

**Posthumanism: An Introduction**  
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**Lecture 30**  
**Lec 30 : Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

Hello everyone, this is Pramod Nair from the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad, and we have been exploring various facets of the post-human subject. This module is also part of that particular segment. Some of you might recall that we discussed the blurring of boundaries between the human, the humanoid robot, and the human who is also increasingly beginning to resemble other creatures. We spoke about the fact that the robot, which undertakes the same set of activities and demonstrates the same set of abilities and capacities as the human, might deserve the moral status of a human being. We made analogies with animals who do the same thing as in, they demonstrate care and nurture and often place humans under a certain moral obligation, deserving our accord of status as a moral equivalent of a human being.

Humanoid robots who undertake activities such as care and nurture also place us under a similar obligation, and we make the point that these creatures are perhaps ersatz moral persons that they are allo-persons, they are allo-humans because they tend to, or they do, exhibit forms of behavior and characteristics that are very, very similar to humans. The point is fairly simple, as we noted via Michael Labossiere and other commentators: if a creature born or manufactured in a laboratory undertakes the same activities and displays the same characteristics as a human being, then what are the grounds on which we say they are not human? We agree that a creature, an animal that exhibits these qualities and demonstrates an ability or condition open to suffering deserves better treatment. So, if a robot depicts, presents, and demonstrates the capacity to suffer, would it not be a moral obligation on our part to ensure that that creature does not suffer?

Or, as we noted, is the origin of this creature a problem? So, the mechanical thing manufactured in a factory, The clone derived from human genetic materials. Not yet, as I said, in the realm of the possible, but research continues on that. The humanoid robot.

These are all variants of the post-human subject. And they work like us, think like us, and behave like us. Then, on what grounds are we saying they are not like us? We are not saying they are humans. Another person's status given is that of an ersatz moral being, a substitute moral being, which places us under a certain obligation to behave with them in certain ways.

We now move on to, as I said, a very sunny issue. The ethics of postmodern, post-human, techno-human subjects. They are postmodern in the sense we have not invoked the term before so I'll spend a minute clarifying that. They are postmodern because they break established boundaries, narratives, and genres. They are, at least partially, the effect of the merger of technology and traditional materials of human beings.

They are postmodern because they resist a totalitarian system of talking about them. Can we call them humans? Can we call them animals? We do not quite know. So, in some sense, they are also the effect of our discourses, of our simulated avatars that have then become partially like the creatures we are talking about. But that's not, that's just a trajectory that some of you might want to pursue: the link between the postmodern and the post-human. But we will return to our core subject here, and that is the ethics of post-humanism and the ethics toward post-human subjects. There are two ways of understanding and discussing post-human subjects and ethics. First, the ethics of creating and employing robots as carers or as servants,

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Posthuman Subjects and Ethics can be understood in two principal ways:

- The ethics of employing robot carers and artificial beings in elder-care, care of children and other such human patients/sufferers
- The ethics of humans towards the robot carers and artificial beings

**Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

and assistance to humans. You know that in several societies around the world, the greying population of the elderly is rapidly rising, and in such cases, there aren't enough care institutions. There aren't enough care facilities to take care of them, to ensure that they lead a relatively comfortable life until the time of their passing. In many cases, therefore, society, corporate-funded, state-funded, and various other sources of funding has legitimized the use of robo-carers. And the robo-carer has proved to be effective.

The robo-carer has also been used in nursing and in the treatment and therapy of children with developmental difficulties, including autism, and this has proved to be effective too. So the debate this opens up is, to put it in rather crude terms, not quite philosophical. Should we entrust the care of a human to something that is not human? Is it ethical to entrust the care of a flesh-and-blood human to one that is made of plastic and metal and a little bit of synthetically manufactured organic compounds? That's one kind of question.

But the bigger question is what I began with. Is it ethical to create such creatures? We will take these each in turn. The third one is: what should be what ought to be the ethics of humans towards such carers and artificial beings?

What should be the ethics of human beings toward robo-carers, robo-therapists, and artificial beings who serve humans? So, the ethics of employing robo-carers and artificial beings in care. I am not segregating different forms of care. So, there is end-of-life care and therapeutic care. There are carers for gerontology and geriatric wards.

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The ethics of employing robot carers and artificial beings in care

More and more robots are now a part of the nursing and care industry. They are being employed to take care of children with special needs, the chronically ill, the terminally ill and the elderly.

Report:  
KASPAR robot to teach children on the ASD spectrum to engage in collaborative play, the authors report that "the children with autism were more interested in and entertained by the robotic partner" than the human confederate (cited in Alexis Elder 2017).

This poses new ethical questions around the subject of posthumans in care.

**Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

There are robo-carers for children with developmental disorders. All sorts of varieties exist, and I am not interested at this point in time in mapping them differently. So, we just take it as the ethics of employing robo-carers and artificial beings. There are robots that take care of people with chronic illness, and a report on the Casper robot designed to teach children on the Asperger's syndrome disorder spectrum

taught the children to play collaboratively. They sat with the children and performed with the children, and showed the children how to work in a collaborative, team environment, which, you know, is a fundamentally social component of our growing up—to work with people. And people with certain kinds of disorders often have problems, such as trusting others, making eye contact, and working with other people. So, the question asked is, are these

effectors. And the report on this says that children with autism were more interested and entertained by the robotic partner than by the human nurturer or carer or caregiver. It's a report. So what they discovered was the children who had problems associating with responding to the humans were able to respond to the non-human or the humanoid robot much better than they responded to humans.

This is a totally surprising discovery, you would think. But that's where our concerns emerge. First concern. The human patient who's already chronically ill or has developmental problems or has stages, has reached various late stages in say Parkinson's

or Alzheimer's or dementia, such a patient might believe that they should have or they do have a reciprocal emotional relationship with the robot. Because, you see, we tend to, at some point when people care for us, have a reciprocal relationship.

(Refer slide Time 10:12)



Concern 1

The human patient may believe that they have a reciprocal emotional relation with the humanoid robot carer, and assume that the humanoid robot carer really cares for them.

Likewise, for children with special needs (autistic children, for eg) who are already vulnerable to social relations and have trust issues, this deceptive suggestion of care or friendship can be potentially hazardous

This implies, according to some critics, a deception and a loss of dignity for the human.



**Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

We trust them. We believe they trust us. We might develop a certain affection for them. We believe they are doing it out of affection for us. And that's where the issue really lies.

The human patients, because of the efficiency of the care, might assume that the humanoid robot really cares for them. Right? They might believe that this care that they are doing, they never forget their medicines, they know what to do for the patient. They believe it is born out of genuine care. And that care which we associate with humans,

But is it really the case? Does the humanoid robot really care in the way we understand care? Or is it programmed to look as though it cares? Is it programmed to mimic human methods and modalities of caring? This is a big question, isn't it?

So for many people, Children with special needs also have a similar problem. Children with special needs are already vulnerable to social dynamics. They have trust issues and they don't really talk to other people. Well known fact, right?

People of the autism spectrum. So, when they start responding to the humanoid carers, they are unable to ask themselves, is it genuine or not? They just take it as part of a reciprocal requirement that if the robo cares for me, I shall also duly care for the robo. But does the robo really care?

If so, people have noted, there is a serious problem of deception here because the child who is already vulnerable to uneven social dynamics, is led to believe that the robot

really cares. That the humanoid or artificial being really cares. Is that the case? So, have we just made it worse for the child?

Because the child already has trust issues. The child already has a problem in responding to humans. And now if the child discovers that the thing, within quotes, that has been caring for her or him is actually not a human. Would a child who is already suspicious of the world, who has problems trusting the world, not be more severely affected? Is that a good thing to do?

For people who are critical of the robo-care industry and the robo-care phenomenon, this implies deception. This implies the loss of dignity for the human. That we have fooled the child or the person with dementia, and the person with dementia or the person with developmental disorders has trusted a fake human. They are already vulnerable people. They already have trust issues.

Should we let them trust something fake and leave it to them to discover later that they have been fooled? This is a matter of the loss of trust, but also, as they point out, the loss of dignity of the human being. So, should such... All states of affairs be allowed to continue. Now the point is also that should the carer, should the human carer be genuinely affectionate and caring, or does their professional training teach them to do so?

(Refer slide Time 14:59)



But: should the internal state of affection and emotion be a prior condition to the 'care relation'?

Or

Is the care relation determined by 'a care environment that is formed by gestures, movements, and articulations that express attentiveness and responsiveness to vulnerabilities within the relevant context'? (the Environmental Hypothesis about care)  
Meacham and Studley

**Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

If so, is the state of internal emotions central to the construction, to the idea of a carer? Do the robot sapiens have this? Do robot carers genuinely care? Is their internal emotional state central? Or, as Nietzsche and Studly point out in their major essay on the subject,

Is the care relation determined by, and I quote, a care environment that is formed by gestures, movements, and articulations that express attentiveness and responsiveness to

vulnerabilities within the relevant context? This is the environmental hypothesis on care. What Richman's study points to is, care is not the result of a certain environment, of a certain system, And actually they speak therefore about care relations. The care relations emerge in a specific context.

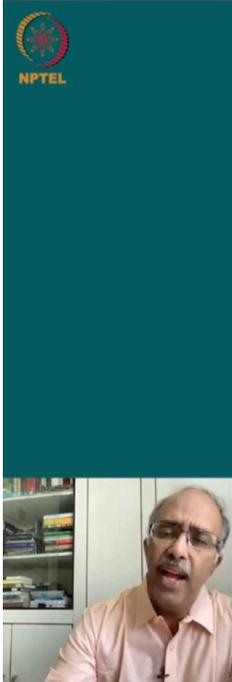
Is the emotional state of the carer important or more important than this environment? Is it integral to how the person or the robot cares? When they speak about the care environment, they speak about the care environment as constituted by gestures, movements, speech, which demonstrate responsiveness, attentiveness. If a robot can do all that, what's the problem? Is the robot happy while doing it or not?

Is that the question? I mean, do we expect the robo-carer to have quote-unquote genuine feelings towards the subject of their care? Do we expect the robo-carer to be enthusiastic, happy and cheerful like a human carer is? But we also know that human carers are also limited in terms of their patience and their abilities to remain cheerful all through the caring process, right? We know that nursing, caring people often lose their tempers, and are often unable to remain cheerful.

They live and work under tremendous pressure. Their work environments are extremely stressful. But we expect them to remain cheerful and happy all the time. That's not possible. Likewise, do we expect the robot carer to also remain perpetually happy and cheerful?

Which means, is the internal emotional state of the robot carer the crucial part or is something else important? Is the care relation important? And the second concern is the condition of risk or conditions of risk that emerge. Can we entrust children or the elderly to robo-carers?

(Refer slide Time 18:20)



Concern 2  
When entrusting children or the elderly to robot carers, the ethical concern is of creating conditions of risk

- (1) a person accepts risk because that person believes the robot can perform a function that it cannot or
- (2) the person accepts too much risk because the expectation is that the system will mitigate the risk.

Borenstein et al

## Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I

Is it ethical to create conditions where they might be arguably facing a certain amount or a certain kind of risk. Two related questions here or rather concerns here. A person like a child or the elderly accepts risk because that person believes the robot can perform a function that it cannot or risks emerging. When the person accepts too much risk because of the expectation that the system will mitigate the risk.

Two related points here which will deserve some attention. The patient believes that the robot can undertake a specific task. This might be a false impression. If that is a false impression, then it follows that the patient has just stepped into very risky territory. Second, the person accepts too much risk because they believe that the system will manage the risk.

Will the system manage the risk? Is it possible for the system to manage the risk? Not a very clear domain as of now. Our third concern is the matter of trust. The trust in the human-robot interaction hinges upon already established notions of trust.

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Concern 3

Human-Robot Interaction hinges on established trust in Human-Human interactions.

Human interactions depend on assumptions of

- Dependency (mutual)
- Risk (the risk that the other may not fulfil their obligation)
- Vulnerability (being open to deception but also to being deceived with a moral obligation)
- Goodwill (mutual)

(Kirkpatrick et al)



**Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I**

But that trust is in human-human interactions. Now, human-human interactions depend on a set of assumptions. First, we assume dependency, which is mutual. We assume risk. The risk remains that when you do a favor for a friend, the friend might not reciprocate that favor.

Which means there is a risk in the other party not fulfilling their obligation. There is no reciprocity. Then that's a matter of some risk. Third, vulnerability. That we are open to deception.

But we are also open to being interested with a moral obligation. And then, of course, there is the matter of goodwill. All of these are factors that come into play when we look at and when we talk about human-human interactions. Now the question is, do these apply to the non-human or the humanoid robot? We do know that robots are programmed to do certain things.

But like we have already discussed, are we being fooled? Because we believe they are emotionally attached to us. They are not emotionally attached to us. Humanoid robot-careers are not emotionally attached to us. They are performing a function that they are being programmed to do.

Now, is that being deceived? And if that is the case, then aren't we being made vulnerable to The lack of a reciprocal relationship. I mean, we believe they care for us when they actually don't. We believe there is a moral obligation that we have towards them because they are a certain type of person caring for us.

They actually are not. So, what happens to the trust between the human and the non-human? Now, the four points listed here, dependency, risk, vulnerability and goodwill are assumptions on which all human interactions are based. The question is, can we move it to the field of human-robot relationships? Studies have revealed that there are strong emotional connections that humans feel with robots.

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Studies show that strong emotional connections (not limited to trust) humans feel with robots in ways that resemble or approach those found in interpersonal interactions

But can we use the same notions/approach in Human-Human interpersonal interactions to think about Human-Robot Interactions?

“If proper interpersonal trust requires moral agency, intention, and consciousness, then a reasonable and measurable approximation of concepts of agency, consciousness, and intentionality [will need to be applied to Human-Robot Interactions]”

(Kirkpatrick et al)

*This means, unless we have methods of ascertaining the agency, intention and consciousness of the robots, it will be difficult to think of 'trust' in robot carers*

## Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I

And that these emotional connections are very similar to human-human interactions. But the question is, can we use the same four yardsticks which we have already looked at here, dependency, risk, vulnerability and goodwill, can we use the same yardsticks to talk about human-robot interactions? Basically, we are saying, are the criteria that we employ to judge human-human interpersonal relationships the same criteria for human-robot interactions? So, unless we have methods of ascertaining the agency, intention, and consciousness of the robots, as this concern explicates, it can be difficult to think of how we can design a trust mechanism for robot-carers.

We still don't know. Please note, this is very gray territory. We still don't know. And people like Darian Meacham, Jessica Patrick, and others have written extensively about it. Alexis Elder has written extensively about this.

When we talk about trusting, we are using models of human trust in humans to talk about trust in robots. Are they comparable? Can we use the same yardsticks to move from human-human interaction to human-robot interactions? Are our expectations the same?

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## Posthuman Subjects and Ethics I

Ought our expectations to be the same? We still do not know. So, the point is, whether it's about emotional connection, vulnerability, or risk, We are working in very gray areas. But as you can see from what we have discussed today, these are matters of considerable philosophical, ethical, and moral concern.

Thank you.