

# A study of “Clara and the Sun” in the context of ethics

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**Abstract:** Artificial intelligence is one of the mainstream trends of future social development, and the development of artificial intelligence also brings social ethical issues. The 2017 Nobel Literature Prize winner Kazuo Ishiguro’s new work *Clara and the Sun* published in 2021 reflects the ethical issues in the context of the development of artificial intelligence. It shows the ethical problems faced by family, friendship and love after the highly developed science and technology in human society. Through the work, the author reminds people to think about and face the loneliness, social inequality and ethical problems brought by scientific and technological progress. The author expresses his imagination and conception on the future of artificial intelligence field and human-machine relationship through the image of Clara. This paper analyzes *Clara and the Sun* and other literary works from the perspective of ethics, hoping to find the direction for the development of artificial intelligence under the guidance of ethics.

**Key words:** Ethics; *Clara and the Sun*; Ethical Choices; Man-machine ethics

The novel “*Clara and the Sun*” has an artistic charm. Narrated by Clara, an Artificial intelligence “AF” (Artificial Friend), the novel unfolds a picture of human beings and artificial intelligence robots living together. As the plot of the novel progresses, a series of ethical issues between human and artificial intelligence are highlighted. What is the difference between human and artificial intelligence? Can artificial intelligence replace humans? Can humans and AI live in harmony? Answering these questions requires an ethical inquiry into the difference between a natural person and a robot.

## I. Interactive survival picture of robot and natural person

“*Clara and the Sun*” is described from the first-person perspective, recounting the “growth” process of intelligent robot Clara, through a series of stories in the process of Clara getting along with human beings, but also from the human nature of thinking. Under the background of the rapid development of science and technology, virtual theme, genetic engineering, cloning technology and other continuous development, the traditional definition of “human” has changed, and the picture of natural person and artificial intelligence interactive survival has been generated. The emergence of algorithms and big data era brings unique opportunities and challenges to human society. The author Kazuo Ishiguro describes the picture of our kind living together with robots with science fiction imagination.

At the beginning of the novel, Clara begins a conversation with the manager, “It must be very lonely without AF,” which are specially programmed, harmonized and trained intelligent robots who use a series of complex algorithms to understand, communicate with, imitate and accompany teenagers. Backed by sophisticated technology, these AFs are already highly observant and empathic. Clara’s mundane conversation with the experience quickly draws the reader closer to the future era of artificial intelligence, in which the coexistence of natural and human-like beings has become the universal social condition. As an artificial intelligence robot, Clara is the product of mechanization, and therefore, it also represents the extreme rationalization and idealization. Facing the seriously ill daughter Josie, Josie’s mother hopes that Clara can continue Josie, and Clara can be no different from Hashiki through deep learning and precise calculation. But Clara is an artificial intelligence robot, can he really replace Josie? Clara gives a wonderful analysis of what science geek Mr. Capaldi says he’s looking for in Josie but hasn’t been able to find so far. And it shows that Clara can see into the human heart. Clara says that what Mr. Capaldi is looking for isn’t in Josie, it’s in the people who love Josie. The plot also makes the reader think deeply about artificial intelligence, where the limits of artificial intelligence are? Do artificial intelligence robots really have the ability of human thinking? Can they replace humans?

The author uses the identity of Clara to express his imagination about the future artificial intelligence world, and also expounds his thoughts on a series of ethical issues in the development process of artificial intelligence, so that the text reflects multiple humanistic concerns and historical thinking. The author, Kazuo Ishiguro, once said that he incorporated relevant elements of genetic programming technology into the creation of this novel, and gene editing was integrated into both character shaping and story telling, to analyze the trend of human society with the support of science and technology.

For genetic engineering, the attitude of scientists is mixed, the contradiction mainly points to the new technology in the field of human medicine, health development, but also brought a series of social ethical problems, if not regulated, its destructive power will be devastating. In the novel, the author Ishiguro Kazuo uses artificial intelligence, genetic engineering and other technologies to design and transform intelligent robots, presenting an artificial intelligence robot Clara that is infinitely close to human beings, but she seems to have an essential difference with human beings. Clara has been infinitely close to human beings, and has the most essential difference with human beings. The author brings readers more thinking.

In the era of artificial intelligence, human beings can not only transform and apply science and technology, but also become the object of deep transformation of science and technology. Human beings are at the center of human-computer interaction, representing the cross-border hybrid “Saiborg”.

The contradiction between the value of life and the development of science and technology proposed by the author in the novel is very prominent. In the novel, Josie’s family receives the transformation of genetic technology, so they can be admitted to a first-class university through a special education without entering a physical classroom. However, Josie’s friend Rick fails to get the genetic optimization due

to lack of money support. Even if he has talent, he can't compete with those who have been genetically optimized. The dissolution of the natural person in the novel heralds the arrival of the post-human era.

There is no doubt that science fiction contains a lot of imaginative plots and is fictive, but he says that the ethical considerations implied by science fiction are heavy.

## II. The disregard for the life rights of robots

The development of science and technology in the novel makes the genetically optimized people benefit from surpassing the human state, arouses people's thinking about human being, life value and other aspects, and faces the crisis consciousness of subject elimination. In the future, the development of artificial intelligence will inevitably require sunshine, faith and love, and use love to make up for the opposition and difference between artificial intelligence robots and natural persons, and protect the right to life. In the face of the ethical problem that the artificial intelligence robot is deprived of the right to life by the natural person, the novel uses sunshine and love to answer.

Natural person is the transformation and application of science and technology, and the creator of artificial intelligence robot. Therefore, the artificial intelligence robot is regarded as its ruling object, and it is considered that the artificial intelligence robot and its creator are affiliated, that is to say, the artificial intelligence robot will exist or disappear with the change of human will. At the party, Clara and other AF was ordered, was required to do performance activities, Josie and friends ordered Clara memory test, color discrimination, singing and other activities, AF became a human to highlight their own accessories, can be laughed at, joking, AF in the party to be treated in this way seems to have no problem. But Clara in order to save the sick Josie, to its belief in the sun for help, even at the cost of taking out part of the P-E-G9 solution in the body to destroy the Kutins machine. The humans represented by Hashiishi and the AFs represented by Clara have formed a huge difference in their treatment of each other. The humans treat AF with selfishness, indifference and cruelty, while AF treats human beings with absolute loyalty. This stark contrast highlights the ethical issues incisively and vividly.

After completing her duty to serve Josie, Clara was left to die in a yard. This raises new ethical questions about how AF's life should be treated. Or, do AFs have lives at all? This is the ethical question posed by technology, which reduces AFs like Clara to Agamben's "holy people." Originally, "Divine man" refers to a person who is excluded from the political community for his crimes and can be killed by anyone, and "divine man" means "a person who has been banished from the divine and earthly world, a person who does not belong to the divine law (shall not be sacrificed) and does not belong to the earthly law (shall be killed without punishment)."

Afs face a common situation with the "holy man" : they coexist with humanity, but are excluded from the human community, and can be discarded, killed, commandeered, and treated in any way. Violence that is "neither sacrilegious nor illegal" is the sovereign power (natural person) that exposes life to threat, and people treat AF in any way without repentance, without any moral condemnation or legal responsibility. Through this description, the novel expresses that the development of science and technology may make the value of life ignored, and China's imaginative literary expression protests the oppression of science and technology on the right to life.

## III. The lack of ability of artificial intelligence to judge good and evil

Artificial intelligence robots can imitate the way of thinking of human beings, and can show no difference with human beings at the level of thinking, and even be more intelligent and rational than human beings, but artificial intelligence robots are very weak in the ability to distinguish good from evil, and robots have no ability to distinguish right from wrong. Although robots can think, make judgments and have their own consciousness, artificial intelligence robots rely on algorithms for thinking and judging, which makes them fundamentally different from human thinking. From this perspective, only human beings really have the ability of "thinking"; And the robot only through the established computer program to achieve the calculation and output results. Viewed from this perspective, humans are ethically conscious and able to distinguish right from wrong by thinking and judging.

Human ethical consciousness makes the concept of good and evil gradually form. Human beings think through brain text, while artificial intelligence robots operate and judge through electronic text. Therefore, it can be said that only by thinking through brain text can ethical consciousness be formed. Through receiving ethical education, human beings store the instructive information about good and evil, morality and ethics in their brain. Electronic text only has the judgment criteria of right and wrong, and can only make simple judgments about good and evil. When it comes to complex, multi-dimensional and multifaceted moral situations and judgments about good and evil, electronic text cannot play a role.

In the novel, Clara and other AFs are extremely poor in moral judgment and the distinction between good and evil, because they do not have a complete ethical consciousness and can only make simple judgments about things in black and white. In Clara's eyes, only "very good" and "very bad", the sun can give Clara energy, therefore, the sun represents the "very good", as long as the sun moistens, there will be miracles and good things happen. The "Kutins machine" symbolizes "extreme evil", which releases pollution and covers the sun. In her opinion, in order to make the sun, a symbol of "extreme good", agree to her request and give Josie "special care" to help Josie recover, it is necessary to destroy the Kutins machine, a symbol of "extreme evil". As the writer Kazuo Ishiguro put it in an interview: "Does the sun really have this ability? I didn't make it clear enough in this story, and maybe Clara thinks so too, but, personally, I don't think sunshine can save Josie, or everything."

In the same way, readers with perfect good and evil give a more comprehensive and pertinent opinion: the sun is not omniscient, and can neither save dying lives nor cure all maladies; It is also possible that the sun is blocked out because of the climate, rather than because of pollutants emitted by construction machinery. From Clara's judgment on good and evil, we can see that in the face of ethical issues of moral

judgment, artificial intelligence's ethical awareness is not sound enough to make an objective and comprehensive judgment, and it has lost the qualification and power to judge good and bad.

### **Epilogue:**

As a science fiction novel, *Clara and the Sun* presents a series of ethical issues in the development of artificial intelligence through literary creation, so that readers can think more deeply about the development of science and technology. This paper discusses *Clara and the Sun* from the perspective of ethics, analyzes and presents the ethical issues in the book, hoping to bring some thinking.

### **Reference literature:**

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