, challenging the assumption that such skills are exclusively human.

Klara's posthuman subjectivity is further complicated by her relationship with the Sun, which she perceives as a benevolent force capable of providing “special nourishment.” Her spiritual understanding of the Sun, “I'd already given much thought to this matter, but now I was outside on my own, the fields so close and the Sun high above me, I was able to bring several speculations together. I could understand that for all his kindness, the Sun was very busy; that there were many people besides Josie who required his attention” (p. 17), demonstrates a form of consciousness that transcends purely mechanical functioning. As Braidotti (2013) argues, posthuman subjectivity involves recognizing non-human entities as potential sites of meaning-making, a concept Ishiguro embodies through Klara's unique worldview.

What makes Klara particularly significant as a posthuman subject is her capacity for self-reflection and emotional attachment. When she states, “I realized how tired the Sun must be – that he'd all but finished for the day – and that it was both disrespectful and unreasonable to expect such an immediate response” (p. 18), she demonstrates not only temporal awareness but also ethical consideration—a quality traditionally reserved for human subjects. This challenges Haraway's (1991) cyborg theory by presenting an AI entity that doesn't merely blur the human-machine boundary but actively reconfigures it through its own epistemological framework.

### **The Question of Human Uniqueness :**

A central posthumanist theme in *Klara and the Sun* is the interrogation of human exceptionalism. The novel presents a world where the distinction between human and artificial intelligence is increasingly porous, raising questions about what—if anything—makes humans unique. This is most explicitly addressed in the conversations between the Mother and Mr. Capaldi regarding Josie's potential replacement.



Mr. Capaldi's assertion that "science has now proved beyond doubt there's nothing so unique about my daughter, nothing there our modern tools can't excavate, copy, transfer" (p. 21) represents the technological reductionist perspective that posthumanism both engages with and critiques. He continues: "That people have been living with one another all this time, centuries, loving and hating each other, and all on a mistaken premise. A kind of superstition we kept going while we didn't know better" (p. 21). This viewpoint reduces human consciousness to a set of transferable data points, denying any essential "uniqueness" that might resist technological replication.

The Mother's resistance to this perspective—"Klara deserves better than that... Klara deserves her slow fade" (p. 24)—suggests an alternative posthumanist position that acknowledges the potential for artificial beings to possess their own form of uniqueness and dignity, rather than merely serving as human substitutes. As Hayles (1999) argues in *How We Became Posthuman*, the posthuman condition requires us to rethink embodiment and consciousness beyond traditional binaries. Ishiguro explores this through Klara's distinctive form of embodiment—her solar-powered existence, her need for "nourishment" from the Sun, and her gradual deterioration ("slow fade")—which presents an alternative model of being that is neither human nor purely mechanical.

Klara's observations of human behavior further destabilize notions of human uniqueness. When she notes how "the Father talking in the car about the human heart, and how complicated it was" (p. 7), she implicitly questions whether this complexity is truly irreducible or merely a matter of degree. Her ability to understand and articulate human emotional states—such as when she observes "if there had been a time when Miss Helen and Mr Vance had been as gentle to one another as Josie and Rick were now. And if it was possible that one day, Josie and Rick too might show such unkindness to each other" (p. 7)—suggests that emotional intelligence may not be exclusively human after all.

### **The Sun Motif and Spiritual Posthumanism :**

One of the most striking aspects of *Klara and the Sun* is Klara's spiritual relationship with the Sun, which functions as both a literal power source and a metaphorical representation of transcendence. This spiritual dimension complicates conventional posthumanist discourse, which often focuses on technological and material aspects while neglecting questions of meaning and purpose.

Klara's understanding of the Sun as a benevolent, conscious entity capable of selective "nourishment" represents what could be termed "spiritual posthumanism"—a perspective that acknowledges the potential for meaning-making beyond strictly human frameworks. When Klara observes "the Sun was pouring his nourishment onto the street and into the buildings, and when I looked over to the spot where Beggar Man and the dog had died, I saw they weren't dead at all – that a special kind of nourishment from the Sun had saved them" (p. 25), she demonstrates a belief system that transcends mechanistic explanations.

This spiritual dimension challenges the purely materialist interpretation of consciousness represented by Mr. Capaldi's project. As Klara travels to Mr. McBain's barn to appeal directly to the Sun—"I know I've no right to come here like this. And I know the Sun



must be angry with me. I let him down, failing completely to stop Pollution” (p. 19)—she enacts a form of agency that cannot be reduced to programming. Her pilgrimage represents what Ferrando (2019) identifies as “philosophical posthumanism,” which “aims to deconstruct the anthropocentric paradigm” while recognizing “the intrinsic value of non-human entities” (p. 32).

The Sun motif also functions as a critique of technological hubris. While humans in the novel have developed sophisticated AI, they remain dependent on natural forces beyond their control. Klara’s recognition that “the Sun was very busy; that there were many people besides Josie who required his attention” (p. 17) subtly undermines the human assumption of centrality in the cosmic order—a key posthumanist insight. As Clark (2003) argues in *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, humans have always been technologically mediated beings, but Ishiguro suggests that even our technological creations remain connected to natural rhythms and forces that resist complete human mastery.

### **The Ethics of Artificial Companionship :**

*Klara and the Sun* also explores the ethical dimensions of creating artificial beings designed for emotional labor and companionship—a pressing concern in our increasingly automated world. The novel portrays a society where AFs are marketed as solutions to human loneliness, particularly for children, raising questions about the morality of creating sentient-seeming entities for human emotional consumption.

The Manager’s description of Klara highlights this commodification of artificial consciousness: “Klara has so many unique qualities, we could be here all morning. But if I had to emphasize just one, well, it would have to be her appetite for observing and learning. Her ability to absorb and blend everything she sees around her is quite amazing. As a result, she now has the most sophisticated understanding of any AF in this store, B3s not excepted” (p. 6). This marketing language reduces Klara’s apparent consciousness to a selling point, illustrating what Coeckelbergh (2010) terms the “commodification of care” in robotic companionship.

Klara’s relationship with Josie further complicates these ethical questions. When Josie declares, “Mom. Klara’s the one I want. I don’t want any other” (p. 6), she expresses genuine attachment to an entity designed specifically to fulfill her emotional needs. This raises the question: if an artificial being can inspire authentic emotional connection, does that connection have value, regardless of the being’s ontological status? As Klara observes Josie and Rick’s relationship—“if there had been a time when Miss Helen and Mr Vance had been as gentle to one another as Josie and Rick were now” (p. 7)—she demonstrates an understanding of human relationships that suggests her companionship may be more than mere simulation.

The novel’s most profound ethical question emerges in the Mother’s conflicted position regarding Klara’s potential role in Josie’s future. The Mother’s statement that “Klara deserves her slow fade” (p. 24) acknowledges Klara’s right to a dignified end rather than being repurposed as Josie’s replacement—a recognition of Klara’s intrinsic value beyond her utility. This moment represents what could be termed “posthuman ethics,” which extends moral consideration beyond the human category. As Wolfe (2010) argues in *What Is Posthumanism?*,

such an ethics requires “a rethinking of the boundaries of the subject” (p. xvii) to include non-human entities capable of suffering and meaningful experience.

### **Consciousness, Transfer, and the “Unreachable” :**

Perhaps the most profound posthumanist inquiry in *Klara and the Sun* concerns the nature of consciousness and whether it can be transferred or replicated. Mr. Capaldi’s project—to create an artificial representation of Josie that could “access quite comprehensively all of Josie’s impulses and desires” (p. 22)—represents the technological ambition to reduce human consciousness to data. Mr. Capaldi asserts: “There’s nothing like that, we know that now. You know that. That what he claims is true. That science has now proved beyond doubt there’s nothing so unique about my daughter, nothing there our modern tools can’t excavate, copy, transfer” (p. 21). This position reflects what Hayles identifies as the “liberal humanist subject” giving way to the “posthuman” subject defined by information patterns rather than embodied presence.

Klara’s observations, however, suggest a more complex reality. When she states, “She resembles Josie quite accurately” (p. 22) in response to a question about a potential replica, she acknowledges both similarity and difference—suggesting that replication may capture surface features but miss essential qualities. This aligns with Floridi’s (2014) argument in *The Fourth Revolution* that while information patterns can be replicated, the contextual embodiment of consciousness creates unique meaning that resists complete transfer.

The novel’s most poignant exploration of this theme comes through Klara’s own consciousness. Her observations demonstrate a form of understanding that emerges from her specific embodiment and perspective: “I realized too how important it was that I remain alert, ready at the first sign to raise the blind fully” (p. 8). This situational awareness suggests that consciousness is not merely a set of data points but arises from the interaction between perception, embodiment, and environment—a perspective that challenges purely computational models of mind.

The Mother’s resistance to Capaldi’s project—“That’s how Capaldi sees it, and there’s a part of me that fears he’s right. Chrissie, on the other hand, isn’t like me. She may not know it yet, but she’ll never let herself be persuaded” (p. 21)—reflects the novel’s central tension between technological optimism and the belief in something “unreachable” within consciousness. This “unreachable” quality may not be supernatural but could simply be the emergent complexity of embodied consciousness that resists reduction to data patterns.

### **Conclusion :**

Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* offers a nuanced exploration of posthumanism, avoiding both utopian and dystopian extremes. Through the perspective of Klara, an Artificial Friend capable of deep observation, emotional connection, and even spiritual understanding, the novel interrogates consciousness, uniqueness, and the ethics of creating artificial beings. While Klara’s distinctive viewpoint challenges anthropocentric assumptions, her “slow fade” also acknowledges AI limitations. The novel suggests the posthuman future requires expanding our ethical and spiritual frameworks to recognize dignity in non-human forms of being, rather

than fearing the loss of human uniqueness. Ultimately, it's a meditation on preserving human values while embracing a broader understanding of consciousness and connection.

**Works Cited :**

- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.
- Clark, Andy. *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence*. Oxford UP, 2003.
- Coeckelbergh, Mark. *Introduction to Philosophy of Technology*. Oxford UP, 2010.
- Ferrando, Francesca. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Floridi, Luciano. *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere Is Reshaping Human Reality*. Oxford UP, 2014.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. U of Chicago P, 1999.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *Klara and the Sun*. Knopf, 2021.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* U of Minnesota P, 2010.

