

DEFINING “HUMAN”: THE BLURRY LINE BETWEEN HUMAN, ANDROIDS, AND ANIMALS IN *DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?*

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Twentieth century witnessed grand global wars including World War I, World War II and the Cold War. All these wars echoed in literature and showed the reader different representations, or some predictions related to them. Especially, dystopian fiction began to flourish after such wars. As one of these wars, the Cold War led Philip K. Dick to write his work titled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Seed, 1999). As Seed states in his book, the Cold War was a metaphor and the War itself also was structured around metaphors that are actualized in post-war science fictions in different narrations. In that sense, we see the echoes of the Cold War in Dick's novel as well, which sets in the post-apocalyptic world after a nuclear global war named World War Terminus. This war gives the reader an alternative end to the nuclear war which resulted in the devastation of earth and emigration to Mars. Through this post-war depiction, Dick explores the question “What is human?” by using posthuman entities like androids and artificial animals. We can assert that Dick tries to show the reader the blurry connection between human beings and androids by using empathy, authentic and artificial animals and the theology called Mercerism in his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*.

First of all, the novel tries to answer the question “What is human?” by using *empathy* as the determining factor of being human. However, it contradicts its solution through the relationship of posthuman entities and human beings. It is believed that *androids* are lack of empathy because of their pure logical thinking and therefore bounty hunters use a test named the *Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test* which measures the emotional response of androids and figures out whether it is artificial or genuine. However, there are some variant problems associated with this test and its reliability. To give an example, through the dialogue between Bryant and Deckard, we see that there might be some misinterpretations of this test if it is applied to some group of people who are psychologically ill like schizoids and schizophrenics.

‘The Leningrad psychiatrists,’ Bryant broke in brusquely, ‘think that a small class of human beings could not pass the Voigt-Kampff scale. If you tested them

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in line with police work you'd assess them as humanoid robots. You'd be wrong, but by then they'd be dead' (Dick, 1996, p. 18).

Along with ethical issues, what comes to our mind is that even if a schizophrenic or schizoid fails to pass this test, then how can empathy still be a reliable factor to understand what humans are although Rick says, in the novel, it is “a million to one odds” (p. 18)? Besides, we can see that most of the human characters in the novel also show a lack of empathy in various ways by looking at their relationship with each other and with posthuman entities. At the beginning of the novel, Rick's wife Iran is depicted as an addict to a technological device called the *mood organ*. It is so ironic to use such a technological device to experience feelings and emotions purely related to being a human, like being optimistic, despair or weary. They basically use a *machine* to feel something. In that sense, Galvan perfectly explains the irony of this process and how it changes the state of human beings.

[...] it makes her dependent upon -addicted to- the life of the machine. Hooked up to her empathy box, entranced by the simulation of the television screen, the human has already, in fact, become the posthuman (1997, p. 418).

When we also look at the relationship between Iran and Rick, we see that there is a distance between them as husband and wife. However, when we look at the friendship of androids, we see that they care for their kind as they hear the loss of their friends. Through the death of Luba Luft, both human characters and android ones question their feelings. In the novel, Rachael states that Luba Luft and she had been “very close friends for almost two years” (Dick, 1996, p. 89). After her death, Rick also finds himself in a place where he questions if androids have souls too and if he feels empathy with them. He perceives this death as a “waste” and says “She was a wonderful singer. The planet could have used her. This is insane” (p. 61). Moreover, one of the most important key points in the novel is Rachael's decision to kill Rick's goat. It conflicts with the idea that androids don't feel in the same way as human beings do. Hayley states in her article titled “Schizoid Android: Boundary Work in the Mid-Sixties Novels of Philip K. Dick”,

He returns home to discover that Rachael has pushed his goat off the roof. Why? Because she is jealous of his love for the goat, or in revenge for his killing her friends...? Whichever interpretation one chooses, the action is not consistent with the official picture of android psychology, which like Dick's essays insists that

androids are incapable of feeling loyalty or indeed feeling anything at all (1998, p. 38).

All these examples show us that although it is thought that empathy is what separates human beings from androids, we see that androids can also feel or act in a way as people do. On the other hand, we can also sense that human beings don't act or feel as it is supposed to be in the novel. It makes the reader sense that empathy is not a strict or clear-cut that helps to differentiate human beings from androids or vice versa.

Moreover, owning and having affectionate feelings for an animal is another important factor that helps to separate android from human beings. As Galvan states "live animals, in a post-nuclear era which finds them scarce, have been fetishized as the repositories of human empathy" (1997, p. 415). For instance, when Rick suspects that Resch might be an android, Resch defends himself by pointing out that he has a squirrel and he loves it. It is believed in the novel that androids are lack of the ability to take care of an animal and to keep it alive since they don't show any attention animals need. Despite this fetishization of animals, we even see the separation between an artificial and authentic animal. It is seen that Rick's ideas on electric or artificial animals are the same as his thoughts on androids.

He thought, too, about his need for a real animal; within him an actual hatred once more manifested itself toward his electric sheep [...] Like the androids, it had no ability to appreciate the existence of another. He had never thought of this before, the similarity between an electric animal and an andy. The electric animal, he pondered, could be considered a subform of the other, a kind of vastly inferior robot. Or, conversely, the android could be regarded as a highly developed, evolved version of the ersatz animal. Both viewpoints repelled him (Dick, 1996, p. 20).

Since artificial animals are compared to androids, it is an important point to have an authentic animal. As Vinci explains "the animal must be positioned as the android's opposite: it becomes the transcendental marker of humanity's unique ability to feel for or with the other" (2014, p. 93). As we've talked about before the importance of empathy for human beings, now we see that since Rick thinks electric sheep doesn't even know his existence, he and -all other human beings in fact- are in need for real animal purely for their interest in defining themselves superior to posthuman entities. As androids, artificial animals are worthless for human beings

and the real ones only matter because of their positive connotations since “owning and maintaining a fraud had a way of gradually demoralizing one” (Dick, 1996, p. 5).

Finally, we see that although Mercerism is thought to create the feeling of empathy between human beings, it is in fact used as a tool to show them that they are not alone and they share common identity so that they see their superiority over androids. As an android, Irmgard questions this situation by giving Mercer experience as an example.

‘No, it's that empathy,’ Irmgard said vigorously. [...] ‘Isn't it a way of proving that humans can do something we can't do? Because without the Mercer experience we just have your word that you feel this empathy business, this shared, group thing.’ (Dick, 1996, p. 94)

So, on a surface level, it is described as a tool to feel empathy as a remedy for a society in a dehumanized apocalyptic world. However, on a deeper level, it is, in fact, the thing that dehumanizes human beings because it is purely used for their ego since they need proof to show their superiority over other posthuman entities. Moreover, although it is believed that Mercerism binds individuals together, it, in fact, separates them by addicting them to the empathy box rather than real life. They share experiences through the fusion of their mentalities. In his work Galvan questions this situation by asking the question “If the ‘empathy’ one exercises when fusing with Mercer divides rather than draws individuals together, then what does that say for an accepted understanding of human beings, as differentiated from androids by natural affective interconnections?” (1997, p. 418). As we’ve argued before, the interconnections and interrelations of human beings are weaker even than that of androids. So, all these experiences do not function enough to show the cut between androids and human beings. Besides, apart from the conscious they experience with Mercerism, we see the idea of false memory which is notable for both androids and human beings. For androids, this false memory makes them believe that they are actual human beings since they cannot remember or relate to their past. However, human beings as well cannot recognize their past specifically before World War Terminus although this false memory system is ineffective for them. Throughout the novel, we can hardly get information about history before the war. All the aspects of Mercerism and memory as well again show us that they are not reliable tools to understand the difference between human beings and androids. In fact, they even blur the line between them more by contradicting each other.

To conclude, Dick's novel titled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* show the reader a post-apocalyptic future that is inhabited by human beings and posthuman entities. Through the depiction of post-war society, Dick explores what makes a human being authentic compared to the artificial ones by using the aspect of empathy which makes things more blurry to understand. The complex relationships of human beings and androids, the connotation of animals both genuine and artificial, and the theology named Mercerism show that empathy is not the case, it is a complex aspect even for posthuman androids as well, along with human beings. So, throughout the novel, Dick leaves the answer to the question "What is human?" to his readers since it is not a one-dimensional thing to explain from an aspect like empathy.

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