

ENGLISH B EXTENDED ESSAY

CATEGORY 3

Research Question: How does Philip K. Dick analyze the consequences of mechanization in

“Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?”?

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Introduction

With the rapid improvement of technology, far more rapid than anyone could imagine, the whole twentieth century was left with a single question; what is coming next? With this question and the endless possibilities that lay ahead, science fiction in literature was born. These novels mostly had one similar goal; analyze the unstoppable mechanization of the daily lifestyle and the possible consequences of this. Surely, mankind exists with the desire and passion to improve itself and overcome what is seen as its limits. Thus, technology and mechanics rapidly evolve consequent to the changing of eras. However, these innovations have their fair share of effects on the concept of identity in the society. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Philip K. Dick introduces an alternative future of an environmentally ruined community which has gone through a revolutionary innovation in terms of the control mankind has on its mind. The novel is formed around Rick Deckard as he hunts for six Nexus-6 android fugitives. Stuck between a desire for a real animal, the empathy he feels towards androids and the feeling of duty, Deckard challenges his perception of empathy, society and humanity. Rachael Rosen, John Isidore, Pris Stratton and Iran Deckard, mechanization and its different aspects are analyzed. The traces of utmost mechanization in this post-war civilization are visible through its societal norms, animals, religion and most importantly; the humans themselves. These aspects can be investigated under two main topics; the mechanization and its immediate effects and the relationship between humans and androids.

2. Mechanization of a Civilization

With the further development of technology, mankind becomes more and more intertwined with the mechanical devices that grant them the ability to do tasks easier, faster and more efficiently. This occurrence, mechanization, can be defined by the usage of machines in order

to replace human and animal labor. However, mechanization is not limited to labor. Humans make up for what they lack by the assistance of technology as it not only replaces work force, but also daily chores, research, production, education and the environment. With technology infesting further into human life, the humans themselves experience the first-hand effects of it. In Dick's dystopic novel, mechanization is highlighted through its effects and consequences. The society the novel revolves around artificially alters their moods with the aid of technology, puts their belief into a religion that is both based on and assisted by mechanics, and makes an attempt to recreate the parts of environment that are long lost and beyond saving. Being so reliant on mechanics, inevitably has its consequences. These consequences can be investigated under the emotions, religion, and the animals of the society.

2.1 Artificial Adjustment of Emotions

In this society where people are no longer compelled to feel sadness or stress, what takes over basic human emotions is the "Penfield Mood Organ". Described to be a machine, Penfield mood organ allows the person to dial any number to feel any emotion they want, which therefore influences their own ideas and thoughts. "If you set the surge high up enough, you'll be glad you're awake; that's the whole point." (Dick, 1). With the constant development of technology, the enhancement in human feelings to a more artificial way is sanctioned in the society, with everyone acknowledging it as a part of their daily lives and not questioning its ulterior effects. Is the mood organ really a convenience?

The usage of Penfield Mood Organ has a major possible downside; it is a device that can be controlled by others. This device, however beneficial it may be to alter one's mood in certain situations, is prone to be used for ulterior motives. The user of the device can have their moods manipulated by others against their wills, or without them noticing. This could have been enforced by the government in order to avoid outrages in the society – in case of any propaganda

against the government, the moods may be manipulated so the society is once again content with the environment they are in.

Additionally, the Penfield Mood Organ works similar to that of a routine; the users have a set schedule where the moods they are to dial are already set. While it is heavily dependent to the user's desire to dial according to the schedule and they are seen to prepare their schedules themselves, this still creates a specific routine for the society in terms of their emotions. Unable to experience emotions in their natural cycle, the society mechanically organizes their moods and is pressured under its own power. There lingers one question; doesn't the spontaneity of emotions lie at the core of the concept of being alive? If one is stuck in a cycle of scheduled moods and emotions, won't they become similar to an android that is programmed ahead?

'If I dial by schedule,' he said warily, 'will you agree to also?' He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

'My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression.' Iran said.

'What? Why did you schedule that?' **(Dick, 2)**

Although most characters do not advert to the perils of the mood organ and the loss of authentic emotions, Iran – the wife of the main figure Rick Deckard – is seen to question the effects of the device.

'My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield mood organ. But then I realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting – do you see? I guess you don't. But that used to be a sign of mental illness; they called it "absence of appropriate affect."' **(Dick, 3)**

She expresses her disapproval of this method by connecting it to “absence of appropriate affect”, which can be explained as the absence of appropriate emotion towards certain situations; such as the lack of sadness or compassion in a devastating situation. This leads to the speculation that the Penfield mood organ is normalizing what was considered to be a mental illness once as it slowly infests the society. What it turns people into is neither a healthier version of themselves, nor a composed one. Instead, it slowly constructs a new kind of robot; one that is of human flesh with a brain that is becoming increasingly more like a circuit with each passing second.

The loss of authentic emotions is one of the main causes of the loss of personality of a man. Surely, emotions are the building blocks of a personality as every individual has a different emotional pattern. Using artificial sources to alter emotions simply standardizes the emotional pattern of the society into one; getting the freedom of experiencing any emotion, but having to sacrifice the authenticity of one’s heart and its own emotions.

There is a small part of the mankind that doesn’t have any mechanical control over their emotions; the “chickenheads”. Despite not being stuck in a mechanical mold, their genetic materials have been altered by the radioactive dust, causing them to obtain very low IQ. These “special” individuals are seen to work in low level jobs or do not work at all. However, no matter how flawed these individuals may seem, they feel less like an android compared to what the society accepts as “normal”. These individuals and their many properties are analyzed through John Isidore. Isidore is seen to have extreme amounts of empathy towards many things; humans, androids and animals. His compassion towards the androids leads him to not only welcome Pris – an android that arrived on earth along with seven others – to the empty building he used to be the lone habitant of, but also take in her android friends who are on the run from bounty hunters. Unable to differentiate between a real or fake animal, Isidore cherishes them all the same to the point where he personally attempts to save them despite not being a

professional; he has the desire to help anything that is in need, be it artificial or organic. Thus, through Isidore, the profile of a genuine human with great sense of empathy is created.

'I don't think Isidore can tell the difference,' Milt said mildly. 'To him they are all alive, false animals included. He probably tried to save it.' To Isidore he said, 'What did you do, try to recharge its battery? Or locate a short in it?' (Dick, 62)

2.2 Technological Religion

No matter how developed a society may be, the traces of religion will always be present. In the novel, the technological religion Mercernism is introduced as the teachings of Wilbur Mercer. In this religion aided by “empathy boxes”, the believers fuse with Wilbur Mercer in an alternative reality and climb up what seems to be an endless mountain. During this climb, believers are also connected to one another mentally and physically which enables them to communicate and share their emotions; happiness, sorrow, anticipation and thus creating a medium of empathy and support, similar to that of a therapy group. Unlike the most religions in which divine services are physical, Mercernism is limited to a mere program installed to “empathy boxes”; a virtual world created to simulate the feeling of a fake Nirvana. However virtual and technology-based this religion may be, it does not cease to bring the believers together. Throughout the climb, rocks are aimed at the body of Wilbur Mercer; causing physical wounds and pain for the believers collectively. Consequently, a feeling of collective pain and joy for the believers is created from the idea of enduring conjoined pain in place of the so-called deity Wilbur Mercer.

Despite being the most widespread religion that advises keeping empathy and good-will a significant component of the daily lifestyle, Mercernism turns out to be much less than an actual divine experience. By the end of the book, it is revealed that Wilbur Mercer and his mountain is in fact, fake.

'I am a fraud. They're sincere; their research is genuine. From their standpoint I am an elderly retired bit player named Al Jerry. All of it, their disclosure, is true.' (Dick, 169)

Although Wilbur Mercer's condition as a fake deity is revealed, most of the followers of the religion do not abandon his religion. The reason for this can be explained by the fact that Mercernism, however fake, follows a good cause and is based on bringing people together while the society is slowly losing its identity and becoming more artificial day by day.

As religion has always been a crucial concept in the formation of healthy civilizations throughout the history, it takes a mechanization so vastly embedded in the society that it eventually fuses with religion. However, the key to this fusing is the mankind itself, or rather, its needs. Throughout time, man has searched for the meaning of its existence and found answers in many aspects of the nature; the sun, the moon, natural disasters or a being that is considered to be the creator of all... This, of course, is caused by humanity being intertwined with and overwhelmed by nature, as it has always been the one entity that mankind has never been able to control. In a technology-dominated civilization, however, seeking answers from nature is impossible due to the fact that it has lost its value for the people and is replaced by mechanics. Ultimately, the society finds salvation in a fake religion assisted by technology.

2.3 Destruction of Animals and Societal Norms

As a post-war civilization, the society in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is inevitably damaged. However, it is not just the society and humans that go under change; nature also gets its fair share from this nuclear war. A world in which animals seem to have mostly gone extinct due to the chemicals released during the war is drawn in the novel. With the lack of animals, the ones remaining have become extremely valuable to the members of the society, to the point that societal norms are constructed upon one's ownership of a real animal.

Through the organic and artificial animals, Dick has pointed out one crucial point; as the power and control human has on their minds and technology increases, their control over nature decreases. Driving themselves into a dead end where environment will be destroyed to the point it is beyond saving, humanity will seek alternatives in technology. There are still animals that have survived and are holding on, but they are all so rare to the point that they can't be mass-bred. The many animals that have gone extinct cannot be brought back either, so the loss is great. Being completely powerless against an environment that is continually disappearing, Dick's society has to turn its focus on technology and an artificial environment.

The lack of animals is seen to have led to the mass manufacturing of artificial, electric ones. However, owning an electric animal is not looked upon positively in the society.

'But they'll look down on you. Not all of them, but some. You know how people are about not taking care of an animal; they consider it immoral and anti-empathetic.' (Dick, 9)

The importance of taking care of an animal is due to the fact that animals need humans after such a big destruction, in order for them to survive. However, as they are rare, they are fairly expensive. With the societal norms and the hierarchy on one side and the financial struggles on the other side, the person is forced to buy an electric animal, which is the direct copy of the original – except for the fact that the electric one is donated by circuits in it.

The effect of the pressure of societal norms is seen to cause a boost in underground technology, as electric animals tend to get more and more realistic. With the fear of being outed for not owning a real animal, an alternative to concealing the truth is discovered; mechanics who are to fix the malfunctioning electric animals are dressed as veterinarians and use vans identical to the ones of veterinaries and, picking up the malfunctioning mechanic being just like how they would pick up a real one. In this case, it can be said that living animals have become

a symbol of status in the society, and a way of proving that the owners have empathy and are “fitting to the requirements to be human”. On the other hand, technology is used in this case to attempt to even out the places the ones who cannot afford animals have in the society and work as a cover-up to hide from the judgmental viewpoint of society.

3. Humans and Androids

Curiosity circulates within the veins of mankind. Humanity asks, thinks, observes, speculates and as a result, creates. One of the biggest phenomena humanity has faced so far is what the concept “humanity” actually means, which ultimately drives mankind to seek the answers to the questions “What does it mean to be human?” and “What makes one human?”. Eventually, each and every society comes up with its own belief and sets out to advance accordingly. In the case of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the base of Emotional Intelligence, empathy, is where the answer lies. Empathy is defined as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner; also: the capacity for this”^[1]. The society Dick displays believes that rather than language or intelligence, what makes human a human is in fact, its unique ability to empathize. With this belief as its base, the society builds a civilization which considers the ones who have the ability to empathize superior; thus deeming humanity superior to all other races and discriminating against the androids who are believed not to be able to empathize.

The immediate interaction of humans and androids is due to an oncoming war; humanity hides behind technology to survive. In this era, androids were initially used in order to start the

colonization program. Later on, not only were they used as body servants or field hands, but also they were marketed to the people with the words “*the custom-tailored humanoid robot for YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS, FOR YOU AND YOU ALONE*” (Dick,13); the conditions they were granted was similar to that of a slave. After seeking pleasure and workforce from these humanoids, mankind moved on to another stage; exterminating them. Fugitive androids who arrived on earth despite being emigrated were hunted down by bounty hunters for high amounts of money. This hunt became harder as the humanoids became increasingly realistic, so the society decided to get assistance from what they believed to lie at the core of the concept of humanity; the ability to empathize.

Dick draws an enthralling connection between humans and androids in the mechanized society. In this world where androids are discriminated and exterminated for simply being androids, humans are shown to be undeniably hypocritical. The society is deeply focused on the argument that what makes mankind human is empathy, rather than language or intelligence.

Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the Arachnida. (Dick, 24)

The assessment of whether one is human or android is assisted by a test called Voight Kampff test. Throughout the test, the assessor describes possible social situations where the person being tested is expected to feel empathy towards animals or humans. As the question is asked, the assessor checks the eye motion and capillary action of the tested person with the aid of a laser. The Voight Kampff test Rick Deckard conducts on suspects, uses the duration of time in which the suspect gives an empathetic response to a given situation. However, the mere difference between a human and an android, neglecting their mechanical bodies, is the sheer time interval of several milliseconds in which they respond emotionally and empathetically to given circumstances. On the other hand, with a technological religion and unauthentic emotions,

a man of Dick's world is frighteningly artificial, almost more artificial than the androids themselves.

A problem the Voight Kampff test brings is that it is not applicable to humans that have a low-developed sense of empathy. Lack of empathy or dysfunctional empathy are not rare occurrences and are common traits in many mental disorders such as Narcissistic Personality Disorder^[2], Borderline Personality Disorder^[3] and Schizophrenia^[4]. This would indicate that any civilian suffering from these mental disorders would be murdered by bounty hunters as they would inevitably fail the test. The usage of a technological standard in order to assess humans – creatures that constantly change and vary from one another – would lead to some humans who do not fit the criteria be sacrificed.

Despite the many arguments that tell androids apart from humans, there are many instances in which these arguments do not apply. Rick states that "*An android doesn't care what happens to another android.*" (Dick, 99). However, it is clear that the group of fugitive androids, Pris and her friends, care deeply about each other. This group who escaped to earth together is seen to worry about each other's survival as much as their own.

"Dourly – but still smiling his smile – Roy Baty said 'Well, they got Polokov.' The joy which had appeared on Pris' face at seeing her friends at once melted away." (Dick, 122-123)

Pris – an android – is seen to experience great joy by seeing some of her comrades alive but her expression changes into one that is akin to devastation upon hearing the death of one of them, indicating that she is able to express immediate emotions such as contentment and sorrow. These basic emotions, however, are absent in the society that is dependent on the Penfield Mood organ. Does this make androids more human than the humans themselves?

As it is certain that there are several androids that indeed do care for each other, what stands out is the fact that humans are able to kill these androids with no hesitation - almost enjoying it. In this case, hypocrisy of humanity is highlighted; humans are allowed to be completely sinister towards androids, who are able to both have feelings of their own and despite not being able to empathize with other's feelings. Where is the concept of empathy – the emotion that “makes a human human” – when beings with emotions of their own are being murdered? The Voight Kampff Test does not assess the empathy of the suspects towards androids, this much Rick Deckard is aware of. The fact that the test that sets the standard completely ignores humans' empathetic feelings towards androids is a result of discrimination towards the mechanical counterparts of humans; the humans desire to be superior in all aspects and show its dominance.

Rick said, 'There is a defect in your empathic, role-taking ability. One which we don't test for. Your feelings toward androids.'

'Of course we don't test for that.'

'Maybe we should.' He had never thought of it before, had never felt any empathy on his own part toward the androids he killed. (Dick, 112)

There is a lack of ethics in the killing spree that is pointed towards the androids. The lack of ethics inevitably creates a lack of empathy, and the lack of empathy along with the malicious attitude of humans towards androids makes the society unfit to be considered “human”, according to the very own criteria they have determined.

Conclusion

Twentieth century novels, the peak of science fiction based upon dystopian settings, were all aiming to foresee the setting of a technological future. Among them was Philip K. Dick,

exploring the human mind in an unknown future. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick is seen to highlight the negative effects of mechanization through a world where everything is slowly being replaced with its artificial counterpart. Dick indeed analyzes mechanization of the future with regards to the human mind itself by focusing on the basic essences of human life; human emotions, empathy, companionship of animals, religion, the overwhelming environment and discrimination of those who are different. While exploring how these aspects of life would change and adapt themselves in a future where technology is trivial in daily life, he draws a connection between the human mind and these revolutionary changes. With the main figure being a bounty hunter – a profession that challenges the norm of an ideal human – Dick satirically criticizes mechanization through the ideals of being a human. Thus it can be said that Philip K. Dick, throughout his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, shows a skeptical attitude towards mechanization and explores its effects through the main themes – empathy, animals, the environment, religion and androids and concludes his analysis with connecting these changes to the human mind and the mankind's idea of what makes them a human.

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