

## Posthumanism: An Introduction

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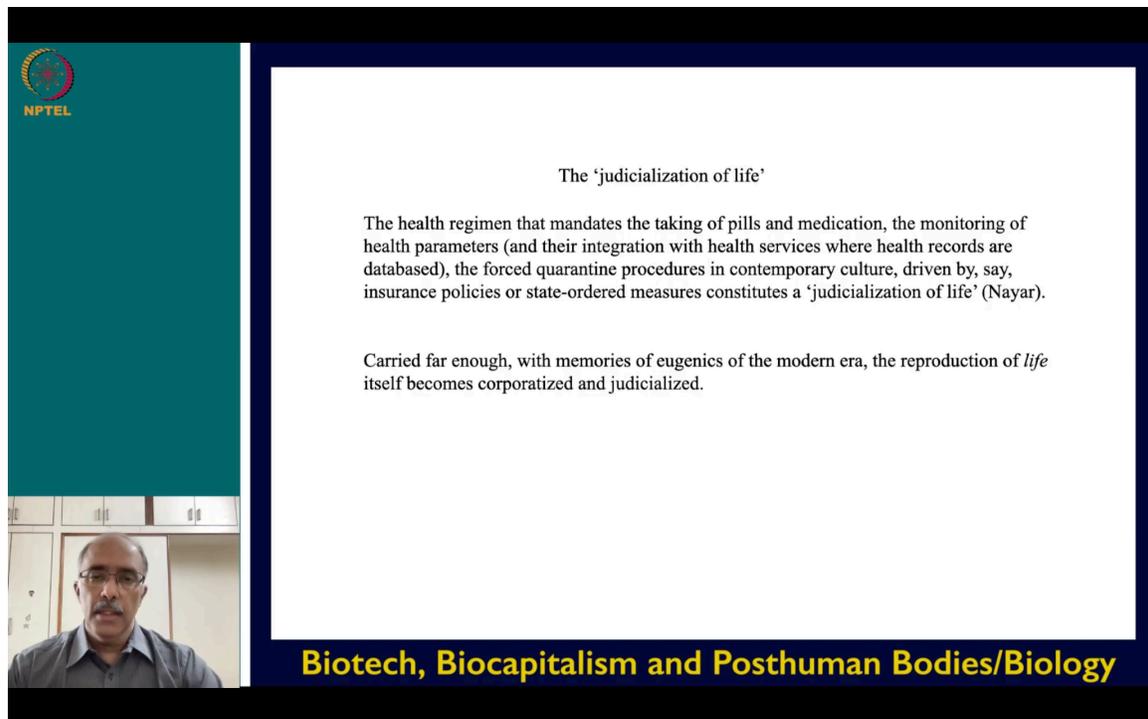
The University of Hyderabad

Lecture 16

### Lec 16 : Biotech, Biocapitalism and Posthuman Bodies/Biology - II

Judicialization of life is the active intervention of the state in managing, controlling, and determining the lives, health, and condition of its populations. So, as the pandemic demonstrated, the state will issue circulars on how to observe hygiene and sanitation, how to behave in public, the medication to be taken, and the penalties to be imposed if you don't follow these orders. So, an extreme form of this judicialization is what happened during Nazi Germany in the form of eugenics. Some of you may be aware of movements such as social Darwinism and eugenics, where the argument made was that

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The 'judicialization of life'

The health regimen that mandates the taking of pills and medication, the monitoring of health parameters (and their integration with health services where health records are databased), the forced quarantine procedures in contemporary culture, driven by, say, insurance policies or state-ordered measures constitutes a 'judicialization of life' (Nayar).

Carried far enough, with memories of eugenics of the modern era, the reproduction of *life* itself becomes corporatized and judicialized.

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There are individuals who are not healthy, who do not have the adequate intelligence required, and they should be prohibited from having children. Think of that. So they said people with lower IQs, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, or epilepsy should not be allowed to have children. Preferably, they should be exterminated. So this is something to keep in mind when we speak about the judicialization of life.

The role that the government has, in conjunction with corporate laboratories, corporate bodies, and laboratories. OK, so that's important to keep in mind. The third is what we mentioned at the beginning: science, capitalism, and kinship. There are any number of projects, including the Human Genome Project and the Human Genome Diversity Project, which try to ascertain the origins of human beings, of various races, etc. And the interest was in knowing ancestry.

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**Science, Capitalism and Kinship**

Human Genome Project and the Human Genome Diversity Project (NatGeo, IBM, and others) and their search for origins, relations, and “genetic citizenship” constitute a new dimension to our understanding of human identity, belonging and kinship (Heath et al).

The National Geographic’s Genographic Project (launched 2005)

Stated aim: to employ ‘advanced DNA analysis’ to ‘help answer fundamental questions about where humans originated and how we came to populate the Earth’.

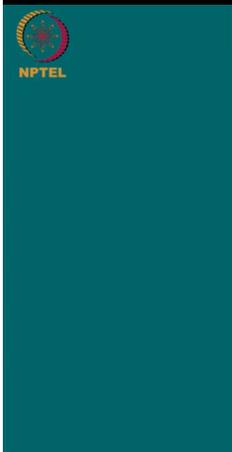
The Project locates genetic ancestry within geography.

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Ancestry. So they did the Human Genome Project, as some of you may be aware, documenting the human genome in its entirety. They mapped the human genome in its entirety. So their interest, such as it is, is to ask: Where did humanity come from? How did it evolve?

And who are our relatives? As in, who are we connected to? The Genographic Project, which is the technical term given to it, asks us to reconsider genetic unity and ethnic connections by which I mean the connections between, say, tribes, communities, castes, or whatever it may be. And let us think in terms of genetic material and genetic connections, rather than through historical evidence and material. So this has obviously been somewhat controversial because the fact remains that science or, more accurately, genetics has been given far greater value than, say, cultural connections.

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The Genographic Project assumes relatedness through genetic unity in the face of historically organized social imaginaries of difference and cultural hierarchies.

Kinship based on genetic lines therefore might be a mode of undermining the tribe's self-definitions and self-recognition.

[The Genographic Project] 'implies that an individual's ancestry is defined through the very small portion of genetic material that is directly inherited, maternally and paternally' (Catherine Nash)



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Kinship, as in making kin, is based on genetic lines, not on any other lines. It's difficult to ask where this is going because we don't quite know. But we do understand that new forms of kinship and new forms of belonging are being crafted. So researchers like Fatima Jackson, Kimberly TallBear, and others have objected to being subjected to all sorts of tests to prove that Oh, you're not related to these people.

You're related to some people, some sitting somewhere in the North Pole, in Siberia, and things like that. And if you follow the Human Genographic Project's trajectory, this is very much how they operate. And you are told that, well, that is really not the point. The point is, these are not your cousins or your relatives. Your cousins are somewhere else.

Which means genetic connections are deemed to be more important than social, cultural, and emotional ones. How do you explain that? How do you understand that? What they are saying is, no matter where you are located, we have always believed that our kinship is based also on cultural understandings, tribal or communitarian declarations. But these people argue the Human Genome Project argues that we are all connected genetically primarily.

This produces problems, of course, because our sense of who we are depends not on our genetic code but on our cultural practices, our memory practices, our art. So, when we say, 'I am so-and-so of a particular community,' we are not talking about genetic material alone. That is there. But we are talking about shared cultural memories, shared tasks, histories. So, when we say

This is kinship. Kinship is also produced through cultural connections, what we call heritage. Heritage need not be genetic in nature, right? Simple as that. So for people like Kim Tolbert and others,

All of this the social contributions, the social ontologies, the economic connections are crucial compared to their biological roots. Biological roots are important, but they are not the only or even the most accurate way to determine kinship. Now, for people working within posthumanism, this becomes a major point. It becomes a major point because we are looking at, say, tribal or aboriginal connections. We are looking at caste and community connections.

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In the quest for origin(al)s, the Project implies that the genetic origin stories are more accurate rather than, say, native myths and stories. And because the 'West' is associated with science, it represents the climactic moment of the journey of man: from myth to rational thought. The lack of attention to native forms of knowledge- and meaning-making in favour of the 'scientific' history that is being built up regarding races, cultures and species is central to the Project's politics.

Kinship, belonging, and the sense of community are, for Native Americans, Asians and several older populations, built not on bloodlines but cultural memories and shared practices—on their social ontologies but not their biological 'roots' (Tallbear, Nayar).

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Do you think it's possible that we rely exclusively on genetic material to do this? No. Our connections are made by shared cultural memories, our shared literary texts, our shared sense of, say, what is comic in a cartoon, etc. So, People like Kim Tolbert, Diana Heath, and others writing about global citizenship note the fact that kinship is also being reconfigured.

It's being redone. And this is important because it has several huge consequences for how the world will view kin and kinship. It's not just the bloodline. And this emphasis on the bloodline therefore becomes a problem.