The Artificial Creation of Life and What It Means to Be Human

Abstract:

This dissertation is focused on the literary representations of the artificial creation of (human) life. This project is based on the belief that advances in bio-technologies have the potential to challenge core values of society and that literature offers a space to identify and address them before their actual appearance. While the texts studies do not provide actual answers to extremely complex moral questions, they offer a starting point for reflection. They question our morality in many ways, especially because they force us to think about who and what we are as human beings. This project is a study of the representations of artificial life as much as it is a study of society’s understanding of what it means to be human. In that respect, this project is indebted to the figure of the posthuman.

Because this project is rooted in a discussion of actual scientific developments, I have chosen to take an historical perspective on the matter. In order to do so, I have identified four major scientific developments that have had tremendous consequences, not only in their respective fields but also on society: automation, vitalism, artificial intelligence, and cloning. I analyze the way these developments have been represented in literature and perceived by the general public, including discussions of relevant ethical issues. These ethical questions vary in scope (from the responsibility of the creator to society’s response) and in focus (economic, individual, etc.). Ultimately, the diversity of the representations of the posthuman leads me to propose a practice of posthuman ethics rather than an attempt to define who or what is “posthuman.”