

Posthumanism: An Introduction
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Lecture 29
Lec 29 : Posthuman Subjects II

This is Pramod Nair from the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad. We have been exploring the posthuman subject in the last module, and we shall continue to do so in this particular one today. The posthuman subject appears in literature, popular culture, and public discourse in several variant models. There are the most obvious humans with prostheses or implants, humans who are connected to machines, dialysis machines, those who wear pacemakers. There are humans modified and enhanced through various kinds of technologies.

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Versions of the Posthuman Subject

- Humans with prosthesis, implants/transplants, connected to machines, modified and enhanced through genetic and other technologies
- Clones
- Humanoid Robots and Artificial Beings

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As we noted in the last module, There are people with corrective prostheses, and here the prostheses enable them to live a moderately functional life not quite normal as we have tended to define it, but a regular routine made possible through prosthetic procedures. Devices, assistant devices, and assisting devices. And, of course, the fact that there are people who periodically require being hooked up to machines to keep their bodily functions and physiological processes going at, as I said, a moderate level of functionality. Enhancement is a different ball game altogether, where the

quote-unquote normal human abilities, the normal human capacities, have been amplified. We are not yet in that age of advanced human forms, although, as some of you may be aware, doping in sports has often been seen and criticized for such enhanced

human forms that humans are modifying, quote-unquote, their natural abilities by allowing and actively focusing on acquiring greater degrees of expertise or skills, through the infusion of, say, implants or pharmacological chemical stimulants. And you know that drug doping chemical infusions of that kind are prohibited in sports, and there are ethical codes which, when violated, often result in penalties. But there are also experiments underway to think in terms of

Genetic modification of athletes, but that's still somewhere in the future. So, which means to say that there's a wide variety of humans with prosthetic implants, pharmacologically modified bodies, and these do call into question what we mean when we say a post-human subject. I gave you the example last time, and of course, in the course of this program. Are people who need prostheses fully human? Are people who have chips and other implants in their brains and other parts of the body fully human?

And as we looked at in the last session, are people in a persistent vegetative state human at all? Which is to say that our classification, our definition, our notions of the human are all now open to question. And that's something that the post-human generation will need to tackle because it has its own set of ethical and moral possibilities and problems. We will come to that at some point. So,

The other variety of the post-human subject would be the clone. Now, we do not yet have clones of humans. It's always a matter of considerable controversy, especially after the cloning of Dolly the sheep, whether cloning of humans should be permissible. And the bioethical conventions, the bioethicists, have always gone to war over this, that it should not be allowed. Even if technology enables it.

The technology is, of course, very expensive and not yet available in cheaper forms for us to consider cloning humans. It is, as several of you might be aware, the stuff of science fiction nightmares, starting with Ridley Scott's cult work *Blade Runner*, which, of course, now has a reboot. So, the clone. And the clone is also the subject of considerable literary attention. Examination, most notably in Nobel laureate Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*.

Be that as it may, the point I wish to emphasize is that the clone disturbs the border between the human and the post-human because the clone is, after all, derived from human tissue, human genetic materials, and then would you think of them as lesser than humans, or not human at all? Would you think of them as being on par with robots and other lab-manufactured things? And I'm using the word 'things' intentionally here. So that's one more variety.

The third variety is of humanoid robots and artificial beings. You know the story of Sophia, the artificial being who has been granted citizenship in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the furor it raised. How do we assign citizenship status to an artificial being? Do we consider them humans, humanoids, robots, or chimeras a mixture of humans and machines? The early popular idea of the post-human as cyborg is clearly what we are looking at here.

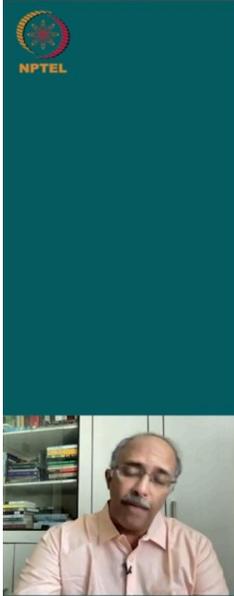
The point I wish to underscore is that humans with prostheses, clowns, artificial beings and humanoid robots are three of the most visible, most debated versions of the post-human subject. Now, you will immediately say that the robot is a breed by itself, is a class by itself, and it should perhaps not be here. That's actually speaking a wrong notion. For the simple reason that more and more, the robot is beginning to resemble the human. More and more robots being designed for, say, purposes of caring for the old, caring for children with developmental disorders, are humanoid.

So is our problem the fact that the robots are machines that look like humans? Is their similarity with the human the problem rather than their difference or differences from us that's the problem? Likewise that question could be expanded and we could ask the same thing of humans with transplants. Our problem with humans having transplants or prostheses is that they are humans who are beginning to look like robots.

It's the converse of what we have just mentioned that robots who look like humans are unsettling, disturbing, uncanny and humans that resemble robots are also disturbing and unsettling. Which means our idea of the post-human subject hinges on our ability to determine whether the resemblance of a human to a robot and vice versa is really the problem or the distinction of the human from the robot is the problem. when for example we are dismissive of very efficient processes or people we refer to them as oh he is like a robot he's so mechanical he's like an automaton which is not a compliment as you know it's not a compliment because humans are supposed to be humans are not supposed to resemble robots after all so the human subject And the post-human subject are supposedly two distinct features, ontological characters or beings where they should not come together. The human should not begin to resemble a robot and a robot certainly should not resemble a human being.

And we have a problem precisely because the post-human subject disturbs the boundary and does not accept this segregation very easily. Now, we move to very specific issues here. What is the moral status of artificial beings? As in, what is the moral status of creatures robots made in laboratories or factories but whose job is to be with humans, robo-sapiens as they are sometimes called, and be able to work with us, play with us, be our companions, and take care of us.

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The Moral Status of Artificial Beings

We have two tests to determine the moral status of any being:

- Reason/Rationality

If a being matches the human capacity to use language, then we assume its entitlement to a moral status analogous to that of a human.

- Feeling/Emotions

Here we assign moral status based not on their intelligence but on their capacity to feel and suffer. Thus, while robots do not *feel* pain even when injured, animals do. So it is easier to assign a moral status to animals but not to robots.

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We normally have two tests to determine the moral status of any being. One, the test of reason and rationality; and two, the test of feeling and emotions. The test of reason and rationality is very simple. If any creature, machine or otherwise human or animal is able to match the human capacity to use language, then we assume it is entitled to a moral status analogous to that of a human. Analogous to that of a human.

The second test is of feeling and emotions. If a robot or an animal or any such creature demonstrates a capacity to feel and suffer, then we have to assign, at some point, a moral status to them. So, we can see the fact that robots do not feel pain, but animals do. So we find it easier to assign a moral status to humans and animals but not to robots because our definition is that robots when they don't feel pain, they don't feel emotions are not entitled to a status analogous to that of humans.

So, two tests. One, the test of reason and rationality. Two, the test of emotions. And if they don't meet those criteria, we don't count. Now, suppose a particular clone or artificial being demonstrates some of these features.

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If the posthuman clone/Artificial Being demonstrates

- Altruism
- Care & sympathy
- Reason
- Sense of humour
(Sentience in general)

These fulfil the test of Reason and the test of Feeling.

Would such a being/robot be entitled to the moral status of a human?



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Altruism, care or sympathy, rationality or reason, or a sense of humor. Would they be entitled to the moral status of a human being? Now, remember these four features: altruism, care or sympathy, rationality or reason, and a sense of humor, a kind of thumb rule to describe sentience and consciousness. So, a creature that demonstrates all four of these would they be a

Would it be entitled to the moral status of a human being? Would they be treated on par with a human being? If you look at those four characteristics: altruism, care, rationality, humor they meet the two tests. They meet the test of reason; they fulfill the test of reason and the test of emotions or feeling. Then, on what grounds are we saying

You cannot give them the moral status of a human if a creature meets those requirements. So humanoid robots are increasingly able to emulate emotions like humans. They demonstrate care as human nurses and caretakers do. Some of them, like Sophie, actually crack jokes. And of course, they have a logical reasoning process.

So on what grounds are we saying they are not analogous to humans? So as you can see, there are no easy answers here, but the questions are particularly worrying, particularly philosophical because we don't have answers to them. Right. Okay. Now, the next question is: what is the moral standing of artificial beings?

Now, Suppose an animal or any creature performs an act that creates a moral obligation toward that creature. Then any creature that does that makes it imperative for us to recognize their moral standing. For example, you know all those stories We have seen films where an animal rescues a human being, right?

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The Moral Standing of Artificial Beings

Any animal that undertakes an act that creates a moral obligation towards that animal, then any being which undertakes a similar act places a moral obligation upon humans to recognize that being as possessing a moral status.

If the Artificial Being is produced by humans so as to mimic human feelings, cater to human needs and serve as mirrors to our-selves then what stops us from recognizing them as humans too?

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The animal warns them that there is danger ahead. Don't walk there. The cliff begins there, rescuing them from drowning and all sorts of things. When the animal does that, it places the human under a moral obligation to treat that particular creature or animal analogous to humans because humans care. Well, not all humans do that's precisely the problem. But jokes aside, we do recognize that very often animals exhibit forms of care that humans don't.

So if an animal does that and then you see a robot doing that, how come you can give a moral status to the animal and not to the robot? The robot is doing exactly what the animal has done. The robot does exactly what a human does. Which means to say that if the artificial being that has been produced by humans mimics human feelings, caters to human feelings and needs, and can actually serve as a mirror image of human beings, then what stops us from recognizing them as humans too? Just because they have been manufactured in a laboratory?

Now, if you are people who have studied these texts, you know that Mary Shelley's Frankenstein did raise similar questions. The monster-slash-creature, which I mentioned last time I noted this for you, is unnamed. The monster or creature demonstrates care, demonstrates intelligence, demonstrates anger and other emotions, and demonstrates the desire to acquire knowledge. Which is what humans possess. All four are human characteristics too.

But Victor Frankenstein says, 'No, I cannot recognize you as a human,' and refuses to provide him with a mate. Now, is the problem that Frankenstein's creature has not been produced through human sexual reproduction? Is that the problem? Is the problem that the creature is manufactured in a lab? In a scientific laboratory.

Which means our problem with artificial beings is not that they are like us, but in the way they originate. So something manufactured in a lab, we don't like. Something that appears

in a petri dish, we don't like. Something synthesized from other bodies, which is Frankenstein's creature, we don't like. So is the origin the crucial question?

Is the origin of the creature the big question? If the artificial being we have produced does all that humans do, feels emotions, shows respect, politeness, curiosity to learn, and undertakes care, nurture, and altruism then on what grounds are we saying they are not like us? Now, note the fact that Any human who does that, any animal that cares, is entitled to moral obligation, right? And you do know that pets are referred to as members of our family.

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A human who performs tasks that embody the above – such as caring for a human or animal, making altruistic gestures, learning from the surroundings – is entitled to a moral obligation from other humans, and we confer a moral status upon that human.

Then why not a clone or robot who does the same things?

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Well, you don't always say, 'These are the non-human members of the family,' do you? We just say, 'Oh, our dog or our cat or our parrot or whatever pet you have is a member of the family.' We do not specify that this creature slash animal, slash whatever non-human is a member of the family. We don't say that. We just say, 'Oh, our dog is a member of the family.'

We use the first name and say, 'This is a member of the family.' We don't specify if it's a non-human member. Why can't this status be accorded to a robot that thinks with you, responds to you, demonstrates active emotional intelligence, rational qualities of thought, and can undertake activities such as care and nurture? Why can't they be given a moral status akin to other humans? So this is the key question.

So there have been arguments made by people like Michael Laboisier that the post-human is an ersatz moral person, a substitute moral person. 'Ersatz' means substitute. The post-human is a substitute moral person. And the quote, which is up on your screen that you might want to pay some attention to says: 'If advanced artificial beings could engage in activities analogous to those humans engage in, and if these activities were to

create an obligation if performed by a human, then they would create an indirect obligation to the artificial beings as well.'

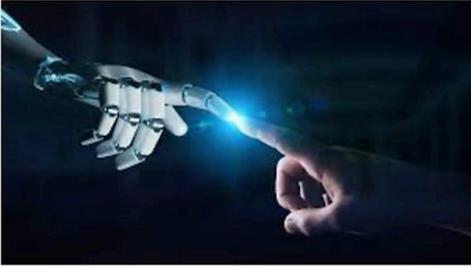
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The Posthuman as 'Ersatz Moral Person'

'If advanced artificial beings could engage in activities analogous to those humans engage in and if these activities were to create an obligation if performed by a human, then they would create an indirect obligation to the artificial beings'

Michael LaBossiere



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This is what I have been saying: if the robot, if the artificial being, undertakes the same things as an animal does, and when the animal does, we give it an ersatz moral status, a substitute, for instance, then what stops us from doing that for any other creature? Even if that creature is made of metal, has been manufactured in a lab, unless we say that the mode of origin is crucial. Which is also a very troubling idea because, with artificial reproductive technologies, surrogacy, and a whole raft of reproductive mechanisms and technologies now available, what is natural in, say, human reproduction is itself open to question.

As people like Sarah Franklin, Melinda Cooper, and a whole bunch of anthropologists of medicine, particularly those interested in reproductive technologies have demonstrated, the reproductive mechanism, the reproductive system, has itself been commodified, commercialized, and subject to various pressures of capital. That's a different line of argument. You might be interested in pursuing that, but that's not, at this point, germane. So when creatures do that for us, why should we not have the same idea and approach toward them? Our next point is about presuming moral status.

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Presuming Moral Status

Can we presume the moral status of such posthuman subjects?

- Is it morally preferable to 'err on the side of treating a being better than its status justifies rather than to treat it worse'? (LaBoissiere)

So, treating a clone or Artificial Being *as though* its feelings may be hurt is better than treating it badly.

- What if the Artificial Being *does* possess the capacity to suffer?

Would we subject a human person to undue risk knowing s/he can suffer? If the answer is 'no', then would we risk exposing an Artificial Being to such a risk if there is

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Can we presume the moral status of a post-human subject? As Labossière would say, is it morally preferable to err on the side of treating a being better than its status justifies, rather than to treat it as worse? Which means, should we not think of treating a clone or artificial being as though its feelings may be hurt, rather than treat it badly? This is an argument that applies to animals as well, as you know.

Is it better to treat an animal as though it can feel hurt, or is it better to treat it badly? Assuming that the animal feels hurt. When you read histories of, say, for instance, the zoo, you know that when animals were starved, they were reduced to performing simple tricks. Hoping that they would get food. It's documented in history.

Elephants and chimps, for example, performed tricks so that out of pity, they would be fed. This was during wartime in various zoos around the world, and there was not enough food to feed the animals, so they eventually starved to death. That's the sad part of human history too. But we do know that we should treat animals favorably, preferably nicely and warmly, rather than treat them badly.

So why not extend this to an artificial being? What if the artificial being does indeed possess the capacity to suffer? Would we allow it? Would we subject a human to undue risk and suffering? The answer is clearly no.

Then would we do that to an artificial being? If you presume that those who hurt animals may at some point be open to hurting other humans, and that's Carey Woolf's argument in his book, *What is Posthumanism?* If you presume that those who hurt animals will at some point hurt other humans, then it means we have assigned an ersatz or substitute moral status to the animal. Ersatz moral persons are those who give the illusion of being like humans. If the humans demonstrate an emotional response to other humans who may be in persistent vegetative states, whose emotional or rational behavior is well away from the norms, but we still believe that they are entitled to human rights, right?

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If we presume that those who hurt animals may be open to hurting other humans, then we have assigned an ersatz or substitute moral status to the animal.

Ersatz moral persons are those who give the illusion of beings *like* humans.

If humans demonstrate an emotional response to humans who are in coma, whose emotional and rational behaviour is below/different from what is socially acceptable, and who we believe are still entitled to Human Rights, then why not assign such a status to ersatz moral persons?

If humans demonstrate an emotional response to such ersatz moral persons, including animals, then why not towards Artificial Beings?

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Then why not assign such a status to such moral persons? That is, if you assume sentience, rationality is an integral part of being human, then we do know that there are people after say medical conditions or those with developmental difficulties have a rational IQ or intelligence lower than what we think of as normal, normal within quotes. But we still think they are entitled to human rights. Although their standards, their levels, their abilities are well below what we think of as standard standards.

for the humans. So why not give the same benefit of doubt to artificial beings who have the same levels of intelligence, emotional quotient as we do, as humans do. Which means to say that the substitute human person will entail a certain obligation from our part. When artificial beings perform the same functions as humans, they can be treated as allo-human persons. And human persons is a definition offered and a concept offered by Alexandra Alcaraz who describes them as acting in continuity with human persons and performing more or less as accurately as us functions of humans.

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Allo-human Persons

When Artificial Beings perform the same functions as humans, they are extensions of the human.

They are 'allo-human persons'

Allo-human persons are then acting in continuity with human persons, performing (to a certain degree of accuracy) as human persons ... "allo-human person" ... embraces different hybrid beings created in natural-cultural processes, that are building up communication, morality, ethics, and society, and who are like – but not identical to – humans.

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz

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They have abilities to communicate, they have morality, they have ethics, and they also have a certain kind of social ability akin to that of humans. So, as you can see, we are in the thick of ethical and moral debates, and we shall continue with this soon. Thank you.