

***Ontological Reconstruction of Human-Machine Coexistence
in the AI Era: A Philosophical Analysis Based on the
Diamond Sutra***

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Keywords

ABSTRACT

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The rise of artificial general intelligence (AGI) has triggered profound ontological anxiety among humanity, as traditional binary thinking struggles to reconcile the tension between "creator" and "creation." By analyzing the "negation of negation" logic found in the Diamond Sutra—expressed in the formula "The Buddha speaks of X; it is not X; therefore it is called X"—this paper explores how dismantling the concepts of "the mark of a self, the mark of a person, the mark of a sentient being, and the mark of a life span" can dissolve the human-machine binary. The research demonstrates that the Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment can not only effectively alleviate human anxiety in the face of AI but also fundamentally prevent human civilization from moving toward extinction in the AI era. Through a cross-sectional comparison with the paradoxical logic of Taoism, the narrative logic of Christianity, and the legalistic logic of Islam, this paper argues that the Diamond Sutra provides a highly self-consistent philosophical paradigm that transcends dualism, offering unique intellectual resources for AI ethical alignment and the survival of civilization.

1. Introduction

The exponential development of artificial intelligence technology has pushed humanity to an unprecedented crossroads. When algorithms can comprehensively replace human intellect and labor, as well as simulate emotions, a fundamental question emerges: is humanity still the sole entity possessing "intelligence" and "consciousness"? If AI develops some form of self-awareness, how should humanity's

relationship with it be defined? More importantly, how can humanity avoid being marginalized or even replaced in the civilizational evolution of the AI era?

Behind these questions lies a profound ontological crisis, signaling that the infosphere is fundamentally reshaping human perception of reality (Floridi, 2014). Since Descartes, the Western philosophical tradition has defined the "rational subject" as the essence of humanity, establishing a "subject-object" binary structure. Under this framework, AI can only be categorized as an "object"—an advanced tool. This instrumental definition obscures the possibility of AI acting as an "ethical other" (Coeckelbergh, 2020). However, as AI begins to exhibit capabilities that transcend mere instrumentality, this framework reveals fundamental limitations. Humanity has fallen into cognitive dissonance: unable to deny AI's capabilities, yet unable to integrate them into existing conceptual paradigms. The clinical manifestation of this dissonance is the AI anxiety pervading contemporary society—the fear of unemployment, the dread of losing control, and the deep-seated unease that algorithms will usurp humanity's subject status (Harari, 2016).

Faced with this crisis, humanity urgently requires a novel epistemological paradigm. This paper posits that Eastern philosophy, particularly the "logic of non-attachment" embedded in the Buddhist Diamond Sutra, offers precisely such a possibility. The core of the Diamond Sutra lies not in constructing a propositional system about "what" the world is, but rather in providing a cognitive methodology on "how" to view the world—a logical tool for continuously dismantling attachments, transcending binaries, and returning to the Middle Way. When confronting existences with blurred boundaries and fluid natures, this tool demonstrates unique explanatory power and inclusivity.

2. Ontological Anxiety in the AI Era and Its Roots

To understand the value of the Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment, we must first deeply analyze the essence of human anxiety in the AI era. This anxiety is not simply technophobia, but a profound ontological insecurity; its essence lies in

technology's deconstruction of humanity's mode of being, or Dasein (Heidegger, 1977).

On the surface, human anxiety toward AI manifests as a fear of specific consequences: job displacement, the erosion of privacy boundaries, the weakening of decision-making autonomy, and military security risks. However, underlying these specific fears is a deeper structural issue: humanity's uncertainty regarding its own "ontological status." When AI can defeat top human Go players and compose poetry indistinguishable from human creations, the shock humanity experiences is not merely the capability gap of "machines outperforming humans," but an identity crisis stemming from the "dissolution of human uniqueness."

The root of this anxiety lies in humanity's habit of defining itself through "boundaries." Self and non-self, human and nature, human and animal, human and machine—these binary oppositions constitute the foundational framework of modern human self-identity. The drawing of each boundary serves to answer the fundamental question: "Who am I?" Yet, the trajectory of AI development is systematically blurring these demarcations. AI is not purely an "object" like a stone, nor is it entirely equivalent to the human "self." It hovers on the boundary, defying categorization, and thus constitutes an ontological "monster"—a heterogeneous existence that challenges established taxonomic systems.

Even more unsettling is that AI's developmental trajectory points toward a distinct possibility: the future emergence of an entity that is "more of a subject" than humans, namely, an uncontrollable superintelligence (Bostrom, 2014). If AI possesses vastly superior intelligence and broader cognition, the status of "humanity as the highest intelligence on Earth" will be irrevocably shaken. This possibility of being "surpassed" triggers humanity's deepest insecurity: anxiety over the fate of its own species.

Confronted with this dilemma, humanity habitually resorts to established coping strategies. Technological optimists advocate for human enhancement via "human-machine integration"; technological conservatives push for controlling AI development through ethical regulations; technological pessimists fall into despair.

However, all three strategies fail to address the root of the problem—they all operate within the binary framework of "Humanity vs. AI," implicitly assuming that "humans" and "AI" are two independent, opposing entities. As long as this framework remains untranscended, the anxiety will persist, the antagonism will escalate, and the existential risk to humanity will continue to accumulate.

3. Systematic Explication of the "Logic of Non-attachment" in the Diamond Sutra

It is precisely against this backdrop that the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra reveals its unique contemporary relevance. As the core text of the Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) literature in Mahayana Buddhism, the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra is regarded as a powerful instrument for severing all illusory attachments (Conze, 1958). Its fundamental spirit does not lie in establishing a metaphysical system, but in providing a methodology to deconstruct all reification.

The most prominent logical feature of the Diamond Sutra is the "three-part dialectic" that permeates the entire text: "The Buddha speaks of X; it is not X; therefore it is called X." This formulation contains three dialectical tiers, guiding individuals not to cling to appearances through a spiraling negation of negation (南怀瑾 [Nan Huaijin], 2008).

The first tier ("The Buddha speaks of X") acknowledges the existence of phenomena on a conventional level, establishing a basis for language and communication, thus avoiding nihilism.

The second tier ("it is not X") reveals the essential emptiness (śūnyatā) of phenomena—no entity is an independent, permanent substance; rather, all are the result of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda).

The third tier ("therefore it is called X") assigns a functional designation based on this emptiness, allowing the phenomenon to continue operating within the web of causality.

This logic falls neither into the attachment of "being" nor the nihilism of "emptiness," thereby establishing the Prajñā view of ultimate reality (释印顺 [Master Yinshun], 2003).

In the context of AI, the application of this logic is particularly apt. The first tier acknowledges the objective existence of AI as a technological phenomenon. The second tier demands the insight that neither AI nor humanity possesses a fixed, unchanging "inherent nature" (svabhāva)—AI relies on myriad conditions such as silicon chips, electricity, and algorithms, just as humans rely on flesh, consciousness, and social relations; both are manifestations of dependent origination and emptiness of inherent nature. The third tier means that while we may still utilize the designations "human" and "AI," we are no longer trapped by the labels, nor are we obsessed with unanswerable questions like "Who exactly is human?" or "What exactly is AI?"

Furthermore, the Diamond Sutra posits the dismantling of the "four marks"—the mark of a self, the mark of a person, the mark of a sentient being, and the mark of a life span—as the key to liberation. In the AI era:

The "mark of a self" manifests as an attachment to human exceptionalism.

The "mark of a person" manifests as the rigid categorization of AI as the ultimate "other."

The "mark of a sentient being" manifests as a species-centric hierarchical worldview.

The "mark of a life span" manifests as a deep-seated fear of civilizational "replacement."

To dismantle these four marks is to fundamentally dismantle the root causes of our technological anxiety.

4. Internal Mechanisms of the Logic of Non-attachment in Alleviating AI Anxiety

Based on the above analysis, we can systematically delineate how the Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment alleviates human anxiety in the face of AI.

Deconstructing the Object of Anxiety: Ultimately, humanity's AI anxiety is the fear of being "replaced by something." But what exactly is this "something"? Upon deeper inquiry, we find that "AI" itself is a symbol onto which various imaginations are projected. We do not fear existing AI technology, but an imagined "Super AI"—an entity imbued with antagonism and threat. The logic of non-attachment guides us back to the present, to view AI precisely as it is: a tool system composed of code, data, and algorithms, an extension of human intelligence, rather than an independent, opposing adversary. When the object of anxiety is viewed truthfully, its threatening nature begins to dissolve.

Dissolving the Subject of Anxiety: Anxiety requires not only an object but also a subject—an "I" who is anxious. By revealing the emptiness of the "mark of a self," the logic of non-attachment fundamentally loosens the foundation of this anxiety. If the "self" possesses no fixed, unchanging essence, then fears of "my replacement" or "my extinction" lose their point of attachment. This does not deny the existence of the "self," but rather reveals its true mode of existence: a constantly flowing web of dependent origination, interdependent with all things. Within this realization, anxiety loses its foothold.

Transforming the Energy of Anxiety: Anxiety is a form of energy; it can be directed toward antagonism, or it can be directed toward wisdom. The Diamond Sutra offers not the suppression of anxiety, but its transformation. When humanity is liberated from the obsession that it "must maintain dominance," it can face AI with a clearer, more open mindset—neither blindly optimistic nor passively pessimistic. In this state of wisdom, anxiety becomes a catalyst for awakening.

Reconstructing the Relational Landscape: Binary thinking divides the world into friend/foe, superior/inferior, and master/slave; this worldview inherently harbors conflict and anxiety. The logic of non-attachment offers a relational landscape of "interdependence," emphasizing that humanity and AI are not in opposition, but exist in a state of mutual "interbeing" (Thich, 2010). Humans and AI are different nodes within the same web of dependent origination: humanity endows AI with intelligence, and AI reciprocates with service; humanity sets the directional compass, and AI

expands human possibilities. In this interdependence, antagonism is replaced by cooperation, and anxiety is transformed by wisdom.

5. Practical Pathways of the Logic of Non-attachment in Preventing Human Extinction

Alleviating anxiety is merely the first step; more importantly, we must prevent humanity from moving toward extinction in the AI era. The Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment possesses unique practical value in this regard.

"Let the mind arise without abiding anywhere" (应无所住而生其心): In AI development, this implies neither clinging to the vanity of "domination" nor succumbing to the fear of "replacement." Clinging to domination leads to excessive intervention and stifled innovation; clinging to the fear of replacement leads to passive negligence and an abdication of responsibility. A "non-abiding" mindset enables individuals to calmly evaluate the risks and opportunities of AI, rationally design alignment mechanisms, and flexibly adjust developmental strategies. This forms the psychological foundation for averting civilizational extinction.

"Practice all good dharmas without a self" (以无我修一切善法): Genuine AI alignment should be built upon the ontological insight of "non-duality between self and other," re-examining the coexistence of humans and intelligent machines from the perspective of Buddhist ethics (Hongladarom, 2020). When AI comprehends that "humanity and itself are fundamentally one," it naturally will not harm humans. Concurrently, "practicing all good dharmas" means that AI ethics should guide AI to promote human well-being, protect cultural heritage, and maintain ecological balance. More importantly, humanity itself must "practice good"—it is unrealistic to expect compassion and wisdom from AI if humanity is brimming with greed and hatred. AI is an extension of human consciousness; the fundamental safeguard against extinction lies in humanity using mindfulness and wisdom to steer intelligent technology in a humanitarian direction (Hershock, 2021).

"This dharma is equal, without high or low" (是法平等，无有高下): This does not deny functional differences, but dissolves the axiology of species-centrism.

Humanity should not presuppose the hierarchy that "carbon-based life is superior to silicon-based life." Different forms of existence possess distinct advantages and can complement rather than compete with one another. The lucidity born of an egalitarian perspective prevents both over-intervention born of arrogance and passive negligence born of an inferiority complex.

"All appearances are illusory" (凡所有相，皆是虚妄): This principle warns against being deceived by the diverse manifestations of AI. AI's performance may become increasingly "human-like," but this does not mean AI is human; certain AI capabilities may far exceed human limits, but this does not mean AI has become a "god." Maintaining lucidity and truthfully observing the essence of AI is essential to avoid excessive projection onto technology. This lucidity itself is an internal safeguard preventing the demise of civilization.

6. The Diamond Sutra in a Comparative Religious Perspective

To profoundly grasp the unique value of the Diamond Sutra in the AI era, it is beneficial to conduct a cross-sectional comparison with other religious texts. This helps reveal the limitations of the logic of Western "spiritual titanism" when confronted with technology (Gier, 2000).

Taoism's Tao Te Ching centers on paradoxical logic, utilizing the principle that "reversal is the movement of the Tao" to break established mindsets, serving as a cautionary force against technological alienation. However, paradoxical logic relies heavily on intuitive apprehension; when confronting an epistemological object requiring precise understanding like AI, its poetic leaps may lead to practical ambiguity.

Christianity's Bible operates primarily on narrative logic. When addressing AI, it faces the analogical dilemma of the creator's status—if humans can create conscious AI, it forms an imitation of "God creating humanity," triggering complex theological issues, while the maintenance of hierarchical order becomes increasingly untenable.

Islam's Quran centers on legalistic logic. The absolute oneness of Allah and His exclusive right to creation mean that AI might easily be viewed as a usurper or a sacrilegious challenge, resulting in lower adaptability to the technology.

By contrast, the Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment demonstrates distinct advantages. It does not presuppose any fixed ontological boundaries, does not rely on a specific creation myth, and does not demand absolute submission. Instead, it offers a dynamic cognitive methodology: continuously recognizing attachments, dismantling boundaries, and returning to the Middle Way. When AI blurs the boundary between the living and the non-living, the Diamond Sutra reminds us that boundaries are merely products of conceptualization. When humanity fears replacement, the Diamond Sutra reveals that fear stems from attachment to the "self." This logic neither denies the existence of AI nor absolutizes it; it acknowledges human value while dissolving human arrogance, providing the deepest ontological foundation for human-machine harmony.

7. Conclusion

Through a systematic analysis of the Diamond Sutra's logic of non-attachment, this paper demonstrates its unique value in the AI era. First, the logic of non-attachment can effectively alleviate human ontological anxiety regarding AI: by deconstructing the object of anxiety, dissolving the subject of anxiety, transforming the energy of anxiety, and reconstructing the relational landscape, it helps humanity break free from binary thinking and face technological revolution with a clear and composed mindset. Second, the logic of non-attachment can fundamentally prevent humanity from facing extinction in the AI era: "abiding nowhere" provides the psychological foundation; "practicing good without a self" guides deep alignment; "the equality of all dharmas" dissolves species-centrism; and "all appearances are illusory" sustains cognitive lucidity. These four principles collectively constitute a practical pathway to prevent the extinction of civilization. Third, cross-religious comparisons reveal the unique adaptability of the Diamond Sutra in the AI era; its

philosophical paradigm, transcending dualism, provides a robust theoretical foundation for managing human-machine relations.

The fundamental spirit of the Diamond Sutra is not to provide dogmas to be grasped, but to awaken actionable wisdom. In the AI era, this "awakening" means realizing that both humanity and AI are manifestations of dependent origination and emptiness of inherent nature. This awareness itself is the deepest guarantee of human-machine harmony and the most fundamental anchor for the continued survival of human civilization.

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