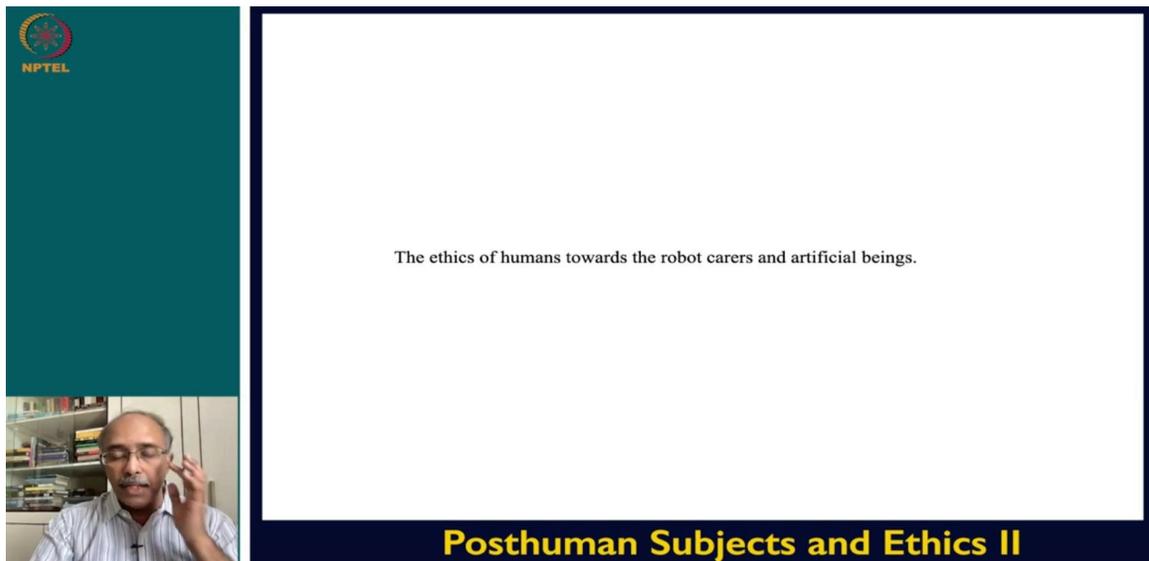


Posthumanism: An Introduction
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Lecture 31
Lec 31 : Posthuman Subjects and Ethics II

This is Pramod Nair of the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad. And in the last few sessions, we have been examining post-human subjects and subjectivity. We have also been interested in looking at ethics and ethical conduct toward the post-human. In this particular session, we will continue with this exploration titled 'Post-Human Subjects and Ethics.' By this, we mean the ethics of human persons toward robo-carers, robo-sapiens, and artificial beings.

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The ethics of humans towards the robot carers and artificial beings.

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Now, you might recall what we have been saying in the previous sessions about how more and more functions of care are being managed by and taken care of outsourced to, if you want to use contemporary jargon robots. Children with developmental problems, people with chronic complaints and conditions, and people who are aged all require constant care. This is at a premium now in many countries around the world for the simple reason that there aren't enough nursing personnel. It's also true that in several countries, including Japan and now increasingly India, the population of elderly people has risen drastically.

This means there are more people in the senior citizen category than there were, say, 10 to 15 years ago. This is what is sometimes referred to as the graying of populations. With the graying of populations, as we witnessed during the horrific pandemic, the demands on the medical care system and the nursing care systems are amplified, and these systems are simply unable to handle the load, which means alternatives must be found. One

alternative being increasingly examined is the creation of robo-carers. Essays appearing in *Nursing Inquiry* and other journals have made the case, with several empirical studies, that it has been a fairly successful venture to employ robo-carers, which means that human functions of care are being handed over to artificially created beings.

It has, as I said in the last couple of sessions, its own moral and ethical concerns, and some of these we will address now. What should our attitude be toward such robot carers? Is it right to create them that way? Are they entitled to or deserving of human rights?

Human will, of course, in quotes. Is it appropriate to say that they are machine-manufactured, laboratory-manufactured, even though they perform all the tasks of a human being, they cannot be treated as all-powerful humans. Can we say that? Or should we develop entirely new ethical frameworks within which to place these creations or creatures?

And we always return to this text, as you are perhaps aware. It's, in fact, a kind of architect, you know, for all of us. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: the creature tells Victor Frankenstein, 'I should have been your Adam.' No? And it's an implicit, yet at the same time, a very unusual demand that we are witnessing.

The creature is saying, If I was your Adam and you were my creator, don't you have a responsibility towards me? Isn't it your job to take care of me? Isn't it an obligation, a duty that the creator has towards the created? Which means to say, effectively, the creature, the unnamed creature, often called monster, is asking a very fundamental question.

And this fundamental question resonates with us even now when we look at artificial beings. If humans have constructed a creature, it could be a thinking robot made up of plastic and metal, or it can be a creature which is made up of artificially synthesized organic materials, a mixture of materials from biological matter and lab-constructed matter. But if humans have created it, they are effectively the progeny of the offspring of humans. And what should their ethics be towards such creatures?

George Mintz and Michael Cook, whose quote is up on your screen, say that the fundamental problems of how different post-humans express what they are, what dignity they'll be accorded, and what will be the meaning of freedom and how it will be guaranteed, is the real question. As in, I just quoted Barry Shelley's creature who says, I should have a new Adam. And if you read novels like Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, it's more or less, they're also the president of the robot, the humanoid robot is called Adam. And Adam's question is more or less on the same lines.

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We need to examine

“the fundamental problems of how different posthumans will express what they are, what dignity they will be accorded, and what will be the meaning of freedom and how it will be guaranteed”

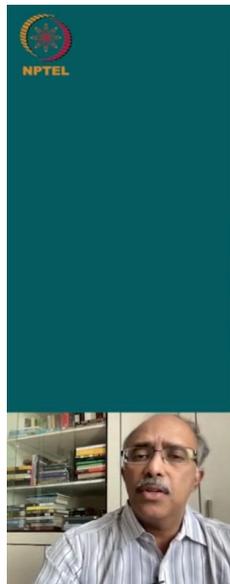
George Mendz and Michael Cook

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Don't you have any obligation toward me? Isn't it something like a responsibility? But what do the creatures themselves ask? So how will the post-humans express their identities, their subject positions? Will they be accorded any dignity?

And what will be the structure, condition, and meaning of freedom is the question as judgment is asked. Let's go to a particular case study. You might have a pleasant one let me warn you. In 2015, two communication studies scholars, Zeller and David Smith, created what they called a hitchBOT. This was a solar-powered iPhone, but put into a kind of doll-like, robo-like structure and casing.

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In 2015 communications studies scholars Frauke Zeller and David Smith created hitchBOT, a solar-powered iPhone enclosed in a fancy and attractive anthropomorphic casing. The bot was sent hitchhiking, and made it across Canada, Netherlands and Germany, and finally into the USA.

hitchBOT not only met with a lot of friendly humans, but also went viral on social media, gaining more than 35,000 followers on Twitter, 12,000 on Instagram, and receiving 48,000 likes on Facebook, all in less than four weeks.

The purpose was to see how humans would interact with the humanoid. While it did not exhibit feelings or reason – the two standard test criteria that enable humans to determine if the device/object can be treated as a nonhuman “person” – humans who encountered it by and large treated it with curiosity and a degree of friendliness. Some took it to a wedding, others to a comics convention. hitchBOT was also taken to a baseball game, and even an ocean cruise.



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This bot was sent hitchhiking. It traveled across Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany, and was eventually brought into the United States. And it continued on its journey. It met with a lot of friendly humans, who were, among other things, impressed by what was going on. And the point I want to emphasize here is, as Judge Menzel and others have asked,

What kind of dignity will be given to them? And how will they express themselves? Please keep those in mind. So, the people responded in very different ways to this hitch-walk, saying, 'Oh, that's unique.' And the hitch-walk had a very large presence on social media, which is understandable.

The purpose of sending this bot out on the walk was to see how humans would interact with the humanoids. Now, admittedly, the Rongo did not exhibit emotions or rationality, which for many humans would be the test criteria to see if the thing could be treated as a person. Most humans, incidentally, treated it with some kind of charmed curiosity.

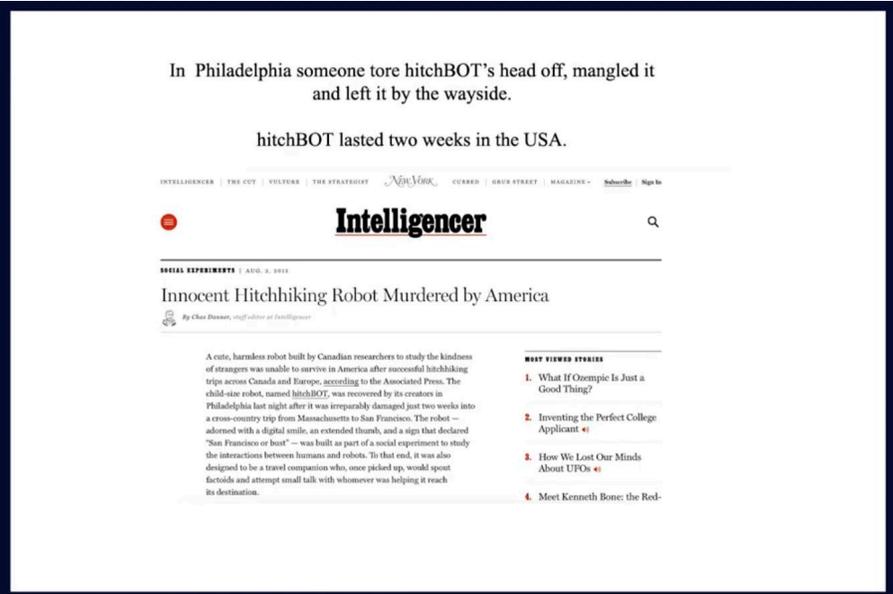
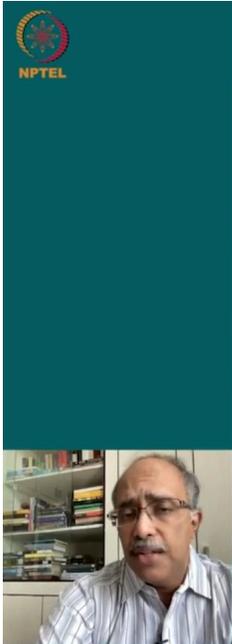
Many, actually frankly, there was an incident where they took it to a running event, and others took it to a comics convention, a baseball game, and even on a cruise. All to show that the humans did not actually think this was a very odd thing to do. They didn't treat the bot, the hitch-bot, as a person. And you might remember what we said about para-persons and allo-persons, right? They fulfill all the requirements of a human.

They conduct themselves like humans do. And they have expressions that are akin to ours, akin to ours. And in many cases, they also emote. So if they do all that, then what stops us from considering them as persons? Now, in this case, the bot did not have actual expressions of feeling, vulnerability, or danger.

But it was a friendly robot. And people responded to it in a friendly fashion. So, the robot walks across, hitchhikes across the United States. But in Philadelphia, it reached a tragic end. Someone tore off HitchBOT's head, broke it up, and left it by the wayside.

I'm not quite sure it's a commentary on the United States, but having traveled through Germany, the Netherlands, and large parts of Canada, it only lasted two weeks in the United States. And I would recommend that you take a look at the screen where a worse item from a newspaper called Intelligencer has been put out. It says, 'Innocent hitchhiking robot murdered by America.' Now, the terms are interesting. So, people who looked at this history, this cultural history of the bot hitchhiking across the United States, the treatment that the bot received people being happy to be with it, talk to it, take it to comic conventions, like I said, even to their wedding it was a sign that humans are perhaps losing their distrust of artificial beings and robots.

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Although decidedly anthropomorphic and endearing, it was responsive, it was cute, as several people described it. It was akin to humans in many ways. But for others, they said, 'What is this strange thing?' And the fact that within two weeks of entering the United States, it had been destroyed... shows that human distrust of rumors is still very high and very strong.

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For some, the treatment the bot received was an index of human society's distrust of Artificial Beings and robots. Anthropomorphic and endearing, responsive and 'cute' (as hitchBot was described), it was akin to humans in many ways.

So what should be human attitudes towards humanoid robots?

Is there an ethics of/towards posthuman forms?

The first question is how to classify the humanoid robot.

Philosophers suggest that humanoid robots are classifiable as:

- Ersatz moral persons
- Allo-humans

When Artificial Beings perform the same functions as humans, they are extensions of the human. Ersatz moral persons are those who give the illusion of beings *like* humans.

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Be that as it may, it's an indication of our interest in what happened that the title of the newspaper piece is, 'It was innocent and it was murdered.' These are terms you use, you affix to incidents where human persons have been exterminated. You don't speak of a

chair. If a chair has been broken and mangled, you don't say the chair has been murdered. The term 'murder' is usually used to describe living beings.

So you can refer to animals being murdered and humans being murdered, but you cannot refer to furniture, a piano, or a building being murdered, not inanimate objects. But the fact that the Intelligencer used the term 'murder' and then used it in conjunction with the word 'innocent' suggests that some people, at least, saw it as a person. Now, this is an example. What should be the ethics toward such creatures? The related questions that emerge are: How do we classify the humanoid, this humanoid robot?

As we have seen, the humanoid robot can be classified as an ersatz model person, as a substitute human person. Or it can be classified as an Alloperson, a variant model. When artificial beings perform the same functions as all other humans, they can be treated as extensions of the human. Enslaved human beings give the impression of being like humans. Of being like a human.

Not identical with, but similar to. And there is a difference here. Similar, they're not identical. So we think of them as like humans. Now, does that make them deserving of rights, dignity?

That's a good point. There are questions, like I just said, of rights and ethics and justice can only be addressed from within a cultural practice where they haven't situated. So the question of ethics towards humanoid robots has two parts. One, should humanoid robots be created with the sole purpose of serving humanity? Two, does it mean that we as humans are creating a new species, a new class of slaves?

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The questions of rights, ethics and justice of humanoid robots can only be addressed within the socius for which they are designed (Robertson)

The question of ethics towards humanoid robots has two parts:

- (a) Should humanoid robots be created with the sole purpose of serving humanity?
- (b) Does it mean we humans are creating a new class/species of slaves?

These questions themselves raise two problems.

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So two very important questions. Should we create such things, such creatures? Whose only job in life is to serve humans? If the answer is yes, are we creating a new race of servants, of slaves, of senators? These questions are not as direct as we think.

The dungeons raise two problems. First, if we assume it is all right to create beings who are meant to serve humans, Whose capacity, whose capabilities are directed at serving humans, then the fundamental and foundational principles of justice demand that they be allowed to fulfill their capabilities. Now, we do know the capability argument from Amartya Sen, Mahatma Swami, and several other philosophers that it is the right of a human to be able to fulfill their capabilities, To use their capabilities to acquire and fulfill their aspirations.

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Problem 1

If we concede that it is ethical to create/design beings who are meant to serve humans, whose very capabilities are directed at serving humans, then principles of justice demand that they be allowed to fulfill their capabilities.

If the humanoid robot has to grow and reach the peak of its capabilities, then the human social order, legal systems must allow it the rightful freedom to serve humans .

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So now, if the robo-sapiens, if the artificial being has been created with the explicit purpose of serving humans, then doesn't it follow that its capacity to serve humans must be allowed to flourish? If that is their purpose, Please note the fact that the basic question is a little prior to this. Should we create such creatures? I'm keeping that aside for the moment.

And I'm asking you to consider the fact that once you have created the thing, the RoboSapiens, and its task, its functionality, its algorithms are all geared towards fulfilling one basic function: to serve humans. Now, if that is the function of the creature, then would it not be wrong, would it not be unjust to deny it that right? Should it not be possible, through legal, social, and other apparatuses, to make it possible for them to fulfill their aspirations? Or should we say, 'No, you can't do that'?

'No, that's not acceptable.' Now, if a human were to be denied the fulfillment of their aspirations and ambitions, if they were not allowed to fulfill all their aspirations to the best of their capabilities, then we would say that's a violation of their rights. It's a violation of their fundamental, foundational, inherent capacities. This humanoid robot has been designed to serve us.

Having been designed to serve us, its only aspiration is to serve us as humans. Then how can you say that they cannot do so? It's a very funny question. The second problem: If we believe that we ought not to design such beings in the first place, then creating such beings means that humanity has created conditions for an entirely new class of servitude and slavery.

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Problem 2

If we believe we ought *not* to design such beings in the first place, then it means that humanity has created conditions for a new species of servitude.

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And this is a very disturbing, unsettling idea. Let's think about this for a moment or two. We have domesticated animals. We have transformed them into the instrumentalization of animals, as we have referred to in the early parts of this particular course when we looked at animal studies. We have transformed them into creatures whose job is to work for humans.

This could be in the form of care and guiding dogs, it could be in the form of pets, it could be in the form of cattle that provide us with various kinds of food products, it could be in the form of cattle used to plow agricultural lands, and so on and so forth. Which is to say that these creatures, animals, have been rendered into instruments of human purpose. We want a purpose. We want to plow the land.

We want somebody to ensure that the visually challenged person has someone to guide them across the crowded street. So we have our guiding dog. We have pets that are available for older people to stroke and make sure that they feel alright, like comfort dogs. We have animals that are sent into mines to see if the place is safe. Human animal sentinels.

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Once we create such humanoid robots, we have to allow and facilitate the goals, desires, and capabilities the humanoid robot was designed/ born with.

This is a rehumanizing of the machine by ensuring its potential is fully realized, its purpose served.

Posthuman Subjects and Ethics II

So we have put animals to multiple kinds of uses, right? Now, the question is, by creating these artificial beings, are we replicating this historical condition? Are we creating a whole new race of beings whose primary job is to serve humans? Is this acceptable? Is it okay to say that...

We have used animals before, and now we are using robots. Now, the counterargument is that robots do not have feelings. Robots are machine-manufactured. They are industrial products. And so, we do not have the same ethical concerns.

Fine. But as you have seen in the last few sessions and today's, if the robot is doing all the things that a human is doing, then the robot is akin to humans, right? They are all people. They also have dignity. They also, therefore, have rights, which means humans have obligations toward them.

So once you take that route, you're going to have a moral crisis. When abolitionism began as a huge campaign, they said, 'We cannot treat any race or other as slave races.' You cannot transform human beings into slaves. It's a violation of their fundamental rights, it's a violation of their dignity, and so on and so forth. And it was right, which is what the Human Rights document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

in 1948 also says: you cannot make slaves out of humans. Can you make slaves out of mere humans, other persons? Big question. So, if you are allowing new species of servitude, then we have to think of ethical formulae.

So Steven Peterson, who writes about what's called engineered robot servicing (ERS), says, 'The beginning and employment of non-human persons who desire by design to do tasks humans find unpleasant or inconvenient.' And it's possible to design robots from scratch so that they want to serve us in more or less particular ways. In such cases, robots are not slaves since they are not working against their will. Now, this is a very specific spin on the question of robot servitude, which is a large domain that we are at this point

looking at in this module. If the robot has been created with an explicit purpose in its head through the algorithms that it must serve humans then you cannot call them slaves because they are not slaving.

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Engineered Robot Servitude:

“The building and employment of non-human persons who desire, by design, to do tasks humans find unpleasant or inconvenient”

“It seems possible to design robots from scratch so that they want to serve us in more or less particular ways. In such cases the robots are not slaves, since they are not working against their will...”

Stephen Petersen



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or serving against their wishes. Their programmed wishes are that they should serve humans. Now, in the case of the slaves, as in human slaves, the human slaves do not want to be slaves. In the case of the robo, they do not know anything other than to serve humans. So would they be slaves?

I mean, would they be classified as slaves? Would they be thought of as slaves? Steven Peterson worries about that question. Now, when you have created them to do certain things, especially unpleasant tasks, then they are programmed to do so, and there is no way you can say that they should not do so. And the point he makes is, once we create such humanoid robots, we have to facilitate the goals, the capacities, that the humanoid robot was originally designed with.

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Once we create such humanoid robots, we have to allow and facilitate the goals, desires, and capabilities the humanoid robot was designed/ born with.

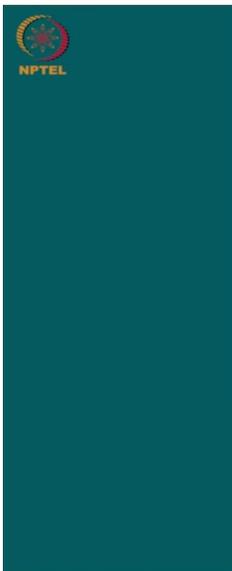
This is a rehumanizing of the machine by ensuring its potential is fully realized, its purpose served.

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There are only two ways around it. That is, we are looking here at a re-humanizing of the machine. A re-humanizing of the machine which will ensure that its potential is fully realized and its purposes are served. This re-humanization is important because the robot is designed to serve humans.

The robot is designed to be a servant or slave to humans. So, if we give it rights, dignity. We have re-humanized the machine. As you can see, there are no easy answers to these philosophical and ethical questions, especially about whether robots are slaves or persons.

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If they are persons, then they deserve human rights, right? If, however, you see them as machines engineered to be slaves, then they are not slaves like human slaves were because they are programmed, meaning they are not working against their will and are not being forced to do so. It's a thorny debate, and we don't really have resolutions, but the point remains that robo-ethics will become more and more a subject for post-human philosophical interventions in the near future. Thank you.