

Dedicated to my Parents



Shri Biplab kr. Basak & Smt. Shila Basak

“ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥”

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "Deconstructing the Concept of Body: A Critical Study" has been prepared by me under the supervision of Professor Debika Saha, Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has been formed verbatim from any other work unless it is placed under quotation marks and duly referred. The presented thesis is an original work that has been prepared by myself.

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PREFACE

The thesis, *Deconstructing the Concept of Body: A Critical Study*, focuses on the evolutions that occur over ages in the human body. This thesis came up with a total of six chapters including an introduction and conclusion. If we observe then we can see that, since the past, in different philosophical thoughts the concept of mind always overpowers the concept of body. But after the emergence of Posthuman thought, the concept of body has found a new experimental field of its own. Posthumanism is a philosophical thought that represents human body enhancement with the help of advanced science and technology. But this kind of body enhancement through advanced science and technology upholds different kinds of moral issues in the human sphere. So, a critical analysis of the moral problems created by posthuman bodies is also a major area of this thesis. Before discussing the concept of posthumanism I have very first elaborated on the basic concept of the human body, then philosophical thoughts on the concept of the body of Charles Darwin, Aristotle, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Darwin for the very first time talks about the human evolution process and by saying a phrase, “Survival of the Fittest” he mentions that, the most fitted animal can secure its place as an extant species in the evolution process. So, humans must have to be the most fitted creature for becoming an extant species. But there are lots of people who are not fit enough and not living their lives happily. Posthumanism, by enhancing the capability of the human body provides humans with a long-range of human survival. Aristotle in his hylomorphic thought realizes that soul or mind is not totally detached from the body. The soul and body together make unity. But such unity does not signify that the mind or soul and the body are the same, they are basically different and oppositional. But in the human body, they work as a unified whole. Descartes in his Cartesian Method through a systematic and continuous doubt comes to the foundational and indubitable truth of existence, i.e., *Cogito-ergo-sum*, “I think, therefore I am”. Through the indubitable truth at first, he establishes the existence of myself, then the existence of God, and then the existence of the body. He says the human body is a machine or automata. The body runs many of its physical processes without any interference from the mind. It is the pineal gland that influences bodily actions, not the mind. Spinoza says, there is only one infinite system. No two separate systems of mind and body are there. Ultimately, only

Nature is there, under which both the human body and mind include. So, if we reflect on Spinoza's view in posthuman debates, then there would not come any objection regarding the human body enhancement process, because if ultimately there is only one truth, i.e., Nature, then through body enhancement no mind can be affected and no new moral issues would be originated. Then the discussion follows the Phenomenological and Existential thoughts of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Heidegger is concerned about a real living body, a body, that really lived out there in the biosphere. Hence, such deliberation regarding the body excludes the corpse body from his philosophical thought of the concept of body. The phenomenological problem of the body, that, we are 'in the world' as a 'bodily manner', is over-skipped by corporeality and hence the problem arises. Corporality only implies the physical representations of the body, but a body is not just a physical representation. It has many other issues excluding its physical part. An embodied body is our own body and we are living in the world as a real living body. Out of mind's fulfilments, the living body has its own wishes to accomplish. Merleau-Ponty is an eminent phenomenologist who for the very first time dedicated his whole philosophical thought based on body only. The body is not just an object to the world. The body is not mere a combined object like other worldly objects, rather it is a precondition for living spatial meaning. The body acts as an instrument to conquer other instruments. The unity of the body is always presupposed and it is prior to the space and spatial relationships. Thus, body is not a simple object, it is a unified whole and this unification refers to an implicatory structure developed by different and unique ways of visualization of our own body. Nietzsche differentiates himself from all the traditional concepts of philosophy. According to him, humans do not trace their origin in the 'spirit' or 'divinity' anymore. Rather they can find their origin back in the animality only. He said a human as an animal is a body. Humans are not perfect animals, they are 'blond beast', therefore, lost and failed animals. However, the body is a series of instincts that represents reality. The body is the intermediary between reality and the conscious spirit. Nietzsche describes the body as a 'plurality of intellect'. Ultimately, he talks about the concept of *Übermensch*. Any person can become an *Übermensch*. And not inspired by traditional values, an *Übermensch* depending on his/her feeling, thinking, and emotion an *Übermensch* creates new values for the betterment of humankind. A posthuman like an *Übermensch* also wants to create new values for all human beings, so that, through which all humans of the world can live a happy, healthy, and better life. Therefore, the philosophies of these philosophers have a great impact

and connection to posthuman philosophy. Posthumanism is a philosophy that makes human body a core area of its study and through different implantations and enhancement processes try to provide happy, healthy, disease-free long lives to human beings. Finally, in this thesis, I have explored the basic concepts, conditions, different kinds of implantations, criticisms, and possibilities of posthumans in this 21st century's world.