

Posthumanism: An Introduction
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Lecture 36
Lec 36 : Posthumanism and Care

Hello everyone. This is Pramod Nair from the Department of English at the University of Hyderabad, and here we continue our exploration of post-humanism and the Anthropocene. This particular lesson will focus on posthumanism and care. While this might seem slightly outside the routine ideas we deal with when discussing posthumanism, as we shall see, that is not quite the case. Let's begin with a standard definition of care.

Care is defined as the work we do to heal, repair, and sustain our world. This is a famous definition by John Tonto from 1994. To repeat, care is the work we do to heal, repair, and sustain the world, and that world involves the human and the non-human, the living and the non-living. So, we do not think of the world as a human-centric world.

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Care is traditionally defined as the work to heal, repair and sustain the world (Tronto 1994).

Posthumanist approaches to care sees it as working towards world-making and of sustaining more-than-human worlds.

The pandemic revealed the role of other-materiality (the virus) in human lives and thus altered the way we see our relationship with others (Braidotti)

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We think of the world as involving, containing, and sustaining multiple forms of life, from microbes to humanity. From animals and plants to humanity, but also a world that includes the non-living, such as the soil, the air, the various elements within them, the large bodies of water, and the oceanic planet we inhabit. So when we speak about healing the world or sustaining the world and the efforts it takes, care is more than human care. Care is not exclusively about humans caring for other humans, but in the post-human

vision and view of care, it involves caring for the more-than-human and the other-than-human. This is an important variation not just a variation, but an advancement on the ideas of care itself.

Because we have tended for a very long time to think of care as being about humans, by humans, and for humans. Post-humanist visions, as we have discussed several times over the last few weeks, have insistently noted the fact that Humans are an assemblage. We are made up of other creatures, from microbes to other organisms, and we are sustained through them. So questions of care cannot obviously be focused on just human care for humans.

So this is something we need to keep in mind. Post-humanist approaches to care often see care as working toward world-making. As in, we make worlds, but also in sustaining more-than-human worlds. Which means to say that we have to seek care in a much larger, expanded sense where we help, we try to sustain more-than-human worlds. So this more-than-human world, the very idea, is a post-humanist one.

Although, as people have been arguing, this sense of the world as being about more than the human, about having more than the human, is frequently seen in non-European, non-Christian traditions and frequently seen in, say, indigenous cultures. Be that as it may, we do not have the time to go into that particular trajectory or genealogy of the post-human. The point is, that care now is all-encompassing. It's not enough to say that we have to make the world safer for humans, right?

We have to make the world safer for multiple organisms. As Rossi-Bridochi would say, the pandemic revealed the role of other materialities, such as the virus, in human lives, and thus altered the way in which we see our relationship with the world. Braidotti is writing after the COVID pandemic. What did it show? And her point is very clear.

It showed that there are other forms, other materials, other organisms intersecting with human lives, which have brought home to us that Our relationship with others by 'others,' Braidotti means non-human others we are not autonomous. We cannot persist in seeing our world as ours alone. So ours will go into quotes. We cannot think of our materiality as in our flesh and blood and bone and nerve,

as sacred, sealed, safe. The pandemic revealed that we are open to injury, that we are open to other material forms that enter our lives, that alter our lives as we have seen, they alter our lives irrevocably, right? Post-humanist views of care and care relations recognize several things. One, anthropocentrism has created hierarchies of ethics or ethical hierarchies where we believe that humans should primarily care for and about other humans, that the care relation is primarily human to human. It also shows the necessity to move beyond human care to the more-than-human, because humanity exists embedded within more than the human which means to say, and this is something we have said before but is worth reiterating for the nth time, humanity exists embedded within other-than-human relationships, other-than-human ecosystems. We need to consciously understand that care involves moving beyond human care.

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Posthuman views of the care relation recognizes

- That anthropocentrism has created ethical hierarchies.
- The necessity to move beyond human care to the more-than-human because it accepts that humanity exists embedded in more-than-human relationships.
- That humanity and human life is dependent on a wide range of nonhuman species.
- That human life, like all life, is an emergent condition of encounters and entanglements with the nonhuman as well as the nonliving.
- That who humans relate to determines who they, the humans, are.

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Then, it accepts and recognizes that humanity and human life depend upon a wide range of non-human species. Whether you want to think in terms of microbes that help our digestion, whether you want to think of guide dogs, Whether you want to think of the agricultural animals or which other agricultural process, the non-mechanized version that we see in several parts of India and the global South even now. Whether you want to think in terms of the number of birds and animals that constitute the everyday life that we live. So, we have to recognize that we depend on a wide range of non-human species.

It calls for us to recognize that human life, like any other life, is an emergent condition of entanglements and encounters with the non-human as well as the non-living. So it is the calcium and the minerals from the soil that constitute our bones. When we die, our bones go back into that that sustains other forms of life. That many things that constitute the human are non-living and non-human. Now, if they are non-human, should we discount those aspects of ourselves which are not, strictly speaking, human in origin?

Chemicals, for instance? That is clearly, we can't do that. So, life emerges from a series of encounters and chance entanglements. Life is not a built-in condition. Life is an emergent condition.

It emerges through a series of encounters, through a series of entanglements, that what we call life is the result of a whole bunch of things coming together and being processed in certain ways of quarreling with, cooperating with, conflicting with each other. And the net result? Humans. Now, think about this perspective itself, right? This demolishes any myth we may have of being solitary, self-identical, grammatically sealed, autonomous organisms.

It's an important recognition because it leads us to the point we are interested in in this particular lesson. Post-human care. Post-human care focuses on a more-than-human affective bond. By 'affect,' of course, we mean sentimental and emotional. Post-human care focuses on more-than-human affective bonds.

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Posthuman care

- Focuses on more-than-human affective bonds.
- Presents a 'dynamic model of care that addresses all creatures, human and more-than, as mutually constituting, vulnerable, embodied, and embedded beings' (DeFalco).
- Addresses nonhuman, postnatural life (clones) and machinic (robot) care.

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And in the words of Emilia Di Falco, Post-human care presents, and I'm quoting here, 'a dynamic model of care that addresses all creatures, human and more-than-human, as mutually constituting, vulnerable, embodied, and embedded beings.' It's a very important definition, and Emilia Di Falco's most recent work does a great deal to advance our sense of post-human care and what's commonly called care relations. It's a crucial book.

What does she mean by this? A dynamic model of care that addresses all creatures, human and more than human, as mutually constituting vulnerable, embodied, and embedded beings. That is, care, as I began today, addresses the non-human as well. And in If you want to go back to terminology we have used before, post-human care addresses the non-human, post-natural life, which would include clones and machines such as robots something we have discussed quite a bit when we spoke about post-human subjects and the ethics of post-human subjects and caring for the post-human, which is basically a point we are making again here: that when we speak about, say, clones, or when we speak about

machines and robots, and we have novels, of course, that we have mentioned several times in the past. Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Clara and the Sun*, Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. So post-human care addresses the non-human, post-natural life of clones, and machinic or robo-care. Post-human care is also very invested in the care of discarded matter. Why discard?

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Posthuman care is also invested in the care of discarded (deemed to be worthless) matter

Waste and discard demand attention too, and thus destabilize how we envision the norms and normative boundaries of the care relations

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Some of you may be aware that one of the central problems of the Anthropocene, of our current environmental crisis, is the sheer volume of waste. All kinds of waste: organic, non-living, non-organic, electronic waste, right? There is waste everywhere. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is one. If you go up to Everest, there is garbage en route to the peak.

The oceans are polluted. There are all kinds of dumping happening, from toxic materials to other kinds. Waste is a key problem today. We all recognize that. So for post-human care, what is the value of valueless matter?

What is the value of discarded and worthless matter? Waste and discarded items demand attention. And waste destabilizes how we look at the boundaries of our lives, of our care relations. Should we worry about discarded products? Should we worry about waste?

Should we dismiss them? The answer is no. Waste is important. Waste constitutes the boundaries of our lives. Waste is also central to non-human life forms.

Right? We know that. So post-human care also means being involved, being invested in various forms of waste and various degrees of wastage. Okay? If you go back to the earlier week's lessons, particularly about robots and robot care, post-human care devotes a great deal of time to the debate around what post-human subjects are like, or what post-human subjectivity is.

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Posthuman care, especially in the age of robot-care (see lessons from week 6), asks:

- Which forms of life can give or receive care?
- If human lives are increasingly entangled with machine-lives and sometimes dependent on them, and the human 'family' now includes a robot or robot carer with whom the humans have an affective relationship, then doesn't the care relation demand reciprocity (that humans care for the robot/machine)?

Posthuman care asks:

What notion of ethics is at work in principled stances that aim to decenter humans' position on Earth while still stating its specific obligations? (de la Bellacasa)

Posthumanism and Care

The question which we are drafting and drawing from the previous week's lessons, particularly from week 8. You might want to revisit those lessons. Which forms of life can give or receive care? Is it only humans who can care?

Can we entrust the task of caring to robots? We have seen this debate already. Can we assume that humans must also care for robots? Which is to say, the idea of post-human care and please go back to Emilia De Falco's definition, which says caring for the other-than-human as well and the dynamic nature of care relations. So, do we care for the non-human?

Do we let the non-human care for humans? Or is it that only humans can care for other humans? If human lives, as we see today, are increasingly embedded, entangled in and with machine lives, sometimes dependent upon them, and the human family now includes a robot or robot carer, then does the care relation demand reciprocity? And you might recall, like I said, you go back to the lesson from week 8.

If the robot is taking care of the humans, should we not take care of the robots? If the robot is serving us altruistically with a great deal of emotional intelligence, which means it's doing all the things that humans do in all the ways that humans do, then is it not ethically and morally an obligation that we do the same for them? So this is the point of post-human subjects that we have already discussed and which is why I am saying you might have to revisit that lesson. So for people working in post-humanism, the question of post-human care is a very phony one.

I mean, would we accept that we should care for a machine? The point is also, and here I am using the work of De La Bellacasa, Maria Dila Belacasa. Post-human care asks, what notion of ethics is at work when we de-center the human's position? When we say that the human is as embedded in the care relation as the say any other creature what notion of ethics will be at work when we modify the humans away from the center but at the same

time say that humans do have an obligation that the idea of justice the idea of fairness the idea of an ethical treatment is still an important component that makes us what we are which is what she is referring to as our specific obligations so

Post-human theories of care note that human slaves have been treated as objects and they have therefore not received care at all, which is the history of slavery in most parts of the world. Now objects and machines have begun to serve as being constructed as servants, slaves or carer robots and hence within their undeserving of care. Care for the non-living, such as the soil, in permaculture is a part of several worldviews. Although it has been devalued due to anthropocentrism. Care for the non-living, which means, say, soil or water, has been, like I said, a part of several indigenous cultures all over the world.

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Posthuman theories of care emphasize that

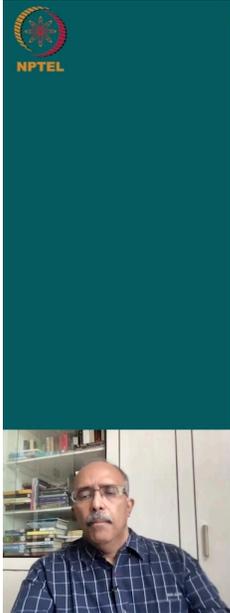
- Human slaves have been treated as objects in history, and denied care.
- Now objects and machines are cast as slaves/servants (carer robots) and hence seen as undeserving of care
- Care for the non-living, such as soil (in permacultures) is a part of several worldviews, although it has been devalued due to anthropocentrism
- Care emerges in a care relation. It is not something that one gives and another receives: 'entangled beings in a specific situation cocreate care together' (Laurin and Martin)

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But we have devalued them because we believe the human is at the center of things. For post-human fields of care, this is not acceptable. Care for the non-living, including soil and water and air, should be a part of our moral principles of care. And we cannot be anthropocentric about it. Care always emerges in a care relation.

It's not something imminent, but it emerges in a relationship. It is not something that one gives and another receives. Because it's only within a relationship that care operates. Mayapib D. Balakasa's work notes that permaculture, which is working with soil and the land, forces us to think about what forms of interdependence we all have. Humans and their technology, animals and plants and microbes and

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Permaculture invites us to think with the “edges”—of lands and systems, where the encounters are both challenging and diversifying beyond the expected and manageable. So there we go. Embedded in the interdependency of all forms of life—humans and their technologies, animals, plants, microorganisms, elemental resources such as air and water, as well as the soil we feed on—permaculture ethics is an attempt to decenter human ethical subjectivity by not considering humans as masters or even as protectors of but as participants in the web of Earth's living beings.

De La Bellacasa

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air and water and the soil when you think of how all these contribute to humans in what is called permaculture studies and permaculture projects which is working with the land then you realize that humanity depends very deeply on the soil and the soil in turn depends on microbes on nematode worms the quality of the chemicals and minerals in it the kinds of plants that grow in it and of course human technology which means what we think of as the living world the living system the living web is not dominated by the humans once you de-center the human Once you refuse to accept that humans are masters, or even protectors, as Dalla Casa would say, we can see them as participants, not masters. We see humans as participants in that world, which is a radical shift in the way we perceive the world and we perceive ourselves. We move away from humans as centre,

to humans as participants. It's a huge shift. Post-human theories of care build, therefore, on non-Western indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies, which treats the non-living as central to life. And we know that in several traditions and cultural practices and religions around the Things like rivers and rocks and others have been given agency, have been defined and have been given a major role as constitutive of life.

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Posthuman theories of care also build on non-western and indigenous cosmologies that treat the non-living as central to 'life'.

These cosmologies assume the non-living, whether the mineral or the rock, possesses agency and even sentience.

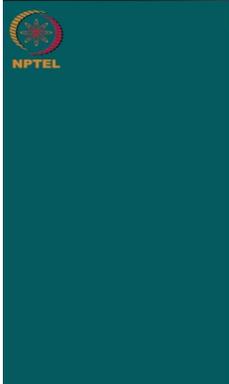
Elements like water, air and soil therefore must be cared for because human life emerged from the elements, are *constituted* by the elements (Astrida Neimanis points out that both the earth and the human body are constituted mainly by water).

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Which means the non-living, whether this is the mineral or the rock, is even treated as possessing sentience or consciousness. Now elements like water, air or soil must be cared for because human life emerges from those elements. We are constituted by those elements. As Astrid Neimanis points out in her work on the blue humanities, the earth and the human body are both constituted principally by water. The bulk of our earth's volume and the human volume is constituted by water.

Which means basically our life depends on it, right? Who we are is defined by water. The indigenous traditions, as people like Kim Tor there have noted, have always seen the non-humans as agential. They've always seen the non-human as engaged in social relations with humans. So

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Indigenous peoples have never forgotten that nonhumans are agential beings engaged in social relations that profoundly shape human lives. In addition, for many indigenous peoples, their nonhuman others may not be understood in even critical Western frameworks as living. "Objects" and "forces" such as stones, thunder, or stars are known within our ontologies to be sentient and knowing persons.

Kim Tallbear

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As Tolbert points out, and the quote is there on your screen, stones and thunder and stars are treated as sentient and knowing persons. Now, it doesn't fit the traditional Euro-American traditions in epistemology and other philosophical traditions there, but for the post-humans, this might be the way to go. This just might be the solution to a very long history of seeing the human at the center, ignoring the non-human as secondary or worse as subjugated to whatever we are, as seeing the non-living as available for instrumental use and no more. And no more. Which is to say that when critical posthumanism examines these traditions of other traditions, alternative traditions, it says that in those traditions the concept of care is a much expanded version.

What Emilio de Falco's quotation says. Cited at the beginning of this particular module, has demonstrated and talked about, that when we say care, care is not principally revolving around the human. Care involves other quote-unquote objects, non-living. It involves other forms of life than non-human. So, for post-human theories of care, this question of care is never, never anthropocentric.

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Which means, effectively, Post-human care involves caring for the world in its entirety. Please go back to the definition: how we heal and sustain the world, and the world includes the non-human as well. Which is to say that when we speak about post-human care, we are not speaking of post-human care by, for, and toward the human. We are speaking about care toward the world, the planet, which involves the non-human and the human, the living and the non-living.

Okay? Thank you.