

Extended Essay

Title: Defining Humanity Through Artificial Intelligence: An Analysis of “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” and “*Blade Runner 2049*” Based on Comparison.

Research Question: In what ways do “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” and “*Blade Runner 2049*” define humanity through the theme of artificial intelligence, exploring both their similarities and differences in the theme’s interpretation?

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Contents;

Introduction: 3-4

Main Body;

Concept of Humanity in Each Work: 4-6

Similarities in How Humanity Is Explored: 6-8

Differences in Both Works Interpretations of AI and Humanity: 9-10

Final Synthesis of Humanity: 11-12

Conclusion: 12-15

Works Cited: 16

Introduction;

For a long time, humanity has used literature and films to explain the existential questions that could arise from rapid technological advancements. The most commonly used technological tool to explain these issues is the portrayal of artificial intelligence. As artificial intelligence evolves, it challenges our prejudices on what it means to be human or the concept of identity. As the portrayal of artificial intelligence becomes more complex, it forces our minds to confront deep philosophical ideas on what it means to be human or to have identity resulting in artificial intelligence evolving from a technological concept into a literary tool.

Two important works that tackle this phenomenon is Philip K. Dick's novel "*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" and Denis Villeneuve's "*Blade Runner 2049*". The central plot for both works is the conflict between what it means to be a human and artificial intelligence. However, the two have very different takes on the portrayal of artificial intelligence. The novel presents AI in the more conventional way: androids. Whilst the film takes AI as artificially created humans, called "Replicants". In the film it is Officer K and, in the novel, it is Rick Deckard. Throughout the both characters' journey, both works use AI to reflect the flaws on humanity's portrayal. Not by highlighting its virtues but instead showing the moral ambiguities and the lack of emotion.

This essay focuses on the question "*In what ways do "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" and "Blade Runner 2049" define humanity through the theme of artificial intelligence, exploring both their similarities and differences in the theme's interpretation?"*". Both works challenge the traditionally accepted concept of humanity using artificial intelligence as a tool. Even though they are similar they differentiate in tone, context and the

thought behind the idea. The novel's setting is shaped by a post-apocalyptic event, the world is barren and dystopian. The film has its setting shaped by the cyberpunk aesthetic. This subgenre of science fiction is used to emphasize the importance of self-discovery and identity. End goal of both works is to make the viewer question what it means to be human.

Main Body;

Concept of Humanity in Each Work;

Before explaining the concept of humanity both works, we first need to look at what AI is portrayed as to distinguish between the works. In Philip K. Dick's novel AI is portrayed as androids or "andys" which are synthetic humanoids created by the Rosen Corp. for slave labor in the novel's post-apocalyptic setting. Visually, they are indistinguishable from humans, however they lack the ability to feel empathy. Which is the main index used for the Voigt-Kampff Test. In Denis Villeneuve's film, AI is a closer concept to humans. As the AI in the film are bio-engineered humans called "replicants", they are genetically grown and not machined. They were created by Tyrell and later by Wallace. In the film, replicants are distinguished from humans by not being born though this concept will later be used to discuss the concept of humanity.

In the novel the connection between humanity and empathy, **"An android doesn't care what happens to another android. That's one of the indications we look for."** (Dick 45) is supported by this quote. Where Rick Deckard is explaining the test that he will conduct to find out if the test taker is a human or an android. The android's inability to feel empathy is contrasted in the film. Where replicants do care. In the film there are two characters, Freysa and

Sapper, where we can see the opposition between the film and the novel. Freysa, who is a replicant, values other replicants as her comrades. When Sapper died to keep the child safe, Freysa honored his sacrifice. The one line that both works draw when questioning humanity is whether they can show empathy or not.

The film blurs the line between humanity and AI even more with its take on memory being a human aspect. In the film humanity is defined as being born from the womb of a mother, this definition later falls apart with the birth of the “miracle child”, whereas replicants who are genetically made are not considered human. Replicants are denied birth, therefore they don’t have a soul according to the film. **“To be born is to have a soul, I guess.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 9)** The concept implied here is very deep, as we cannot give the term “soul” an accurate description. The Cambridge Dictionary defines “soul” as **“The spiritual part of a person that some people believe continues to exist in some form after the body has died, or the part of a person that is not physical and experiences deep feelings and emotions.”** This challenges the movies telling of having a soul. As in the movie, these replicants are retired by Officer K, means killing in the film’s setting. When a person dies, their soul should live on according to this description.

The main difference between the portrayal of AI in both works and how it portrays humanity is the concept of having emotions. In the novel we are repeatedly told that AI cannot feel emotions in any way, which is indirectly disproportional to the films understanding of what an AI is. As even Joi, Officer K’s hologram girlfriend wants to find meaning and love. **“We’re all just looking out something real.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 16)** This also challenges the moral complexity of the replicants alongside with the novel, which explains even

who we consider a human will suffer with morality. This ambiguity makes defining a “human” difficult. **“You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life.” (Dick 80)**

In both works, the internal conflicts of the main characters are also used to define humanity, more specifically their memories. In the novel. Rick Deckard, while administering the Voigt-Kampff Tests feels that his internal answers are too mechanical to be considered by his understanding of what a human is. In some cases, the androids even display more apparent empathy than who he considered as not human. Which results in a conflict of him having the possibility of failing the Voigt-Kampff Test thus having suspicions that he himself is an android. **“Maybe that’s a false memory. Don’t androids sometimes go around with false memories?”** and **“Maybe there was once a human who looked like you, and somewhere along the line you killed him and took his place.” (Dick 46)**. A kind of conflict similar to this is also present in the film. Officer K. feels a moral boundary here. **“I never retired something that was born before.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 9)**

Similarities in How Humanity Is Explored;

While **“*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*”** and **“*Blade Runner 2049*”** tackle the concept of AI through different lenses, androids x replicants, both works arrive to the conclusion about the nature of humanity. By looking into emotional struggles, moral decisions and identity crisis, they challenge the conventional belief that only biological humans can exhibit such traits. This section explores three major thematic alignments: the questioning of humanity, moral ambiguity and AI as a mirror for human behavior.

In both works, the human condition is delivered via various characters. In the novel, androids are severely dehumanized by humans, they are seen as object of labor or as slaves, they have no rights or are not considered sentient. **“I’ve never killed a human being in my life.” Iran said, “Just those poor andys.” (Dick 3)** The irony here is that many humans lack empathy which is one of the main separations between a human and an android as discussed in section 1. Another fundamental human desire is the longing for an identity; this directly correlates with a human being seen as “human”. However, in the film, Officer K. at first thinks himself to be the “miracle child” however he later realizes that he is not. **“We all wish it was us. That’s why we believe.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 31)** This shows the replicants desire to have an identity and not be dehumanized as the androids in the novel.

Another way that both works take humanity as is moral ambiguity, humans being less “human”. This is present in novel as Rick Deckard feels guilt after realizing that androids may feel emotions as deep as humans and regrets killing those androids. **“I can’t anymore; I’ve had enough. She was a wonderful singer. The planet could have used her. This is insane.” (Dick 61)** When compared with the androids this quote portrays Rick as “less human”, the androids which he was killing blindly on the request of his employers. **“Sometimes to love someone... you’ve got to be a stranger.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 29)** Shows the sacrifice made by Deckard. Deckard also appears in the film, loosely based on the novel. To protect his daughter Deckard had to be **“a stranger”**, sever his connections with her daughter. This moral complexity shows that AI characters can grapple with real emotional decisions, something which most “humans” in the film fail to do. Such as; Joshi, Wallace and many more “humans”.

The Key takeaway would be that AI is a reflection of humanity in both works, or rather what a “human” should have as traits. Though as seen above, many of these features that make a human a “human” is mostly or partially absent in both works from our main characters. Who are the primary examples for being “human”. **“You’re not alive!” Isidore said (Page 73).** **“We’re not even considered animals.” (Dick 55)** Ironically, Isadore, a human who is considered special by the standards of the novels post-apocalyptic world. He is a subhuman in the society due to the radiation after the fallout that he was exposed to. In summary he is not considered “human” even though he is not an android. However, Isadore is the only one who can sympathize with the androids. Showing confusion between human and machine behavior.

However, in the film, being “human” is defined through emotional imperfections. All the truth and human experiences are related to the concept of imperfection. **“Anything real should be a mess.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 21)** So according to the film, to be real, you need to be flawed. Which directly challenges the common understanding with AI. Where it is a sentient being that is miles ahead of humans in all fields. So, the being real and having flaws opposes the common conception of AI. As in both works, these artificially intelligent beings are shown as having flaws, and by flaws, emotions. Emotions do push “humans” to make irrational decisions, so the same would be true for an android or a replicant. So, to summarize all the statements made in this section, AI in both works acts as a mirror to reflect the absence of “human” factors on actual human. Further blurring the line between biological and artificial.

Differences in Both Works Interpretations of AI and Humanity;

Both “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” and “*Blade Runner 2049*” share many thematic parallels in their exploration of AI and humanity, however both works are diverse in their tone, message and interpretation. Each work reflects some sort of historical and cultural context: the novel is born from the anxieties caused by the Cold War-era. It offers a bleak, questionable portrayal of identity and empathy, while the film is much more modern in style, as it was released in the post-digital age. The film presents a more emotionally grounded and redemptive view of artificial beings. The way that these differences are shown in both works are their tone and setting, the role given to AI by the society and the conclusions they reach about what it means to be a “human”.

The novel is presented in the aftermath of a massive nuclear war; this war has turned Earth into a barely habitable place for humans. **“He lived alone in this deteriorating, blind building of a thousand uninhabited apartments...” (Dick 10)** Highlights that humans have become numb to emotions. However, the main line to draw here is that not just Earth has become barren but humans have also become emotionally barren. A cold dystopian world shaped by World War Terminus. **“The world is built on a wall that separates kind. Tell either side, there’s no wall, you bought a war.” (“Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script” 8-9)** Said early in the film, shows the more cyberpunk setting of the film. A controlled, oppressive society that is regulated by the various corporations that hold power. Separation between humans is what sustains this society. Humans are living in illusion. So, both works show a context of how humanity is interpreted. The novel focuses on emotional decay, whilst the film suggests political control through corporate manipulation.

The role and use of AI in both works align with each other to a certain extent. The novel looks the androids as slaves. The androids' sole purpose in the society is to be a worker, be exploited for more gain. **"A humanoid robot is like any other machine..." (Dick 19)** Androids, despite showing the ability to think for themselves, are only seen as mechanical beings, a copy of a human. As they are dangerous since a machine cannot feel emotions or empathy, or so humans thought. Actually, the novels take on AI as a slave aligns mostly with our beliefs today. As AI should be tool for humans, not a different kind of being but just a machine, a new slave. In the film, AI is seen as a tool of expansion, again with the novel, a slave for humans. **"We make angels... that is how I took us to nine new worlds."** (**"Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script" 13**) This quote in the film highlights AI still being seen as a property of its creators. Showing a more corporate-utopian exploitation. Which also aligns with our current world circumstances as giant corporations are known to use humans to exploit resources. Basically, the film has an evolved version of our current corporal exploitation.

Both works conclude what it means to be human differently. At the ending of the novel Rick Deckard is still uncertain about if he should consider androids as humans or do, they even deserve to be human. **"The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are."** (**Dick 110**) Sees a life in the androids but a part of him still believes that their lives hold no real significant value, a mere imitation of a humans. Philip K. Dick leaves the definition of humanity unresolved and the novel results in its ending being more open-ended, open to reader interpretation. Denis Villeneuve offers a more hopeful and decisive conclusion in his film. **"Dying for the right cause is the most human thing we can do."** (**"Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script" 30**) Showing that humanity is not based on birth but with its ability to have selfless actions and we see that replicants are capable of that.

Final Synthesis of Humanity;

It is apparent that as the stories in “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” and “*Blade Runner 2049*” are told, the in-depth commentary is heavily influenced by the internal context in which each was created. Philip K. Dick’s novel, written in the late 1960’s, reflects the paranoia caused by the Cold War, the ever-growing threat of nuclear annihilation and the growing fear that technology could strip life of its meaning and origin. This scenario manifests in the world’s emotional desolation. As in the novel, even natural emotions have become mechanized. “**My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression,**” (Dick 3) This statement made by Rick Deckard satirizes the idea of self-awareness and even the natural emotions of humans are being regulated and programmed by post-war dystopia of its setting.

Meanwhile, “*Blade Runner 2049*”, released in 2017, speaks towards the more modern concerns: data, memory, identity and the fear of losing autonomy in a hyperconnected world. “**You’ve getting on fine, without one,**” (“*Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script*” 9) Referring to the soul. This reflects a society that has normalized the grounded idea that lived experiences, sacrifice and the inner conflict in someone is not enough to qualify as human. Both works show a cultural shift in defining humanity, yet both fail to present a definitive answer.

Despite the decades that separate them, both works converge in the idea that the common concept of humanity, biological origin, the capacity to feel emotions, soul or memory, are deeply flawed when used to define a human and separate it from an artificially created beings who is also capable of these criteria. This is especially evident in how each protagonist struggles with meaning. In the Novel, Rick Deckard observes “**Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community...**” (Dick 14) but everything that he has witnessed about the androids

contradicts this. As androids are capable of showing emotional complexity, self-preservation and even moral restraint. While “humans” often display cruelty and apathy. This contradiction leaves Rick Deckard, and the reader, to question that if empathy is truly a human trait.

In the film, Officer K. is in a similar scenario. Although he is not the miracle child, he accepts his purpose in helping another, Ana Stelline, fulfills a destiny greater than that of his own. K’s final word “**All the best memories are hers,**” (“**Blade Runner 2049 Movie Script**” 34) marks a realization that being human may not be about truth, the realness of emotions and selfless actions. Just like the novel, the film avoids delivering a concrete final judgement on what humanity is, however allows artificial beings to claim that identity by virtue of their choices. In this context, both stories leave the question unanswered, open-ended, but amplifies the question, creating a strong urge to find the actual answer to the question.

Conclusion;

This essay set out to answer the research question: “In what ways do “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” and “*Blade Runner 2049*” define humanity through the theme of artificial intelligence, exploring both their similarities and differences in the theme’s interpretation?”. Across both works, the presented artificial beings are simply not “the other” where humans must fear or control; instead, they become the lens in which the audience is pushed to think and interrogate the limits of human identity and what a “human” is. By presenting androids and replicants as reflections for human behavior, Philip K. Dick and Denis Villeneuve ultimately present that “humanity” is not a fixed biological status, rather a fragile ethical and emotional practice. On that many biological humans in both works fail to uphold, and that the so called “artificial” beings increasingly adopt.

A key similarity in both works shake up the conventional criteria used to separate humans from artificial intelligence. In the novel, the Voigt-Kampff test claims empathy as the trait that defines a human. In which androids are framed as dangerous precisely because they “lack it”. Yet Philip K. Dick repeatedly complicates this fine line: humans who should be the ones representing morality are the ones that often behave mechanically, whilst androids display self-preservation, fear and forms of social bonds that resemble the “human” emotional life. This reversal forces the reader to see that the concept of empathy is not guaranteed by biology. In “*Blade Runner 2049*”, the line between being human and not is even thinner due to replicants being biologically grown and able to express emotions. The film defines “human” as something that has memory and lived experiences. The growth of Officer K’s self-understanding shows that identity can be built through beliefs, attachment and making decisions based on morals, rather than one’s birth. In both works AI is used as a narrative device that exposes how easily human society reduces “humanity” to a conventional label, whilst ignoring the behaviors (care, responsibility, restraint) that might actually justify it.

Both works also align in their portrayal of moral ambiguity as an integral part of defining “humanity”. Deckard and K are not the heroes of their respective works in a traditional manner; they are agents of a system that dehumanizes artificial beings through language (“retirement”) and corporate routine. The best evidence of “humanity” linking back to conscience is the internal conflict that both characters have. Yet even conscience is unstable. Deckard’s doubt about his own authenticity and K’s fear of what it means to “**retire something that was born**” demonstrate that most human experiences in these stories are not being certain or being pure. The reality is one of discomfort, opposition and guilt. The complex moral system is not exclusive to humans. Artificial beings, replicants and androids have their own choice of actions

based on factors. Loyalty, hope and sacrifice are some of them. This proves that morality is not exclusive to biological birth.

Despite their similarities, the two works sharply diverge in terms of the “how” they pose the issue, as well as the emotional conclusions they draw. The post-apocalyptic world of Philip K. Dick’s novel is characterized by the decay of emotions and the numbness of society. Humanity is exhausted, numb and spiritually empty. Such dark, bleak and gloomy surroundings form the argument of the novel: if humanity mechanizes its emotions, they risk becoming the same as the machines they once feared. Denis Villeneuve’s film, in contrast, uses a cyberpunk world defined by corporate control and artificial identities, where the central identity is not only replacement by technology but also the manipulation of meaning itself. The settings embody different kinds of crisis. In the novel humanity erodes after a catastrophe, in the film humanity managed, controlled and categorized by powerful corporations. The contextual differences are important for the shaping of the “definition of humanity”. Philip K. Dick emphasizes moral exhaustion and uncertainty. Whilst Denis Villeneuve emphasizes the formation of identity and the possibility of redemption.

The most accurate depiction of this contrast are the endings. “*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” remains fundamentally unsolved. Despite the shift in Deckard’s perspective he fails to come to a stable conclusion about the life of androids. The ending is deliberately left open to interpretation. The contrast here is that androids are considered “**alive**” yet they are still treated as “**paltry**”. This reflects an incomplete realization about the life of androids. “*Blade Runner 2049*” is more finalized but is still complex, where the willingness to suffer for some else is what defines humanity. The choice of K helping Ana Stelline despite learning that he is

not “**special**” shows that “being human” is less about being born, rather it is shaped through ethical choices. The film does not give a simple answer, rather, it depicts a direction. “Being human” is a practice, best expressed by sacrifice and care.

In conclusion, both works build an intricate definition of “humanity” when judged together. By using artificial intelligence as a tool. In both works “humanity” is explained by a set of values that could be present or absent in any being. “Humanity” is not secured by biology, origin and social standing. The novel warns that humans can become less “human” because of cruelty, numbness and lack of morality. The film, however, shows that artificial beings may be considered human via the use of memory, attachment and sacrifice. When both works are taken to be compared they also show certain shifts. Primarily discusses the earlier fears of technology making society emotionless. These fears later develop into profound discussions of identity and originality. Additionally, it explores who decides what “humanity” is in a society that is dictated by corporations. The most important discovery of this essay is that the concept of AI is not simply an idea, but rather a way of achieving something. It is the way in which the reader comes to realize that the concept of “humanity” is ambiguous and requires an ethical responsibility. This is because the audience is never allowed to simply rest on the idea of the distinction between “being human” and “being a machine.” Both works challenge the reader/viewer with the omnipresent question of what it means to be alive if “humanity” is not something that is inherent in one’s birthright. Especially if society says that it is “not real.”

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