

English B HL-Extended Essay

Category 3

Empathy for the Devil

Research Question: *How does the writer use the concept of "empathy" in the personal development of the protagonist?*

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“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

-Rumi

1. INTRODUCTION

“Do Androids Dream of electric Sheep?” is a futuristic and dystopic novel by Phil Dick. It is about a bounty hunter who hunts androids and goes through a spiritual and philosophical journey resulting in a dynamic change. Since the background of the story tends to reflect possible results of events taking place in 1968 like; the possibility of a nuclear war, intensive racist acts, a hate for collectiveness and the emergence of consumer culture, it can be said that the novel demonstrates the predictions of an apathetic society in the future.

Through the society he created, Dick demonstrates humans’ need for “empathy” and a corrupted consumerist culture which has made people apathetic, selfish and machine-like. “Empathy” holds a big place in the society and is seen as the exclusive ability that makes human, human. Because they lack the feeling of “empathy”, androids are considered slaves, incapable of demanding any human rights and murderous machines. Detecting lack of “empathy” is the only way bounty hunters use to distinguish humans from androids.

During his mission, Decard, the protagonist, empathises with androids and faces a moral conflict within him which leads to a search for the true definition of being human. He questions the concepts of reality and humanity and struggles to stay “human” in his own ways. By using the concept of “empathy” in the personal development of Decard, Dick highlights the feature of humanity as “unconditioned empathy” and through Decard’s epiphanies, he criticises selfishness, discrimination, and lack of “empathy” in the society. In other words, although the society is obsessed with empathy, ironically they lack it. Consequently, starting out as an ordinary man, Decard undergoes chang-

es through inner and external conflicts. In my essay, I will analyse the events and their effects on the development of the protagonist and relate them to the concept of “empathy” to answer my research question; “How does the writer use the concept of empathy in the personal development of the protagonist?”

To achieve this, I will divide my essay into the following sections. First, internal conflicts regarding empathy in the protagonist will be revealed. Then, the external conflict about empathy between the protagonist and the society will be conveyed. Finally, I will examine the changes in the main character and their relationship with empathy. While addressing my research question I will mainly use the primary source as a reference.

2. CONFLICTS

The story revolves mainly about the conflicts the protagonist Rick Decard goes through. Starting off as a bounty hunter, Decard eventually becomes charmed by the humanistic characteristic of androids and begins to see them more than machines. He empathizes with them after seeing the cruelty of bounty hunters and their insolence towards both artificial and normal life through his co-worker Phil Resck. Bounty hunters are described by the androids as “*a professional murderer who's given a list of those he's supposed to kill.*”(p.117) Seeing through the androids' perspectives make Decard realize the wickedness of his job, thus puts him into a mental struggle between morality and self-interest.

2.1. The Protagonist's Internal Conflict and Empathy

In the beginning of the novel, he believes that empathy is the essence of the humanity and because of their inability to feel it sees androids as something inhuman and cruel. “*For Rick an escaped humanoid robot, which had killed its master, which possessed no ability to feel emphatic joy(...) epitomized The Killers.*”(p.24) According to Mercesim, their religion, people can only kill “*killers*” to

protect themselves. Upon this belief, Decard, compares androids with “The Killers” who kill their masters to escape, and despite androids’ resemblance to humans as it is stated that he hardly needs to “dial” a fresh attitude towards his job, he doesn’t have any remorse about his job.

He also finds the ability to empathize exclusively the creatures that do not need to take the life of another living being thus, regards androids as predators. *”a solitary organism, such as a spider, would have no use for it; in fact, it would tend to abort a spider's ability to survive. It would make him conscious of the desire to live on the part of his prey.”*(p.23) This quote reveals that Decard resembles androids to predators. He thinks that since androids do not possess this ability, they do not know how to be merciful or compassionate and this makes them capable of ruthless murder. To him, humans are not predators since they feel empathy. However, his opinion later changes when he realizes that Phil resembles a predator in many ways. Upon this realization he thinks that the qualities of a “predator” are the features of dehumanization and brutality. Hence, his reasoning about the likeness of humans and predators or androids foreshadows the inner conflict he will face. For instance, through his mirror character Phil, Decard realizes his lack of empathy to something seeming alive and for the very first time feels the androids’ desire to live as seen in the quote: *”Do androids dream? Rick asked himself. Evidently; that's why they occasionally kill their employers and flee here. A better life, without servitude.”*(p.145) Like the spider, this makes him incapable of doing his job to earn money.

Inner conflict within Decard starts when he realizes the lack of empathy in his job and empathizes with the androids. He sees that since the androids are now nearly identical to humans, and without empathizing with this different life form, he is losing his humanity. For example, Luba Luft is portrayed as an android whose only wish is to be human. With this wish, she has escaped to earth and started imitating humans. Because of the descriptions of her convincing liveness, it can be said she is used as a symbol for androids will to live. Her humanistic behaviors and talent charms Decard and makes him empathize with her. *”Luba Luft sang, and he found himself surprised at the quality of her voice; it rated with that of the best.”*(p.76) Decard gets attached to Luft, but after seeing her

brutally murdered by Phil, an outbreak in Decard occurs. *"I can't do it anymore; I've had enough. This is insane"*(p.110) In his quote, it is understood that, after seeing the death of Luft, he realizes they are killing something just because it is an android and he finds this "insane". He gets irritated and points out that she was very talented. He does not want to be a part of this *"form destroying process"* as Phil's deed makes Decard question the immorality of his job and even leads him to suspect the possibility of Phil being an android due to his cold-blooded murders of the androids, especially Luft. Realizing Decard has developed a sexual desire, because of *"his feelings(...)/for Luba's voice (p.114)"* and being actually no different from Phil initiates an epiphany resulting in change. *"Of course we don't test for that. Maybe we should.(...) Empathy toward an artificial construct? he asked himself. Something that only pretends to be alive? But Luba Luft had seemed genuinely alive; it had not worn the aspect of a simulation."*(p.112) The quote reveals the dissatisfaction of Decard. Conversely to the test result, Decard detects brutality and apathy in Phil's actions. This makes Decard find the test insufficient to determine someone's humanity and questions his "empathy". Since Mercer *"makes people to love"* Isadore, a figure who is cast out because of his mutated genes, it can be said that Mercer encourages people to love each other. As Decard puts it, even though Luft was artificial, she seemed very alive. Therefore, he questions himself and comes to the conclusion that, not caring about the will to live of something that seems living, they are corrupting humanity. By comparing himself to Phil, he realises he is able to empathise and gets affected from an android, despite selfish reasons, thus there is still humanity left in him, which will be gone if he continues his job and become a successful bounty hunter like Phil .

Therefore, Decard's epiphany puts him into a moral conflict between materialistic and spiritual needs. For him if he keeps doing his job he will *"become an unnatural self."* Yet he still *"needs the bounty money"* to feel human as he wants to buy a real animal. So it can be said that Decard's materialistic needs are symbolized by his obsession to possess a real animal. After realizing the brutality in him Decard, buys an animal to feel human again as in the society owning an animal is associated with the ability to empathize. This starts the conflict within him as he still feels corrupted but does

not want to give the goat he had bought back forcing him to continue his job. His personality starts to alternate between being predatory and sympathetic. For example he tries to restrain himself from killing the androids yet, in the end, "*in an instant. he does what he couldn't do*" and he kills them. However, after this, he cannot make out whether he is sad because of his killings or unfortunate death of his goat during the incident. "*I've been defeated in some obscure way. By having killed the androids? By Rachael's murder of my goat? He did not know,*"(p.183) In other words, empathy both triggers and resolves the conflict inside him because Mercer, who represents humanity, accepts him as he is. Mercer and his wife's understanding gives Decard the tranquility he had searched for showing the importance and effectiveness of empathy in human nature.

3.2. The Protagonist's Internal Conflict and Empathy

In the novel, empathy is also shown through the external conflict of man vs society as Decard's views have started to diverge from the society's. To begin with, governing forces like mass media, government and companies have a big influence on the society and designate peoples perspectives about the main concepts of the novel like; empathy, reality and life. Empathy is used by the society to distinguish real living humans from the humanlike androids as they lack the ability to empathize. Yet, in the novel through metaphors and irony, the similarities between androids and humans are demonstrated, which is symbolically criticizing the dehumanization of people, indicating that there is actually no absolute difference between real and unreal. After realizing that empathy is not enough to completely separate humans from androids Decard starts to conflict with the society's norms.

Decard's realization about the similarities between humans and androids causes him to lose his trust in the governing forces. "*So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs.*"(p.113) Decard used to have a conformist approach to life and follows the norms and capitalistic culture of their society as he does "*from a social standpoint what had to be done*". He was a man of his time. For example, he used to be in conflict with his wife Iran who criticized

this consumeristic nature through “*six-hour self-accusatory depression*”. She said that in the absence of the sound of tv, she “*heard the emptiness intellectually*” however, she could not feel it because of the Penfield mood organ, a device the society uses to manipulate their emotions, and felt grateful to afford it. Like a consumerist society, they watch TV to erase their loneliness and buy products to please themselves and ignore their problems. She finds this unhealthy based on the fact that it “*used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it "absence of appropriate affect"*”. This is also a motif for the mechanization of people considering that androids also show similar behavior. Also, it being not seen as a disease indicates that it is now a normal behavior of people. However, Decard does not understand her perspective and forces her to “dial” to feel better. “*I don't feel like dialing anything at all now,*” Iran said. “*Then dial 3,*” he said. (p.4) Decard does not realise the denaturation of the process because according to the society this artificially created emotion is real. In this dialogue, Dick shows the blurriness between real and fake in his society. However in the following sections of the novel, it is also seen that the society has strict definitions about what is real and what is not, which is shaped by the governing forces like the government, mass media and companies. Decard follows these validations until he starts to empathize with the androids.

In the novel, the society defines human as an organism that feels empathy. Due to androids’ inability to empathize, they are not legally considered as alive or real although being %100 organic and taking place in the formation of a social hierarchy. Because of their incapability, they are seen as emotionless cold machines enabling people to use them as slaves. Yet, ironically there are many similarities between humans and androids. At this point, Decard’s job plays an important role. He is employed by the government to distinguish who is human and who is not and kill the nonhumans, by using an empathy test. The incident between Luft and Phil makes Decard realize that empathy is not enough for him to determine who gets to live. When he first met with Luft, he was touched by her emotive singing and almost believed in the possibility of her being human. However, when he met Phil, Decard did not thought of him being not an android due to his lack of empathy. Finding out that Phil is the human and Luft is the android causes Decard to “*renew his ideology*” about the

empathy test and, because of Luft's impression on him, he empathize with her, leading him to detest his job as they are ordered to kill her. He questions why they are forced to do this, creating a distrust towards his societal norms and the law. He realizes that humans can be cold and apathetic like androids and androids can be passionate and sensitive like humans. *"I rode down with two creatures, one human, the other android. . . And my feelings were the reverse of those intended. Of those, I'm accustomed to feel I - am required to feel."*(p.114) In the quote, Decard states that he has admired an android and wanted to kill a human opposing the society's norms. The word choices like "accustomed" and "required" show that Decard starts to conflict with the government, because he, contrary the law, starts to see androids as living organisms. He finds their legal empathy test insufficient, as he realizes humans are also not hundred percent empathetic, resulting him to question the morality in their society and the laws regarding the definition of living and non-living.

Against the governing forces attempt to mechanize people, Decard becomes able to perceive a spiritual reality by feeling the life in androids. He realizes that not everything can be measured or seen but only be perceivable. *"They're saying now that Mercer is a fake."/*"*Mercer isn't a fake," he said. "Unless reality is a fake."* (p.186) As it can be seen from this quote, Decard now does not share the perspectives of the governing forces and understands that even though Mercer is not a prophet and something artificial, the idea and the feelings that people get from it is real and this makes him real. He also states that these are all illusions due to the uncertainty of reality, pointing out even the governing forces cannot determine it. He gives up on his obsession with a real yet an expensive animal as he understands that he should love the animal like it is real because the important thing is "realness" of this love not the realness of the animal and being empathic is more than possessing an animal.

In conclusion by gaining empathy, Decard experiences an epiphany and sees that there is no strict line between real and fake and life cannot be measured with a test resulting him in to changing his thoughts about the society's concept of empathy.

3. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT of the PROTAGONIST

Going through many conflicts, Decard ends up changing his beliefs about his society and his job. He re-humanises. Decard's empathy to the androids can be considered as a metaphor for his transformation to an empathic man. In the beginning of the novel, he is described as a self-centered man yet after empathizing with androids, he starts to show humanistic traits. In addition to narrating and word choice, Dick uses symbols and metaphors to show these changes.

In the beginning of the novel, Decard acts as a materialistic and selfish man. His thoughts about his electrical sheep demonstrate his selfishness. He hates it because it is incapable of returning his love. *"within him an actual hatred once more manifested itself toward his electric sheep,(..)it had no ability to appreciate the existence of another."*(p.25). Like the rest of the society, he desires a real animal to show his social status in addition to feel empathy. To achieve his desire, he wishes the androids to keep escaping so he can kill them and get the bounty money and feels nothing about the androids. He also does not like "fusing" and sharing his happiness with people. This preferred disconnection from people illustrates his individual selfishness and disinclination to human connection. He does not even try to understand why his wife is depressed. Other than feeling sad for her, he sees her selfish because *"she has nothing to give"* him, again showing his apathy. However, Dick also leaves some open space to show that he has the potential to change. For example, Even though he thinks that he should be happy for Dave's injury, he still feels somewhat sad for him. *"He felt depressed. And yet, logically, because of Dave's sudden disappearance from the work scene, he should be at least guardedly pleased."*(p.27)

After empathizing with androids in his epiphany moment, he starts to change. He calls Rachel, a nexus-6 type android who works for the company that manufactures these types of androids, for help. This indicates that now he needs some connection. His affair with Rachel, in some perspective, can also be interpreted as an example of Decard's change. Before his epiphany moment, he

hated his fake sheep because he knew that they were unable to return his love. His love to Rachel shows that he is now capable of loving without expecting something in the end. Also at the resolution part of the novel, he tries to reach Dave in a search for some understanding which is an example for his loss of confidence about the morality of his job and shows his need for empathy. *“It would have been rewarding to talk to Dave, (...)he would have understood the other part.”*(p.184)

At the end of his journey Decard faces his second epiphany and is symbolically reborn. In the resolution part of the novel, Decards accept that he has lost his humanity and feels corrupted because of his mass-murder of a life form without a valid reason. He kills the androids knowing their pain and suffering as he has empathized with them. Yet, Dick suggests that he has now become more human than ever as he has understood the androids which is a motif for accepting and empathising without discrimination. Dick shows this through his interaction with Mercer in the resolution part of the novel when he goes to a dead hillside thinking that he is going to die which we can see in; *“the dead stones, the dust Decarden weeds dry and dying, perceived nothing, recollected nothing, about him or themselves”*.(p.181) Dick, Through Dick’s intensive usage of imagery it can be said that the setting acts as a motif for the theme of death. This gives the setting a vital role in establishing Decard’s rebirth. It also enhances the atmosphere of despair and reflects Decard's feeling, causing the reader to understand his sorrow. Right after this moment he “fuses” and becomes Mercer. In the novel Mercer symbolizes the good part in humanity and it is stated that only the ones with strong empathy can truly “fuse” with him. While at the beginning of the book it was mentioned that he had hardly ever undergone any “fusion” , his becoming Mercer and *“seeing through his eyes”* can be interpreted as him becoming a morally good person and regaining his humanity. He completes his spiritual journey and becomes a new man as it is shown in the line; *“I can't stop being Mercer. Once you start, it's too late to back off”*.(p.186) This quote has a very special meaning in the chapter as it symbolises the change in Decard. Since Mercer figure is a symbol for empathy, this quote implies that as he understands the androids and now gained the ability to truly empathize, he can never be ignorant again like the apathetic killer he used to be and cannot turn back. He also realizes

the importance of community and togetherness as can be seen in the lines; “*But why does it bother me? I've undergone it before, during fusion.(....)This isn't new. But it was. Because he thought, I did it alone.*”(p.183) From his statement it is seen that he now knows the power of empathy. He feels the real pain of what they have been doing in the fusion, “*the first knowledge of absolute isolation and suffering*” and sees that with empathizing and helping how little the pain becomes. Also, he starts to appreciate and care for life. This is symbolized with him finding a “toad” on the hill as he states that he found it because he saw through the eyes of mercer who “*perceives inconspicuous life.*” In the climax part of the novel, this also happens to Isadore, a foil character for Decard who symbolizes innate altruism of humanity as he helps the androids. This reference to the Isadore indicates that now Decard also starts to equally love life.

Dick shows these changes in the closing chapter. He is not upset about the “toad” being artificial and states, “*machines have lives too*” because now he knows that feelings can make a realness too and his love for the toad makes it real for him also symbolically and demonstrates that he also sees life in the androids and empathizes with them. He also acts lovingly to his wife and becomes vivacious as before learning when he gets her understanding of what he has done thereby revealing his need for empathy and human connection.

In conclusion, Dick uses “empathy” to initiate the transformation of Decard. Through empathizing with androids he transforms from cold and selfish man to thoughtful and sympathetic man. He does not use the mood organ to feel better, a symbol used to reveal the mechanization of human, as Dick manifests that Decard is finally re-humanized without the need for such a tool.

4. CONCLUSION

In this essay; the events that lead to Rick's conflicts are analyzed and changes in him with their relation to concept of empathy are shown. It is pointed out that Dick used the concept of empathy in Rick's character development through the inner and external conflicts of Decard which results in his spiritual transform to an empathic man. His empathy to androids causes him to contradict with himself. In the end; as he completes his spiritual journey and is able to empathize truly, the writer indicates that he has saved his humanity. Since empathy towards something is not easily perceived by the society, the writer questions who to empathize with and challenges the society's standard of real and way of living. In the end of his journey, he diverges from the society and his materialistic views shifts to idealism.

In conclusion through the usage of empathy, Dick argues that, to be considered as human one should empathize unconditionally and shows this with the development of the protagonist. Also, by making his protagonist to question the reality and the realness of "empathy", and indicating that feelings create the reality, Dick gives a solipsistic perspective to his novel.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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