

## Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep by Philip K Dick : Exploration on how the concept of the 'other' might be used to analyse the text

The text I have chosen to explore was originally written in 1969 called, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* by Philip K Dick. In this essay I will first draw upon the work of theorists and specialists in order to argue that Dick's novel uses the concept of the 'other'. In order to draw out the differences between the humans & androids and humanity societal positioning I will primarily focus on theories of humanism/post-humanism. I will further extend these views beyond the original text as I examine some of the narrative choices for the 'other'. Second, I will examine some of the alternate lenses of self and other infra-humanization distinctions such as, class, religion and colonialism.

Before delving further into the text, we must ensure a level set understanding of what self/other pertains to. Sami Schalk, an author and research leader in contemporary American literature and culture and speculative fiction, attempted to address this complex topic in her article, *Self, Other and Other-Self: Going Beyond the Self/Other Binary in Contemporary Consciousness* she argues that:

The binary of self and other is perhaps one of the most basic theories of human consciousness and identity, claiming, in short, that the existence of an other, a not-self, allows the possibility or recognition of a self. In other words: I see you. I do not control your body or hear your thoughts. You are separate. You are not me. Therefore, I am me. The self/other binary seems to be an accepted division of how the modern individual comprehends who s/he is, by recognizing what s/he is not. (Schalk, 2011).

While, on the surface, this may seem definitive, the reality is much more complex. If you take this at face value, the other becomes anyone or anything outside of yourself. A further expansion of these distinctions which bears merit in examination is that of infra-humanization. In 2009, Jaques-Phillipe Leyens, an Author and lecturer in social psychology, discussed the concept of infrahumanisation, a term coined by him to identify every-day dehumanisation. He argued that, within an Infrahumanisation scope:

Ingroups were said to be the only ones with a full human essence. It was meant that ingroups were paragons of humanity [...] Variables are examined or proposed in terms of sufficiency and necessity. 'Which outgroups are infrahumanized' will remain an unsolved problem until sufficient and necessary conditions are discovered.

(Leyens, 2009)

In the novel, Dick primarily provides distinctions between a human 'self' and android 'other' by using differences in humanity elements such as empathy and religion. Dick also offers up distinctions between human 'self' and human 'other' further expanding upon the infrahumanisation through the lens of a layered class system.

In 2013, an article was published in the International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, titled, *The influence of empathy in human–robot relations*, whereby they discussed robotic companionship:

Establishing meaningful relationships with humans remains far from being accomplished. To achieve this, robots must interact with people in natural ways, employing social mechanisms that people use while interacting with each other. One such mechanism is empathy (Leite et al., 2013).

In the novel, the protagonist, Deckard, uses a device which administers an empathy test call Voigt-Kampff. Although the use of empathy as an element of humanity provides an Ingroup vs. Outgroup infrahumanisation separation, Dick shows that this method of detection for post-humanist forms such as androids is flawed. The flaw becomes important later as it allows Dick to show the ever-blurring line between a human 'self' and android 'other'. Dick outlines the flaw as part of the narrative:

A problem has always existed. Since we first encountered androids posing as humans [...] Kampff compared the diminished emphatic faculty found in human mental patients and a superficially similar but basically [...] a small class of human beings could not pass the Voigt-Kampff scale. (Dick, 2017, p.30).

In analysing the text further, the reader is given a glimpse of the ever-evolving test equipment and methods. Although Dick does not categorically outline the next stage in test evolution, I argue that a measurement of empathy alone is not a suitable measure of 'being human'.

One such addition to testing could include brain maturation rates. In 2014, Zeljka Korade and Karoly Mirnics from the University of Nebraska, assessed the maturation rates of human brain development and whether we are *programmed to be human* (Korade and Mirnics. 2014). In their paper they attempted to distinguish between human and non-human brain construction during prenatal and adolescent/adult development cycles:

The anatomical, neurochemical, and physiological differences across the different brain regions are tremendously complex [...] A particular characteristic of neocortical tissue is the precise specification and coordinated development of brain regions. Although this basic neocortical map is shared among mammals, there are multiple

unique organizational differences that are a hallmark of the human brain. (Korade and Mironics, 2014).

I argue that, even if Dick were to add this distinction between a human (self) and android (other) in the novel, issues in the testing would still arise due to the very nature of the android developments. In the novel, as Deckard is preparing to head into the Rosen corporation, he is given a vital piece of information which negates this as a possible infrahumanisation element:

Nexus-6 did have two trillion constituents plus a choice within a range of ten million possible combinations of cerebral activity. In .45 of a second an android equipped with such a brain structure could assume any one of fourteen basic reaction-postures. Well, no intelligence test would trap such an Andy. (Dick, 2017, p.11).

Effectively, Deckard is told that the new Nexus-6 androids have the same complexity to their brains as any human, and therefore it is only the delay in response which is likely to capture the difference. The test administered in the novel forces the subject to think and react to an empathic situation. When considering wider aspects to 'being human' (or aligning to 'self'), we must look wider than empathy or brain construction. Milton Dawes, a trustee and ambassador of the Institute of General Semantics, states that, these elements should, "include the following: tool making, language, self-consciousness, myth-making, self-reflexiveness, death awareness, belief in and worship of gods, bi-pedalism, complex social organisations, among others." (Dawes, 1994). While Dawes hasn't listed empathy, which is used as a diagnostic within the novel as a distinguishing feature between the human 'self' and android 'others' it aligns in terms of the consciousness and sense of self which is portrayed as subtext in the novel. I argue that the definition that Dawes gives us is a more rounded approach in assessing one's self to another, however, even this has flaws; If you

add these layers to a humanity scope, and we use them as a set of alternative measurements of infrahumanisation in the novel, the difficulty in distinguishing self (human) to other (android) would remain. For example, in the novel, the head of the Rosen corporation, Elron Rosen confronts the protagonist Deckard about the testing. Rosen says, "Your police department — others as well — may have retired, very probably have retired, authentic humans with underdeveloped empathic ability, such as my innocent niece here" (Dick, 2017, p.22). I argue that even with an extended set of test measurements such as language, self-consciousness and myth-making, mistakes could still be made. Each of these could be either programmed into an android (others) operating system or be picked up incorrectly on a human with under-developed brain functions.

As a reader, Dick leads us to accept that the test based on empathy to identify the 'others', however, it raises an interesting point on when to provide space for a reader and interpretation and when to fill in the details with technical depth. As an author, I can see merits on both sides but fall primarily in agreement with Dick's approach of simplification of 'other' distinction without stalling the narrative flow.

As a secondary infrahumanisation layer of self and other distinction in human societal positioning, Dick has incorporated a non-defined, but clearly identifiable, class system. Dick set the novel in a post-apocalyptic world following "World War Terminus" (Dick, 2017, p.3) indicating that the next World War would be the war to end all wars causing untold but imagined levels of destruction. Most of the Earth's inhabitants have taken the option of moving to Mars, whereby they are gifted with an android helper as both an incentive to move and provide them with a personal slave (I will return to this aspect of 'other' later). This brings about layering of self and other as it distinguishes between those who have been left behind to rot in the dust and radioactivity, those who have managed to escape and elevate themselves into a new Mars colony and the growing population of android slaves.

In the text, the humans which have moved to Mars are shown to be higher in class as anyone who remained on Earth is deemed as a 'special':

Specials came into existence, created out of regulars by the omnipresent dust. The saying currently blabbed by posters, TV ads, and government junk mail, ran: 'Emigrate or degenerate! The choice is yours!'. (Dick, 2017, p4).

For those left earthbound and denigrating, Dick added a further class layering regarding materialism. Bullock et al define class as:

A concept which denotes different social strata in society. Many sociologists, such as Ralf Dahrendorf, distinguish between the 'estate' systems of feudal and pre-industrial society [...] the true class system which emerged when capitalism and the industrial revolution substituted these criteria with the external criterion of 'material possessions'. (Bullock, Lawrie and Trombley, 2000, p.127).

Post Word War Terminus, most of the animals and birds have been made extinct. The novel builds upon this, providing another self/other differentiation in the form of 'class'. While some remaining Earthbound inhabitants own real life animals, some have purchased electric equivalents due to the scarcity and cost of such a material wealth. Those with electric animals are looked down upon in a portrayal of a hierarchical class system. When the protagonist, Deckard, meets his neighbour, Barbour, on the roof of the building complex, they discuss the potential purchase of a horse:

Going over to his sheep, Rick bent down, searching ... the concealed control panel of the mechanism. As Barbour watched, he snapped open the panel covering, revealing it. 'See?' he said to Barbour. 'You understand why I want your colt so badly?'

After an interval Barbour said, 'You poor guy. Has it always been this way? (Dick, 2017, p.8)

The inference in this discussion and the follow-on regarding neighbours and material wealth, it becomes clear that all those who own electric, or android animals are deemed lower in class to those with real livestock. One of the key reasons behind this is due to real livestock being a 'means of production'. In the text, Deckard discussing the potential of his neighbour's horse having a foal. His neighbour, Barbour states:

Through inside contacts I have with the State Animal Husbandry Board. Don't you remember last week when their inspector was out here examining Judy? They're eager to have her foal; she's an unmatched superior. (Dick, 2017, p.4).

This ownership of the means of production places Barbour into a higher class of 'other' Earthbound humans.

Adding a further layer to the divisions, Dick introduced a religious order called Mercerism, which becomes a clear point of distinction between the humans and the androids. The humans are consumed by this order and the android see this as a means of differentiation of them as 'others' which they must overcome to be considered anything else. In discussion about Mercerism, the lead rogue android, Roy Baty states, "Mercerism came into existence [...] Ask yourselves what is it that Mercerism does. Well, if we're to believe its many practitioners, the experience fuses — It's that empathy that humans have." (Dick, 2017, p.83). From this, we deduce that the android 'others' see themselves as remaining 'other' if they lack empathy and therefore the ability to share empathic experiences through Mercerism.

As previously mentioned, the element of 'slavery' mentioned above is an interesting element that, as subtext in the novel, could provide a differing view on how the androids are created and treated as slaves. The novel touches upon but does not dive into a link between post-humanism and colonialism when Dick identifies the android developments as slaves to Mars colonists. The author and lecturer, Patricia Kerslake states that: "The location of the Other in SF is an excellent place to begin the identification and explanation of experiments in the use of power and politics, since it possesses an affinity to both the concepts of postcolonialism and the focus of SF texts discussed in works." (Kerslake, 2010, p.8). Dick appears to have chosen this direction carefully as, while the provision of robotic tools has and will continue for some time, he could have addressed their production as tools or helpers rather than slaves. In calling them slaves, he ensures that the rogue androids rebelling against their 'other' status is solidified early on as narrative back story. The choice of calling them slaves, however, holds other potential consequences: The French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard, stated that:

Fifty years after the first operational robots [...] 'man' will no longer be the homunculus running the machine but, to use his metaphor, he will be the old master outpaced by the runaway slave. (Halliwell and Mousley, 2003).

This brings into discussion two key elements in the novel. Firstly, the androids in development are typically created to act as slaves for both Earthbound humans and Mars immigrants. Despite being increasingly enhanced in terms of human-like traits such as physical features and adaptive intelligence, they are still classed as 'non-human' as were the slaves during our own history of colonisation of the world. Second, the continual evolution of neural capabilities which we see today, leaning towards development in Artificial Intelligence, could, Dick's novel suggests, lead to our own metaphorical replacement as the leading inhabitants of Planet Earth. Dick provides some insight into how the second issue is

controlled, in that the Elron corporation gives the androids a four-year life span, thereby, limiting the longevity of, and threats from, the 'other'.

In conclusion, despite its age, the novel explores several quandaries we struggle with today in terms of the defining line between humanity, our creations, the layering of infrahumanisation and our place in continually evolving societies. As we move through the next couple of centuries, the technology developments will increase in speed and the lines between our 'self' and our 'other' creations will grey. I foresee that as we progress through ML (Machine Learning) into true AI (Artificial Intelligence) that humanity will probably be forced to continually evaluate our place in the world and therefore the definitions of self and other as a measurement of this must evolve.

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