

The Posthuman World of Philip K. Dick's
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

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Tiivistelmä/Referat – Abstract <p>In the landscape of twentieth century science fiction, Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> stands out as a visionary dystopian narrative that deals with central metaphysical concerns of human subjectivity and ontology in an age of advanced biotechnology and artificial intelligence. The present thesis explores the storyworld and plot of the novel through the lens of posthumanism, a paradigm of philosophical inquiry that calls into question our fundamental understanding of what it means to be human by examining the ways in which humans relate to non-human entities and environments. The aim of the thesis is to show how two strands of posthumanist thought, transhumanism and critical posthumanism, manifest throughout the narrative.</p> <p>The post-apocalyptic technoculture depicted in the novel provides a setting for deep posthuman anxiety and vulnerability, which stems mainly from the android challenging the human as a unique subject and strict ontological category. The novel presents a critique of the anthropocentric and speciesist values enforced by a transhumanist world view that is preoccupied with the advancement of the human condition beyond its biological and earthly limitations. Both animals and androids serve as commodified objects for humans to define themselves against, but what the novel reveals is the illusory nature of these boundaries, and the flaws of such an anthropocentric and Cartesian way of thinking. Dick's vision of the future anticipated the dangers of a society characterized by the increasingly simulated nature of existence brought on by pervasive technological innovations. The novel exposes the pitfalls of transhumanist vision of the posthuman form that perpetuates the mechanization of humans and the humanization of machines, while still clinging on to the essentialized view of humans as dominant beings. By the end of the novel, however, the main characters, Deckard and Isidore, have transformative experiences through which they embrace a posthuman view of the world based on empathy and connectedness with non-human beings and environments.</p>			
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1. Introduction

Fifty years have passed since Philip K. Dick published his science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. Like most of his works of science fiction, it received little mainstream critical acclaim during his lifetime, and yet half a century later, Dick's prescient vision of the future is more relevant than ever. Today, Dick is considered by many to be "one of the most unique and visionary talents in the history of American literature" (Sutin x), and *Do Androids Dream* stands out as one of his most exemplary novels. Its title points to some of the central themes and questions raised in the novel: What is defined as real or artificial? What separates humans from machines? The story explores these and many more philosophical questions, which I intend to engage with in the present thesis.

Before proceeding to my aims and methods, let me provide here a brief outline of the storyworld. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic San Francisco following a global nuclear war, World War Terminus, that has left Earth in ruins. The planet is engulfed in radioactive dust that has rendered most animal species either extinct or critically endangered, and causes gradual deterioration of mental and genetic properties in humans. Most humans have consequently emigrated to space colonies where they are serviced by enslaved genetically engineered humanoid robots. However, some humans numbering in the thousands have stayed behind either by choice or because they have been affected by the dust severely enough to be classed as "special," or "biologically unacceptable, a menace to the pristine heredity of the race" (Dick 13; hereafter referenced by page number only), and, as a result, are barred from emigrating. Humans have taken to caring for the remaining animals on Earth to counteract species-loss and, more importantly, as a way for them to practice empathy. Empathy is supposedly the only characteristic separating humans from androids, and it is the basis of the widely-practiced religion, Mercerism. The plot focuses on two characters: Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter hired by the government to kill any escaped androids, and John R. Isidore, a "special."

1.1 Aims and Methods

Do Androids Dream is a novel that has been written about extensively. Thus, my aim with this thesis is to build on and add to the already existing corpus of literary

criticism, while drawing on various articles to support my arguments. However, my main theoretical source is Pramod K. Nayar's book *Posthumanism* from 2014, a comprehensive text on posthumanist philosophy. I aim to show how the storyworld society of the novel tackles some of the core ideas of posthumanism, a philosophy that is concerned with the implications of "[t]echnoscientific cultures, global economic challenges, looming environmental disaster, the spread of digitalisation, the rise of biomedicine and the erosion of traditional demarcations between human and nonhuman" ("About"). By focusing my textual analysis on the two focalizing human characters, Deckard and Isidore, I aim to show how they manifest different facets of posthumanism. Nayar distinguishes between the two strands of posthumanist thought, transhumanism and critical posthumanism, which are both crucial to my explication of the novel and which I will introduce in section 1.3. Before doing so, I give some background on the author and his works.

1.2. Philip K. Dick and His Works

Philip K. Dick's literary career spanned three decades, from 1952 to 1982, producing over fifty volumes of novels and stories. His earliest novels already evinced a major theme that would pervade his SF writing: "the juxtaposition of two 'levels of reality' – one 'objectively' determined, the other a world of appearances imposed upon characters by various means and processes" ("Dick, Philip K(indred)")—such as the juxtaposition of human with technological simulacra. After deviating into realistic fiction for several years but failing to make a name for himself in the mainstream novel market, Dick seemed to realize that his strength as a writer lay in the SF genre. In 1962, he published one of his most well-known novels, *The Man in the High Castle*, a story based on an alternate history in which the Axis powers won WWII, for which he won the esteemed Hugo Award. He continued to write SF books of varying success throughout the 1960s, producing as many as three novels a year. A decade of intensive writing culminated in the publishing *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in 1968. Dick continued to write texts that were increasingly metaphysical, and increasingly reflective of his own personal episodes of paranoia and epiphany ("Dick, Philip K(indred)").

Despite an impressive writing career, Dick never enjoyed mainstream popularity during his lifetime, partly because of his dedication to the science fiction genre, a genre

that, according Lawrence Sutin, “almost invariably wards off serious attention” (qtd. in Vest ix). However, as Jason Vest notes, “[d]ebates about the artistry, sophistication, and canonicity of SF texts have receded in recent years as science fiction has become a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry” (x). Dick died only few months before the release of *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott’s film adaptation of *Do Androids Dream*, a film that has since earned cult status. The film, along with the numerous Hollywood adaptations of Dick’s novels and short-stories since then—including the 2017 sequel, *Blade Runner: 2049*—have helped lift the science fiction author from literary obscurity. Along with extensive scholarly and academic research, this has cemented him as one of the most important writers of the twentieth century in any genre.

The posthumous critical respect bestowed on Dick is well-deserving considering the depth of his fiction. His novels often “emphasized metaphysical speculations as opposed to ‘hard’ science predictions” (Sutin xi), and showed that “SF was the genre par excellence for the exploration of new and challenging concepts” (xii). Dick understood the essence of science fiction to be “the conceptual dislocation within the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author’s mind, transferred to paper, and from paper it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader’s mind, *the shock of dysrecognition*” (*Shifting* 99). What is emblematic of *good* science fiction, according to Dick, is when the *novum*—or “the conceptual relocation”—is “intellectually stimulating to the reader; it must invade his mind and wake it up to the possibility of something he had not up to then thought of” (*Shifting* 100). *Do Androids Dream* certainly achieves this level of estrangement, a cognitive experience that, as Joan Gordon puts it, “allows one to step outside one’s own form of cognition or place in the world and look at the change this alteration makes, or to consider one’s own position as another might, or another’s position as if it were one’s own” (332). Nayar observes that one of the questions that the genre of SF is so apt at exploring is “what does it mean to be ‘truly’ human, or ‘merely’ machine or animal?” (128). This question is also central to posthumanism, which I discuss in the next section.

1.3. Posthumanism: Transhumanism and Critical Posthumanism

Posthumanist thought deals with both the ontological condition of humans as well as a new conceptualization of the human in the age of advanced biotechnology, genetic engineering, and digitalization. Nayar identifies two strands of posthumanism:

transhumanism and critical posthumanism, for which I provide some background in this section.

The philosophy behind the transhumanist movement has been developing since the first half of the twentieth century. However, the roots of the movement go back to eighteenth century Enlightenment thought and its secular humanist ideals, such as the “belief in reason, individualism, science, progress, as well as self-perfection or cultivation” (Ranisch et al. 8). For transhumanists, human rationality is “a key marker of ‘personhood’ and individual identity” (Nayar 17), and the human body in its current state only inhibits the full potential of the mind. They conceive “the limitations of the human body (biology) as something that might be transcended through technology so that faster, more intelligent, less disease-prone, long-living human bodies might one day exist on Earth” (16). This advanced human form that they strive for is what is called the *posthuman*. The transhumanist vision of the posthuman sees the human as a modified entity, often involving both the mechanization of the human and the humanization of the machine. Transhumanists believe that humans are currently in the transitional—or *transhuman*—stage of this evolution, and that technological innovations will allow humans to transcend not only their biological limitations but also their confinement to planet Earth.

Whereas transhumanism can be considered an extension or intensification of traditional humanism, critical posthumanism is critical of humanist philosophy, particularly its anthropocentric stance. The “essentialist and hierarchical divisions between culture and nature” (Nayar 69) emphasized by transhumanism are what critical posthumanists seek to eliminate. Whereas transhumanism is more concerned with the ontological condition of the human, critical posthumanism is interested in a new conceptualization of the human, one that treats “the human itself as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology” (13). This vision of the posthuman signals the death of the traditional conception of the self-contained human subject and “configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (Hayles 3). Critical posthumanists challenge traditional views of humanism and demand a rethinking of the human condition in a way that is not dictated by the dichotomies that are so persistent in Western culture, “such as nature/culture, man/woman, subject/object, human/animal, or body/mind” (Ranisch et al. 8). As Nayar points out, “the rejection of binaries is also the rejection of a kind of autonomous subjectivity” (126) in favor of what he calls “species

cosmopolitanism.” In this sense, a critical posthumanist conception of the posthuman is based on empathy and connection, which poses a challenge to the anthropocentric values of speciesism inherent to transhumanism.

Do Androids Dream deals with some of the core issues of critical posthumanist thought in that it reveals “the ways in which humans have perceived and represented other non-human species, ways that have then codified species differences, ignored similarities and established human dominance” (Nayar 127). The novel highlights these issues by depicting a futuristic society that reflects anthropocentric values stemming from transhumanist ideology. Although critical posthumanism is not concerned with advocating animal rights as such, it draws heavily on animal studies, because it seeks to overturn the anthropocentric notions of human superiority and uniqueness by examining “how the animal as a life form is the constant other to the human ... that enables the construction of the human as a category” (Nayar 111). According to Derek Ryan, “where transhumanism supports, and indeed depends upon, the human arrogance that has often sidelined thoughts about animals and claimed transcendence over animality, [critical] posthumanist theory [seeks] to uproot the privileged position of human individualism” (69). In my first analytical chapter, I analyze human relations with animals in the novel in order to show how the anthropocentric notions of transhumanist thought are ingrained in the storyworld’s society.

2. Human–Animal Relations

One of the central themes examined in *Do Androids Dream* are human–animal relations. This theme makes the novel an exemplary work of science fiction, a genre that “has often cast numerous animals ... alongside humans in order to explore the (supposed) animal–human boundaries” (Nayar 128). The ways in which humans relate to animals, both real and artificial, are reflective of some of the core transhumanist values that the futuristic society depicted in the novel is based on. Transhumanism, a movement preoccupied with the enhancement and advancement of mankind in general, upholds an ideology of human exceptionalism, allowing for speciesist values to dictate its relations to other beings. My aim with this chapter is to show how these speciesist values are manifested in the human–animal relations in the novel.

I begin this chapter by providing some theoretical background to speciesism and how it relates to transhumanist ideology, before showing how speciesism is evident in the novel, or, more specifically, how the characters in the novel reveal the ideological notions underpinning the storyworld society. The ways in which humans relate to animals seem genuine on the surface, but in fact masks a much more anthropocentric and speciesist mindset. Finally, I provide a comparative analysis of the two main characters, Rick Deckard and John R. Isidore, to show how their differences reveal crucial issues about the nature of human–animal relations.

2.1. Speciesism

Speciesism, like other forms of discrimination such as racism or sexism, underlies a long history of domination and objectification. Peter Singer, who popularized the term in his seminal work *Animal Liberation*, defines it as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species” (6). It is an ideology that “positions the human as the dominant species that then controls, domesticates, oppresses, exploits, guards and pets non-human, animal species” (Nayar 131). Speciesism has historically allowed for the mass commodification of animals, which grew exponentially during the Renaissance in Europe, when animals became more abundantly available and were used for a greater variety of purposes (122). The exploitation of animals continues to be prevalent throughout the world today, most prominently in the meat and dairy industries, in which certain species of animals are bred for the sole purpose of human consumption.

Speciesism as a value system is central to humanism and, by extension, transhumanism. Since transhumanism can be considered “an intensification of humanism” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xv), the speciesist values of traditional humanism are naturally extended in its ideology, including the emphasis on “the uniqueness of human beings, their free will, their potential, and their dignity” (Singer 198) in contrast to inferior animals. Transhumanist thought continues to uphold the Enlightenment ideals of the human/animal dichotomy, placing humans at the top of the hierarchy (Nayar 17). The Humanity Plus organization—formerly known as the World Transhumanist Association—provides a definition of their movement, as well as an eight-point Declaration in which their anthropocentric stance is made clear in the first point: “Humanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future. We envision the possibility of broadening human potential by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth” (“Transhumanist Declaration”). They do, however, acknowledge non-human beings in point seven: “We advocate the well-being of all sentience, including humans, non-human animals, and any future artificial intellects, modified life forms, or other intelligences to which technological and scientific advance may give rise.” Despite the organization’s claim of showing equal consideration for all beings, the emphasis on the divide between humans and non-humans as well as the obsession with advancing humans to a superior form make transhumanism incompatible with true empathic sensibilities towards non-human beings.

The speciesist ideology of traditional humanism marks humans as exceptional and defines humans against the Other, whether it be the animal, the machine, or the monstrous. The boundaries of the human are enforced by “separating, through rigorous socialization, sanitization and coercion, particular characteristics of human life ... to be expelled, and the ‘essential’ human to be retained” (Nayar 110), which allows for the domination, control, and extermination of non-human life. Norman Fischer argues that “works of art can extend and illuminate the critique of human centeredness through both theme and form” (102), and this is exactly what Dick’s novel does, by portraying a dystopian society that has embraced the transhumanist values of speciesism and human exceptionalism.

2.2. Objectification and Commodification

In *Do Androids Dream*, the speciesist values of the storyworld's society are not explicitly obvious from the way animals are treated. Owing to the scarcity of animal life, the remaining animals on Earth are viewed with reverence, and caring for animals is a necessary practice of followers of Mercerism, the religion of empathy. As Hayles points out, "Animals, evoking feeling in their owners and capable of feeling themselves, occupy the privileged position of fellow creatures whose lives, like human lives, are sacred" (175). On the one hand, the idolization of animals stems from humanity's joint effort to counter global species-loss and save the remaining species from extinction. Indeed, failing to contribute to the well-being of animals was criminalized immediately after the nuclear war. On the other hand, these futile efforts originate from a collective guilty conscience that serves more humans than they do animals. Moreover, upon closer look, the show of reverence is undercut by the practice of objectifying and commodifying animals.

In a world where androids have been developed to the point where they are physically and intellectually indistinguishable from humans, empathy is supposedly the only feature that separates humans from non-humans. The essential human quality that transhumanists believe separates humans from non-human, has thus shifted from rationality to feeling. The way that humans are able to demonstrate their empathic quality is by owning and caring for an animal. Since *not* taking care of an animal is considered "immoral and anti-empathic" (10), those who cannot afford to keep a real animal have the option of owning an electric version. People who are marginalized based on their low economic status can then at least retain their "human" status. The ownership of animals is thus a form of objectification, because instead of being treated as animal subjects, animals are treated as "cultural signifiers that prove in the flesh that the human is indeed a specialized category of existence in its ability to empathize and care for the animal" (Vinci 100). Following Erica Fudge's argument that "owning a pet enhances our status as humans" (32), the speciesist basis of this practice is undeniable.

The way empathy is tested in humans further shows the contrived nature of human empathy toward animals. The Voigt-Kampff test, which humans are supposed to be incapable of failing, is used by bounty hunters to identify any potential android fugitives from the space colonies. The test works by describing hypothetical situations often involving animal suffering in order to elicit empathic responses from the subject being tested. However, the extent of the animal cruelty described in these scenarios are

very much dependent on social context. Scenarios involving, for example, “a calf-skin wallet,” “a butterfly collection,” and “a lobster in a pot of boiling-water” (41-2) are, as Jill Galvan notes, “instances of brutality and exploitation, yes, but not uncommon in many social contexts – in fact, too common to trigger consistent empathic reactions in most human beings” (415). In many societies, these scenarios would hardly evoke a meaningful reaction, which is indicative of the constructed nature of empathy.

Animals are also treated as commodities with a price label and are consequently fetishized. *Sidney's Animal & Fowl Catalogue* is updated monthly with information about the conservation status of every species along with their current monetary value. Since animals are so rare and expensive, ownership of a real animal is a sign of status and wealth, which makes them highly coveted. This is apparent at the beginning of the novel, when Deckard stops in front of a pet store on his way to work: “In the center of the block-long display window an ostrich, in a heated clear-plastic cage, returned his stare. ... After staring at it, Rick spent a few more minutes staring grimly at the price tag” (23). The ostrich is displayed on the shop’s window like any other commodity whose worth is decided by its current availability on the market.

Electric animals, similar to androids, have been engineered so that they are difficult to differentiate from their authentic counterpart, and although real animals are conceived as being vastly superior—as reflected in the significant difference in their monetary value—there is little difference in how they are treated. Both are regarded as mere commodities, which is apparent by the way most characters in the novel respond to the death of an animal. For instance, as Sherryl Vint points out, when Deckard tells his neighbor about replacing his real sheep with an artificial one, “there is no sense that the death of his real sheep caused him any grief on a personal level nor that his relationship with the electric one is different in any way” (116). He is more concerned with not being able to afford another real sheep to replace the old one. Similarly, Isidore’s boss, Hannibal Sloat, reacts to the death of a cat without any regard to the suffering of the animal, saying, “it’s the waste that gets me” (67). The owner of the deceased cat is more concerned with replacing it with an electric doppelganger so that her husband will not find out. Vint compares this emotional detachment with that of the android Luba Luft, who during the Voigt-Kampff test responds in a way consistent to human behavior: “Nobody would kill and eat a dog. ... They’re worth a fortune” (89). It is evident that “what passes for ‘empathy’ among humans derives far more from a cultural construction than from any categorical essence” (Galvan 415). Humans are

more concerned with being able to distinguish themselves from androids as empathic beings and will resort to caring for synthetic animals in order to satisfy this criterion, but they seem to have lost the ability to exhibit genuine empathy for animals, and in most cases, are shockingly apathetic.

As I have shown, the status of animals in the futuristic society of the novel is suggestive of speciesist values, even if they are masked by seemingly compassionate intentions. Although animals are no longer exploited in ways that show explicit cruelty, the exploitation manifests on the level of objectification and commodification, which conceals a deeply rooted speciesist value system. There is only one human character in the novel who relates to animals in a way that demonstrates true empathic sensibility, which I discuss next.

2.3. Isidore and Animals: The Dehumanization of the Human

John R. Isidore is one of the focalized characters in the novel, and provides a very different perspective from the other human characters. He is considered subhuman, or “special,” owing to his “distorted genes” (15), which humans are regularly tested for so as to prevent anyone with inferior genetic properties from procreating or emigrating to the space colonies. Isidore has a low status even among specials, since he has “failed to pass the minimum mental faculties test” (15), and he is often referred to by others with the common derogatory term, “chickenhead.” Isidore is keenly aware of his own inferiority in the social hierarchy, and it is a constant source of anxiety that is amplified in social interactions. His colleagues at the false-animal repair firm where he works as a pickup and delivery truck driver, often talk down to him and refer to him as the chickenhead, even when speaking in front of him. The exclusionary behavior is difficult for him to understand, and in particularly stressful moments his confusion and social awkwardness turns his speech into anxious stuttering.

Isidore’s isolation from the human community is exacerbated by his living in an empty building block at the edge of the city that is saturated with fallout and decay, with neither human nor animal companionship. Without having an animal to care for, he is unable to display empathy, the singular feature that would mark him as part of human society. The only company he has is Buster Friendly’s TV show that blares out in a seemingly never-ending stream of news bulletins, advertisements, and talk show segments. But even the TV is a constant reminder of his status as a special: “the ads,

directed at the remaining regulars, frightened him. They informed him in a countless procession of ways that he, a special, wasn't wanted. Had no use" (17). Yet he keeps the TV on rather than off, because in its absence he is overwhelmed by the silence and the emptiness—"the void"—of the uninhabited apartments, an awareness of which is so intense that it permeates all his senses. He is a character with a keen awareness of being completely discarded by society, much like the ever-multiplying "kipple"—"useless objects, like junk mail or match folders" (56)—that surrounds him.

The dehumanization of Isidore and other specials is symptomatic of a speciesist society. Owing to his inferior genetic and intellectual faculties, Isidore is considered disposable by a society that, true to its transhumanist ideology, is devoted to the advancement of the human race: "Once pegged as special, a citizen, even if accepting sterilization, dropped out of history. He ceased, in effect, to be part of mankind" (13). As Nayar points out, "when humans are speciesist and treat non-human life forms as expendable, then some species of humans are also—as history shows in the form of genocides, racism and slavery—excluded from the category of the human to be then expendable" (14). In the novel, androids have replaced the expendable position traditionally held by animals, as they are enslaved and exploited for the sake of human progress, with no regard for their subjectivity. Josh Toth points out that the subjugation of androids achieves the same purpose as showing empathy to animals: "Humans *can* violate (e.g., enslave, exploit, maim, kill) an android *without having to violate their own identity*; a human does not, or *cannot*, share an empathic bond with a lifeless machine. In contradistinction, the android confirms the human *as human*" (66). This is a fundamental pillar of the society, which comes under heavy scrutiny as the story progresses. The subjugation and exclusion of the non-human is extended to specials as well, who are dehumanized for their intellectual and genetic inferiority. The ambition of realizing the transhumanist vision of an enhanced human race coupled with the demands of having to maintain the increasingly ambiguous boundary between humans and humanoid robots, has led to a stricter criterion for classifying the human, which has resulted in specials like Isidore to be eliminated from the category. Paolo Cavalieri calls attention to the speciesism present in contemporary society that allows for the classification of animals as inferior according to certain features but fails to hold humans to the same standards:

It is not true that all human beings possess the attributes that allegedly mark the difference between us and the other animals. It is undeniable that there exist

within our species individuals who, on account of structural problems due to genetic or developmental anomalies ... will never acquire, or have forever lost, the characteristics – autonomy, rationality, self-consciousness, and the like – that we consider as typically human. (qtd. in Nayar 130)

Thus, there are individuals who are so severely disabled that although they are still biologically human, they “are not human in the philosophical sense” (130). This intrinsic link between speciesism and discrimination toward members of one’s own species is evident in the case of Isidore and how humans categorize him as “special” and reject him from the human community.

The character of Isidore poses a challenge to the claim that humans are unique in their ability to show empathy. As Toth points out, Isidore, who no longer qualifies as human, “at the same time, and quite paradoxically, is frequently depicted as the most human (i.e., empathic) character in the novel” (69). He is a devout adherent of Mercerism, the religion of empathy, although his empathy expands even further than that of other humans. For instance, when he is sent to pick up what he thinks is a malfunctioning electric cat, he feels empathy for it when he hears its groans of pain: “Funny, he thought, even though I know rationally it’s faked the sound of a false animal burning out its drive-train and power supply ties my stomach in knots” (63). When the cat turns out to be real upon closer examination, his boss and colleague mock him for not being able to tell the difference, even though his colleague admits that “the fakes are beginning to be darn near real” (67). But whether the cat is real or not is inconsequential, since Isidore’s compassion does not differentiate between the two. Although his intelligence is subpar, he demonstrates acute emotional sensitivity: “I wish, he thought painfully, that I could get another job. If I hadn’t failed that IQ test I wouldn’t be reduced to this ignominious task with its attendant emotional by-products” (63). These “emotional by-products” caused by the suffering of something that he knows—or mistakenly thinks—is synthetic, demonstrates extreme empathic feelings. This stands in stark contrast with the apathy of other characters, especially Rick Deckard, who feels resentment and “actual hatred” (36) toward his electric sheep for being synthetic.

Isidore’s indiscriminate empathy is reflective of critical posthumanist philosophy. His altruism extends even to the escaped androids, whom he helps by harboring them in his apartment. When Pris, one of the escaped androids, informs Isidore of bounty hunters wanting to kill her, he thinks that she must be mistaken: “It’s

not in accord with present-day Mercerian ethics. ... All life is one; ‘no man is an island,’ as Shakespeare said in olden time” (128). The quote—originating in John Donne, not Shakespeare—is emblematic of critical posthumanist view of the human subject “enmeshed with the environment and technology” (Nayar 13), contrary to the transhumanist emphasis of “the autonomous, self-willed individual agent” (13). Isidore is a victim of the transhumanist society. He exhibits the empathic quality that humans claim to uniquely possess, but because of speciesism, he is dehumanized for his supposedly inferior qualities and prevented from joining the rest of humanity. In this sense, humans in their effort to enhance the human condition, have lost the very quality that they claim marks their humanity in the first place.

2.4. Deckard and Animals: The Tyranny of the Object

Rick Deckard is a character that is in many ways the opposite of Isidore. He still passes for a “regular,” that is, “a man who could reproduce within the tolerances set by law” (6), and is permitted to move to the off-world colonies. The only thing keeping him from emigrating is his job as a bounty hunter, tracking down and eliminating any androids that have entered Earth illegally. Whereas Isidore’s job is to restore ersatz beings, Deckard’s job is to destroy them.

Deckard’s attitudes and behavior indicate that he has fully internalized the anthropocentric values of the transhumanist society. The emotional detachment that he employs in his job of killing androids is reflected in his relations with animals, which in turn is symptomatic of a speciesist mentality. With the same intensity that Isidore desires companionship, Deckard desires the ownership of a real animal, a desire that is all-consuming. His primary motivation behind capturing and retiring the escaped Nexus-6 androids is so that he can afford to buy a real animal. He carries a copy of *Sidney’s Animal & Fowl Catalogue* wherever he goes, and when he comes across a real animal his “automatic response” (35) is to flip through the catalogue to find out the animal’s conservation status and monetary value. When he is unexpectedly faced with the prestigious collection of animals owned by the Rosen corporation, he feels “more a sort of yearning” (34) than surprise. He reflects with resentment on his need to maintain an electric sheep:

within him an actual hatred once more manifested itself toward his electric sheep, which he had to tend, had to care about, as if it lived. The tyranny of an

object, he thought. It doesn't know I exist. Like the androids, it had no ability to appreciate the existence of another. (36)

In Deckard's mind, the mechanical animal is at the very bottom of the hierarchy and he feels a deep bitterness at having to settle for one.

Although he is resentful about it, he acknowledges the societal demand for practicing empathy: "Owning and maintaining a fraud had a way of gradually demoralizing one. And yet from a social standpoint it had to be done, given the absence of the real article" (7). He seems horrified by the thought of anyone in the building finding out that he owns an electric sheep: "you have to keep your eye on it exactly as you did when it was really alive. Because they break down and then everyone in the building knows ... – they'd recognize it as a *mechanical* breakdown" (9). It is far more important to Deckard that other people *think* that he is taking care of an animal than actually taking care of one, thus further showing the contrived nature of empathy.

Later on, Deckard uses an animal to try to help him through a depressive state. After having a strange encounter with one of the escaped androids, Deckard is conflicted about his job as a bounty hunter because of having had empathetic feelings toward an android. He reasons that he must purchase a real animal with his newly earned bounty money, in order "to get my confidence back, my faith in myself and my abilities, back" (147). For him, "the sight of animals, the scent of money deals with expensive stakes" (145), are a welcome distraction and a way to relieve himself from his psychological weariness. But more importantly, the goat that he ends up buying should allow him to redirect his empathy toward an animal, as he is expected. However, as Vint points out, Deckard fails in connecting with the emotional side of himself because he "does not know how to interact with animals as anything other than commodities" (121). Deckard has never considered animals more than objects that serve selfish purposes, and he has yet to learn to view them in any other way.

Deckard's transformation and acceptance of a critical posthumanist world view comes at the very end of the novel. When he learns that the toad, which he has found in the desert and presumed to be real, is actually electric, he accepts it in a way that shows a complete turnaround from the beginning of the novel: "The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (211). No longer is he concerned with its authenticity, its monetary value, or its ability to affect his social status, as he had before. The anthropocentric values dictated by the transhumanist society have been replaced by

critical posthumanist values, a perspective that acknowledges the subjectivity of the non-human entity. Even though his comment about the life of the electric toad being “paltry” or less significant, could be interpreted as “a reversion to humanist hierarchies” (Vinci 110), it shows a genuine consideration of the non-human entity *despite* it being “paltry.” This consideration is important because it is “less a question of the fact of difference than a question of *responding* to that difference with empathy” (Nayar 133). Vint points out that “Deckard comes to this realization only through embracing animal being, rejecting the speciesist discourse that attempts to construct hierarchies and divisions, a logic that rejects humans like Isidore within the novel, and which rejects animals” (117). Empathy, for Deckard, is no longer “a culturally codified act of performance” (Vinci 107), a realization that concludes his transformation from a product of a transhumanist society into a critical posthumanist subject. A closer analysis of Deckard’s posthuman transformation will be given in chapter 5.

2.5. Concluding Remarks

In *Do Androids Dream*, humans have placed animals on a cultural pedestal by idolizing them primarily for their significance in relation to themselves. The anthropocentric construction of a hierarchical distinction between themselves as opposed to others allows for discriminatory practices against androids, because of their ostensible lack of empathy, and against specials, because of their inferior genetic and cognitive faculties. The character of Isidore, from the position of a dehumanized person, functions to reveal the pitfalls of transhumanism. His behavior toward animals, when contrasted with that of “regular” humans, sheds light on the constructed nature and artificiality of human empathy in a transhumanist society. It shows how transhumanism in practice is incompatible with true empathic consideration of non-human beings, and consequently leads to the dehumanization of others. The novel poses a challenge to the discourse of speciesism, whether Dick intended to do so or not, and calls for redefining the boundaries between human and non-human. It is an important work of fiction as it demonstrates the need, in Vint’s words, “to re-examine both the category of ‘animal’ and also our material relationships with non-human animals” (114). Cary Wolfe stresses the causal relationship between speciesism and other forms of discriminatory attitudes and behavior:

As long as this humanist and speciesist *structure* of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of whatever species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference. (*Animal Rites* 8)

In the novel, the system of exploitation of nonhuman animals that Wolfe refers to has been applied to the androids, who have replaced animals as commodified objects, which is what I examine further in the next chapter.

3. Human–Android Relations

So far, I have showed how humans position themselves in relation to animals, and how animals are only ideologically significant since they serve as “cultural signifiers” (Vinci 100). Above all, animals are a necessary tool for humans to distinguish themselves from the androids, since they act as the “transcendental marker of humanity’s unique ability to feel for or with the other” (93). Androids themselves also function to mark humans as unique, because the criterion for belonging to the category “human” demands the androids to be assigned “to the realm of the monstrous, thereby ensuring a clear boundary for the humans” (Nayar 120).

In this chapter, I analyze the human–android dichotomy and show how the nature of the distinction between the two is largely illusory. Of all the dichotomies in the novel, the human–android one is the main cause of concern, because the legitimacy of human superiority and the exploitation of androids depends on it. As Vinci writes, “In order to keep the myth of human exceptionalism alive, androids must remain culturally and ontologically marginalized, enabling a cultural displacement of the inherent absence in the human onto the android” (93). The implications of the human–android boundary being blurred, or even worse, becoming non-existent, would be devastating to the ideological foundations that the futuristic society is based upon. Therefore, humans must at all cost maintain the illusion of the human–android distinction.

I begin this chapter by showing the ways that androids, like animals, are exploited by humans, and how their commodification is not only necessary for humanity’s progress in the transhumanist society, but also a means to validate human exceptionalism. I go on to show how humans, without realizing, have become android-like themselves and, furthermore, how the android is the actualization of the posthuman form that transhumanists idealize. Then I look more closely at John Isidore and how his experience as a social outcast influences how he relates to the androids. Finally, I analyze Rick Deckard as a Cartesian subject whose interactions with the androids lead to a gradual disillusionment with the legitimacy of the human–android dichotomy and his job as a bounty hunter.

3.1. Commodification and Exploitation of Androids

In much the same way that animals in the novel's futuristic society are treated as glorified commodities for humanity's benefit, the androids are considered a necessary tool for humanity's progress. The space colonization program is entirely dependent on the android workforce. One of the incentives of emigrating to Mars is the promise of a "custom-tailored humanoid robot ... given to you on your arrival absolutely free, equipped fully, as specified by you before your departure from Earth" (14). For all intents and purposes, androids have replaced the position traditionally held by slaves and animals as objects of exploitation.

The exploitation of androids not only enables humanity's progress, but also operates as a way for humans to separate themselves as exceptional beings. The supposed lack of empathy in the androids excludes them from humanity and places them in the category of the "monstrous." As Nayar writes, "Life forms and bodies too distant from 'normal' humans—such as beasts—and too uncomfortably close—such as humanoid robots or creatures that exhibit human emotions and/or intelligence—are both equally monstrous in cultural representations of otherness" (115). The marginalization of androids as Others, allows humans to maintain their status as human. Nayar further points out that "[h]umanity survives by constructing modes of exclusion, and the monster's ontological liminality enables domination, persecution, incarceration/containment, exhibition/display, genocide, displacement and elimination of certain forms of life" (116). This exclusionary behavior stems from the speciesist value system, as I argued in chapter 2. Hayles further points out that since "animals, rapidly fading into extinction, have ceased to pose any conceivable threat to human domination" (175), this threat has now shifted to androids.

The subjugation of androids and the concurrent humanization of their physical and intellectual traits is highly problematic for society. The line between humans and androids is becoming ever thinner with each up-grade to the Nexus model of androids, and it is for this very reason that the Nexus-6 model of androids is considered such a great threat to humans, if one of them escapes Mars. Although androids "surpassed several classes of human specials in terms of intelligence" (25), and, as Deckard observes, "the servant had in some cases become more adroit than its master" (26), their anti-empathic tendencies indicates a capacity to harm others. In fact, it is implied that the fugitive androids have escaped by violent means. Androids themselves resent their status as mere expendable commodities and would rather risk being killed on Earth than

live as slaves on its space colonies. One of the androids explains this desire for freedom and autonomy: “It’s a chance anyway, breaking free and coming here to Earth, where we’re not even considered animals. Where every worm and wood louse is considered more desirable than all of us put together” (106). They are keenly aware of how humans view them, which aggravates their lack of empathy and even hate toward humans. Having the ability then to infiltrate society and easily blend in with its citizens poses a great threat for humans.

Even though androids are regarded as unfeeling objects and commodities, in many instances, the androids exhibit behavior that shows more sensitivity and feeling than humans. For instance, when Pris refers to Isidore as a “chickenhead,” Irmgard intervenes immediately: ““Don’t call him that, Pris,’ Irmgard said; she gave Isidore a look of compassion. ‘Think what he could call *you*’” (138). Irmgard responds to Isidore with more compassion than any human would, and for an android to show feelings of compassion, however slight, serves to highlight the anti-empathic and exclusionary behavior of humans. N. Katherine Hayles notes that the humanization of androids emphasizes the oppressive nature of their existence:

They think, feel outrage, bond with their fellows. Given their abilities, they should be able to participate in the social realm of human relations, but ... they can do so (legally) only as objects. In this view they are not objects improperly treated as if they were social beings but are social beings improperly treated as if they were objects. (169)

Although androids supposedly lack the group instinct that would allow them to bond, their behavior demonstrates that they care for each other. One of the androids, Rachael, confesses to Deckard that she and Luba Luft “had been close, very close friends for almost two years” (172). The humanization of the androids on the emotional level makes their commodification and exploitation by humans all the more problematic.

Having been implanted with false memories and experiences, Rachael expresses a sense of existential confusion at feeling that she is neither completely android nor can ever be completely human. When Deckard appeals to her for help in tracking down and killing the remaining androids, she notices that one of the androids on his list, Pris, is the same type as her, and is visibly troubled. Deckard questions if it is empathy that Rachael feels toward Pris, but she struggles to articulate what exactly she feels: “Something like that. Identification; there goes I” (164). She goes on: “I never felt this

way before. We *are* machines, stamped out like bottle caps. It's an illusion that I – I personally – really exist; I'm just representative of a type" (164). As Vinci points out, "While humans in the novel seek the ability to fuse, to share feelings, to merge into single, communal consciousness, Rachael struggles to individuate" (97). She is torn between the feeling of being an individual and the rational understanding that she is merely a type that marks the human as human. Rachael's existential confusion is indicative of the problem of the boundary between human and non-human becoming blurred. The state of being both biological and mechanical, both born and made, is a result of not only the humanization of androids, but also, as I argue below, the mechanization and consequent dehumanization of humans themselves.

3.2. The Androidization of Humans: The Threat of the Void and the Dangers of the Posthuman Form

In the novel, technology has been developed to help humans cope with the harsh, post-apocalyptic conditions on Earth, and it has ended up mediating every part of their lives. It is apparent from the opening line: "A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard" (1). The Penfield mood organ, which wakes him up, is used to artificially manipulate one's emotional states.¹ The name itself is an obvious reference to the Canadian-American neurosurgeon, Wilder Penfield, who is famous for having transformed the study of the human mind and brain. In his simulation studies, he probed different parts of the brain while his patient was still conscious to elicit various responses, which contributed greatly to understanding of the functional anatomy and mapping of the brain, among other things (Ruelland 66). Being able to manipulate people's minds and senses in this way showed the mechanical nature of the human brain, which the Penfield mood organ in the novel also serves to highlight. As Deckard goes off to work, he dials "for a creative and fresh attitude toward his job" (5), a manipulation of behavior mirrored in his pet electric sheep, which in the next scene is described as grazing in "simulated contentment" (5).

The true purpose of the mood organ is bleak when considering the condition of humans left on Earth who, as Vinci argues, are suffering from considerable personal and

¹ The mood organ described in the novel is virtually identical to the AI-controlled brain implants that are being developed by scientists today in order to treat mood disorders and other mental illnesses (see Reardon).

cultural trauma “caused by severe physical isolation, psychological alienation, and consistent and pervasive practices of discrimination” (92). Without the mood organs, humans would have to face the overwhelmingly dire reality of their isolated existence on a suffocating planet, a reality that is signified by “the void.” The void is described as a force of silence and emptiness that looms in the surroundings and penetrates uninhabited rooms and apartment buildings. The controlled stimulation provided by the mood organs as well as the distractions of Buster Friendly’s TV show, prevent most humans from experiencing the void.

Unlike Deckard, his wife Iran has become aware of the emptiness and lifelessness of their post-apocalyptic condition and can sense the ever-looming void. As a result, she suffers from crippling depression, but instead of alleviating it, she chooses to wallow in it. The mood organ could make it so that even though she intellectually knows the emptiness is there, she would no longer sense it. However, she feels it is unnatural and wrong to block those feelings: “I realized how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting. ... [T]hat used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it ‘absence of appropriate affect’” (3). Iran acknowledges the artificial nature of their existence and the very real need to *feel* the despair of humanity. She senses an urgency “to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth after everybody who’s smart has emigrated” (3). In an essay titled “The Android and the Human,” Dick writes that suffering itself is “an essential key revealing the authentically human” (*Shifting* 202), which is what Iran has become conscious of. Ironically, she relies on the mood organ to feel that despair, and has decided that twice a month is “a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything” (3). Even though she has taken the first step to becoming a more conscious human subject, one who is more in touch with herself, her environment, and others, she falls back on the passivity and compliancy of an artificially controlled reality. Following a heated argument, she even lets her husband dial her mood organ for “pleased acknowledgement of husband’s superior wisdom in all matters” (5), before he heads off to work.

Unlike Deckard and Iran, who rely on mood organs to filter their day-to-day lives, Isidore’s experience of his surroundings is unabated, save for the endless chatter of the TV set. As soon as he turns off the TV, his senses are overwhelmed by “the lungless, all-penetrating, masterful world-silence” (17):

It flashed from the woodwork and the walls; it smote him with an awful, total power, as if generated by a vast mill. ... It unleashed itself from the broken and semi-broken appliances in the kitchen, the dead machines which hadn't worked in all the time Isidore had lived here. ... It managed in fact to emerge from every object within his range of vision, as if it – the silence – meant to supplant all things tangible. Hence it assailed not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by the inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive. Alive! ... The silence of the world could not rein back its green. Not any longer. Not when it had virtually won. (16)

Isidore perceives the void as an animate, menacing force with a will of its own, an experience that is so powerful that it manifests as a synesthetic phenomenon. Whereas Deckard can dial the mood organ for a positive attitude as he leaves for work, Isidore, unable to manipulate his emotions, feels acute existential dread as he opens his door to leave his apartment: “He was not ready for the trip up those clanging stairs to the empty roof where he had no animal. The echo of himself ascending: the echo of nothing” (17). Living in the fringes of society, both geographically and socially, Isidore feels the threat of the void more powerfully than anyone else, because it not only signals his lack of human companionship and animal ownership, but also his ontological exclusion from the category of human. Having such an intense awareness of the void is thus closely linked to his anxiety of being considered subhuman. Indeed, he wonders if his experience of the void is “peculiar to his peculiar biological identity, a freak generated by his inept sensory apparatus?” (16). He *is* peculiar, but not because of any fault in his sensory experience, but because he is more in touch with his senses than anyone else. The over-powering effect of the void is also tied to his loss of identity, a point that I discuss in the next section.

Although the mood organs help humans alleviate the bleakness of their existence, having such a heavily moderated experience of the world has severe consequences, as evidenced in Deckard's and Iran's relationship. Their marriage is characterized by emotional detachment and coldness, which is symptomatic of the superficially controlled nature of their lives. Deckard responds to his wife's apathy and depression dismissively, as the emotional detachment between them leaves little room for sympathy. During a phone call with her, he thinks to himself: “her depression this time had become too vast for her even to hear him. For all intents he spoke into a vacuum. ... Most androids I've known have more vitality and desire to live than my

wife. She has nothing to give me” (82). He sees more value in androids, not only because killing them increases his earnings, but because he feels they have more *fight* in them than his wife. Much like the animals and androids, he also considers his wife a commodity, one that has become useless to him and whom he would rather get rid of.

The cause of Deckard’s cold detachment is that humans have been dehumanized by a forced separation between rationality and affect. Whereas Iran recognizes this separation—of intellectually knowing things but not feeling them—as unnatural and unhealthy, Deckard has fully accepted it as a natural way of thinking and being. As Dick writes, “‘Man’ or ‘human being’ are terms that we must understand correctly and apply, but they apply not to origin or to any ontology but to a way of being in the world” (*Shifting* 212). Without realizing it, Deckard’s way of being in the world has turned him into the very thing he despises: an android. Dick compares a schizoid person to an android, one who “thinks rather than feels his way through life. . . . Both have a mechanical, reflex quality” (*Shifting* 201). Deckard has unwittingly become this schizoid, android-like human. The words used by another bounty hunter to describe an android could very well be used to describe Deckard: “. . . cold. Extremely cerebral and calculating; detached” (101). As Sherryl Vint points out, “the risk faced by Deckard and other humans in the novel lies in realizing that they already are android-like, so long as they define their subjectivity based on the logical, rational, calculating part of human being” (112). Deckard comes to this realization at the end of the novel, a point that I return to in a later section.

In many ways, the android represents the posthuman form that transhumanism strives for. According to transhumanist philosopher Max More, “becoming post-human means exceeding the limitations that define the less desirable aspects of the ‘human condition’” (qtd. in Ryan 68). Transhumanism seeks to transcend human limitations by means of science and technology, and the humans in the novel do so by means of the mood organ, which enables them to either suppress or stimulate any given mental state for their own benefit. I would argue that humanoid robots represent the ultimate transcendence from human biological limitations. They epitomize the transformation into a superior thinking machine, one that can potentially exceed any physiological restrictions as well as surpass cognitive and intellectual constraints. Such an evolution would eventually lead to a loss in qualities that threaten to dehumanize humans, such as the loss of empathetic sensibilities toward others, as evident in the novel. The fact that human behavior in the novel is becoming increasingly android-like is evidence of this

gradual transformation into the idealized posthuman form. By manipulating their experience of the world that shuts off any acknowledgement of their own pain and trauma caused by the post-apocalyptic conditions, humans are unable to feel authentic empathy toward each other and other life forms. As Dick writes, “a human being without the proper empathy or feeling is the same as an android built so as to lack it, either by design or mistake” (*Shifting* 211). The ever-closing gap of the human–android dichotomy demands bounty hunters such as Deckard to control that boundary, to act as a “barrier which keeps the two distinct” (122). Paradoxically, in order to do so, Deckard must become android-like himself.

There is a scene in the novel that provides a perfect metaphor for the anxiety experienced by humans in the face of the void that threatens both from within and without them. In the museum, Deckard and the other bounty hunter, Phil Resch, come across the famous painting by Edvard Munch, titled “The Scream of Nature”:

The painting showed a hairless, oppressed creature ... its hands clapped in horror to its ears, its mouth open in a vast, soundless scream. Twisted ripples of the creature’s torment, echoes of its cry, flooded out into the air surrounding it; the man or woman, whichever it was, had become contained by its own howl. It covered its ears against its own sound. ... [T]he creature screamed in isolation. Cut off by – or despite – its outcry. (113)

Resch comments that the painting shows how an android must feel, and, indeed, moments later the android Luba Luft brings the painting to life when the bounty hunters confront her: “[S]he lay crouched against the wall of the elevator, screaming. Like the picture, Rick thought to himself, and, with his own laser tube, killed her” (116-117). The painting not only represents the terror felt by the androids, but also the acute anxiety humans feel as they recognize the hollowness and isolation of their existence on a lifeless, abandoned, silent planet. Humans have become less aware of and more detached from each other and their surroundings, and the painting represents the overwhelming horror of realizing their own androidization. The character who is in the least danger of becoming android-like, and, at the same time, the most aware of the void surrounding him, is John R. Isidore.

3.3. Isidore and Androids: Affinity with the Other

As I argued in chapter 2, despite his inferior status as a special, John Isidore is in many ways more human than “regular” humans. He resents his inability to separate rational thinking from his emotions, because society has conditioned him to think that this makes him inferior: “I’ve become strange. They say chickenheads are like that” (55). However, this inability to separate rationality and affect actually makes him less strange and more human than the rest.

In certain ways, Isidore embodies the critical posthumanist way of conceptualizing others. As I mentioned in chapter 2, Isidore does not discriminate between the suffering of real or ersatz animal, and this rejection of hierarchical boundaries derives from him being rejected from the category of human. The fact that his own sense of selfhood and identity is fragile and confused, influences how he perceives others—whether authentic or synthetic, real or robotic, human or non-human—as deserving of equal consideration. Even though, on the one hand, he approves of the speciesist social hierarchy by accepting his status as “special,” on the other hand, his inclusionary compassion rejects that very same hierarchy. In this sense, Isidore is, as Vinci puts it, “suspended somewhere between the world of human exceptionalism and the world of posthuman openness” (104). But since critical posthumanism “critiques the humanist and transhumanist centrality of reason and rationality ... and offers a more inclusive and therefore ethical understanding of life” (Nayar 19), my claim is that the character of Isidore represents this facet of posthumanist thought. Nayar writes:

Posthumanism as a philosophical approach involves a rethinking of the very idea of subjectivity because it sees human subjectivity as an assemblage, co-evolving with machines and animals. It also calls for a more inclusive definition of life, and a greater moral– ethical response, and responsibility, to non-human life forms in the age of species blurring and species mixing. Posthumanism therefore has a definite politics in that it interrogates the hierarchic ordering—and subsequently exploitation and even eradication—of life forms. (19)

Isidore’s interaction with the androids shows that he has internalized an inclusive critical posthumanist way of conceptualizing the world. In a sense, Isidore is also the only true follower of Mercerism in the novel, a religion that, as Vint puts it, “rejects boundaries between self and other and hierarchies among living beings” (117).

Furthermore, Isidore's own experience as an outcast from the human community makes him empathize with the plight of the androids. As an individual that has been cut off from humanity, he cannot define himself in contrast to androids as other humans do. The loss of his human identity, then, allows him to extend his empathy indiscriminately. This is why when he finally figures out what the androids are, his immediate reaction is one of solidarity: "But what does it matter to me? I mean, I'm a special; they don't treat me very well either, like for instance I can't emigrate" (142). The androids in turn show signs of sympathy toward Isidore when they realize his desire to help them: "he knows us and he likes us and an emotional acceptance like that – it's everything to him. It's hard for us to grasp that, but it's true" (143).

As I mentioned earlier, the ever-looming threat of the void is linked to Isidore's anxiety over the loss of his identity as human. The threat of the void is as powerful as the threat of so-called "kipple-ization." Whereas the void is a force of silence and emptiness, kipple is the overaccumulation and deterioration of matter into "entropic ruin" (17):

Eventually everything within the building would merge, would be faceless and identical, mere pudding-like kipple piled to the ceiling of each apartment. And, after that, the uncared-for building itself would settle into shapelessness, buried under the ubiquity of the dust. By then, naturally, he himself would be dead, another interesting event to anticipate as he stood here in his stricken living room along with the lungless, all-penetrating, masterful world-silence. (17)

Isidore feels that he is in danger of turning into living kipple and losing himself in the entropic decay of inhumanity, or as Toth puts it, "lost to an undifferentiated and categorically *not*-human milieu" (69). He can feel the kipple taking over: "Every day he declined in sagacity and vigor. He and the thousands of other specials throughout Terra, all of them moving toward the ash heap. Turning into living kipple" (63). What Isidore does not realize is that the androids are the kipple that ultimately "drives out nonkipple" (56); they are both the void and kipple manifest.

Once Isidore has established a social relationship with the androids, and feels accepted by them, his self-identity comes to rely on them. He eventually realizes that the androids are using him, but shrugs it off: "I think, he thought, they're exploiting me sort of. But he did not care. They're still good friends to have, he said to himself" (178).

In fact, the companionship that the androids provide becomes the very thing that anchors his sense of self:

In the absence of the Batys and Pris he found himself fading out, becoming strangely like the inert television set which had just unplugged. You have to be with other people, he thought. In order to live at all. I mean, before they came here I could stand it, being alone in the building. But now it's changed. You can't go back, he thought. You can't go from people to nonpeople. (178)

Because Isidore has been excluded from humanity, he remains in the vulnerable state of existential limbo until he meets the androids. His empathic openness toward the androids then causes him to become their organic extension, so that in their absence he becomes lifeless and static—living kipple. The affinity that he feels for the androids gives him not only a sense of purpose and meaning, but also ontological security without which he can no longer function. In this sense, he is no longer a self-contained subject, but rather has become, in the posthuman sense, “enmeshed with the environment and technology” (Nayar 13).

3.4. Deckard and Androids: The Dilemma of the Cartesian Cogito

It is no accident that Rick Deckard's name is very similar to that of René Descartes; there are clear parallels between the bounty hunter and the seventeenth century French philosopher. Cartesian philosophy was born out of a combination of Renaissance humanism and Christian doctrine, which emphasized the centrality of humanity's place in the universe and completely undermined the value of non-human life (Singer 200). In *Discourse on Method*, first published in 1637, Descartes famously wrote, “I think, therefore I am” (21), a statement that underlies what he believed to be the essential division between humans and automated animals. Cartesianism insists on an ontological mind-body dualism that separates the human from the rest of nature. According to Descartes, humans have unique access to the mind, or *cogito*, while animals are mere machine-bodies without self-conscious thought. He maintained that although some animals have superior physiological traits that allow them to

exhibit more dexterity than we do in some of their actions, we at the same time observe that they do not manifest any dexterity at all in many others. Hence the fact that they do better than we do, does not prove that they are endowed with mind, for in this case they would have more reason than any of us, and would

surpass us in all other things. It rather shows that they have no reason at all, and that it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs, just as a clock, which is only composed of wheels and weights is able to tell the hours and measure the time more correctly than we can do with all our wisdom. (Descartes 36)

Whereas Descartes made a clear distinction between rational humans and irrational animals, in Dick's novel, the criterion for distinguishing humans from androids is not one of rationality, but of empathy. Even though the Nexus-6 androids are virtually identical to human beings—and in some cases even superior in terms of intellect and physiology—as mere machines, they are supposedly unable to access instinctual empathy or make any sense of the fusion practiced by followers of Mercerism. Thus, just as “Cartesianism gives humans an alibi for their lack of concern for, or even cruelty towards, animals” (Ryan 9), so does it justify the enslavement and exploitation of androids in the novel.

As a bounty hunter, Deckard depends on the human–android distinction to hunt and kill the escaped androids, a distinction that he continuously justifies to himself. He relies on the coldness that he senses in the androids: “Her tone held cold reserve – and that other cold, which he had encountered in so many androids. Always the same: great intellect, ability to accomplish much, but also this. He deplored it. And yet, without it, he could not track them down” (86-87). He likens androids to carnivorous animals who must hunt and kill in order to survive, and who would starve if they felt any empathy at all: “Evidently the humanoid robot constituted a solitary predator. Rick liked to think of them that way; it made his job palatable” (27). For Deckard to stomach the killing of the humanoid robots, he must actively apply a Cartesian subjectivity that regards them as cold and calculating killers:

For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot, which had killed its master, which had been equipped with an intelligence greater than that of many human beings, which had no regard for animals, which possessed no ability to feel empathic joy for another life form's success or grief at its defeat – that, for him, epitomized The Killers. (27)

Furthermore, both Deckard and Phil Resch make a conscious effort to objectify the androids by referring to them as objects. They use words such as “it” and “thing,” even though Deckard claims to no longer feel the need to do so when Resch questions him

about it: “I did at one time ... [w]hen my conscience occasionally bothered me about the work I had to do; I protected myself by thinking of them that way but now I no longer find it necessary” (109). Here Deckard admits that the job has at some point troubled his conscience, but by objectifying the androids in a Cartesian way, he has been able to overcome any qualms with the nature of his job.

In order to apply the Cartesian cogito, Deckard must think and act through pure intellect and reason, without emotion and affect. He is often described as cerebral, not unlike a machine, for instance, when thinking: “the conduits of his brain humming, calculating, and selecting” (108). Isidore’s impression of the bounty hunter is very revealing as it is very similar to the image of an android:

He had an indistinct, glimpsed darkly impression: of something merciless that carried a printed list and a gun, that moved machine-like through the flat, bureaucratic job of killing. A think without emotions, or even a face; a think that if killed got replaced immediately by another resembling it. And so on, until everyone real and alive had been shot. (138)

Even Iran sees Deckard’s job for what it is, when at the beginning of the book, she accuses him of being “a murderer hired by the cops” (1). There is a part of Deckard that recognizes the true nature of his job: *he* is the solitary predator, “The Killer”; *he* has become the android. Ironically, by continuously applying a purely rational Cartesian way of thinking, he has become like the very thing he must eliminate. The android Luba Luft is the first to explicitly comment on Deckard’s android-like behavior. When she tries to convince him that she is human by offering to help him find the other androids, he answers: “An android ... doesn’t care what happens to another android. That’s one of the indications we look for” (88). To this she replies, “Then ... you must be an android” (88), implying that killing androids makes him one of them. Indeed, Deckard has regressed to what Dick calls, “pseudohuman behavior” (*Shifting* 187), having been transformed into one of the instruments of the government body that reduces “humans to mere use—men made into machines” (*Shifting* 187). The question of his own identity and the growing awareness of his own androidization begins to have an effect on his performance as a bounty hunter.

There are instances throughout the novel where, like Isidore, Deckard feels discomfort at having to separate rational thinking from his emotions, a feeling that grows as the story progresses. He is conscious of feeling a physical and emotional

attraction to some androids, noting how odd it is “knowing intellectually that they were machines but emotionally reacting anyhow” (83). This sensation becomes more pronounced when he encounters Luba Luft, who is one of the escaped androids masquerading as a professional opera singer. When he first hears her sing, he is impressed by her skill: “[H]e found himself surprised at the quality of her voice; it rated with that of the best, even that of notables in his collection of historic tapes. The Rosen Association built her well, he had to admit” (85). By admiring the android’s skill, Deckard has taken the first step in acknowledging her as more than a mere commodity, and allowing himself to feel something beyond what is rational.

His next observation regarding Luba is significant for its underlying implication: “Perhaps the better she functions, the better a singer she is, the more I am needed. If the androids had remained substandard, like the ancient q-40s made by Derain Associates – there would be no problem, and no need of my skill” (85-86). He realizes that bounty hunters are needed to create the barrier between humans and androids because otherwise there would be no significant difference between the two to justify the exploitation and killing of the other. This points to the fact that the human–android dichotomy is essentially illusory. As Vint observes, “once he has this insight that his skill is about *making* rather than *policing* a boundary, Deckard is unable to continue as before” (116, emphases added).

Vint makes another important observation about Deckard’s interaction with Luba, when he buys her a book from the museum gift-shop. The act of buying and giving a book and not expecting anything in return further acknowledges the android as more than a mere machine, as an individual capable of enjoying the gift, even if for a short while. After she is killed, he burns the book, much to the perplexity of Phil Resch who only sees the cost value of the book. For Deckard, instead of seeing Luba as a means to receive his paycheck, he demonstrates his humanity by initiating a social interaction, one that does not “reduce Luba to simply a commodity or ... allow his interactions with her to be on the level of commodity exchange” (Vint 120). Nayar writes that “[t]he ability of the monster to feel ‘human’ emotions is usually presented as a redeeming feature. Here, essentializing the human as one possessing certain kinds of emotions ... is a cultural construction” (119). By allowing Luba the enjoyment of a having received a present, Deckard humanizes her, which changes how he relates to her, and further obscures the separation between human and android. For Deckard, her

redeeming features are very subtle, but enough to cause him to re-evaluate the differences between humans and androids.

Because of these gradual steps toward viewing androids as more than mere objects and commodities, Deckard is put off by the other bounty hunter Resch, who, in his view, kills the androids a little too easily. Deckard has become disillusioned by the whole idea of legitimizing the act of killing, and tells Resch: “You don’t kill the way I do; ... You like to kill. All you need is a pretext. If you had a pretext you’d kill me” (119). Deckard is convinced that Resch is actually an android who has been implanted with false human memories, and since Resch is not sure about his own humanity either, they decide to administer the Voigt-Kampff test on him. Resch notes that if he proves to be an android, Deckard will “undergo renewed faith in the human race” (121), but if not, Deckard would have to reframe his ideology so as to explain Resch as human. After confirming that Resch really is human, Deckard says: “There is a defect in your empathic, role-taking ability. One which we don’t test for. Your feelings toward androids” (122). Deckard is baffled by his own consideration of empathy toward the androids, how his feelings toward Luba Luft and Phil Resch “were the reverse of those intended” (124):

He had never thought of it before, had never felt any empathy on his own part toward the androids he killed. Always he had assumed that throughout his psyche he experienced the android as a clever machine – as in his conscious view. And yet, in contrast to Phil Resch, a difference had manifested itself. And he felt instinctively that he was right. 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. (122)

Deckard is for the first time facing another bounty hunter, “a predatory one who seemed to like to destroy [androids]” (151), and for the first time fully acknowledges the anti-empathic nature of his job. Deckard’s new understanding of the bounty hunter as a predator, in addition to his appreciation of the android as more than a mere machine, has an irreversible effect on his Cartesian cogito. As Vint notes, “Deckard’s discovery that he feels empathy for androids is the first sign that he is becoming a new sort of human, one who cannot separate cognition from affect, and thus is resisting becoming like an android himself” (116).

Deckard further cements his empathetic feelings toward androids when he meets with Rachael at the hotel. After killing Luba, Resch recognizes Deckard's conflicting feelings and tells him to "[w]ake up and face yourself, Deckard. You wanted to go to bed with a female type of android – nothing more, nothing less" (125). He advises Deckard to have sex with an android, and then kill her afterward, in order to overcome the psychological barrier. Deckard falling in love with the android Rachael, who, after they have had sex, reveals her true intentions: "No bounty hunter ever has gone on," Rachael said. 'After being with me. Except one. A very cynical man. Phil Resch. And he's nutty; he works out in left field on his own'" (172). Devastated, Deckard is then left with the choice to kill the android, but if he were to do so, then, as Toth observes, "he will be no better, or *no more human*, than Resch" (78), the bounty hunter who has come to represent everything he despises. The true test comes when Deckard faces Pris, the android who is physically identical to Rachael: "there can be a legion of her, each with its own name, but all Rachael Rosen – Rachael, the prototype, used by the manufacturer to protect the others" (193). Deckard eventually ends up killing Pris, the full implications of which I discuss in a later section.

3.5. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have shown how the transhumanist ideology that the novel depicts seeks to perfect the human condition but, in doing so, dehumanizes humans, not only by discriminating against those considered inferior like Isidore, but also by weakening the connection to themselves, each other, and their surroundings. This is evident in the behavior of Deckard and his wife, and in the artificial and detached nature of their lives. In many ways, androids are the actualization of the posthuman form that transhumanists idealize, as they represent the human as a perfected construct that has lost their capacity for empathy. The only way for humans to hold on to their humanity is by convincing themselves that they still have this essential feature that their automated counterparts lack. However, as I have shown, even this empathy is deeply flawed. Isidore stands in contrast to this ideology as he exhibits indiscriminate empathy and inclusionary behavior toward the androids, thus reflecting a worldview more in line with critical posthumanism.

Deckard is beginning to understand that his job as a bounty hunter requires of him to violate his identity as a human. Since humanity defines itself against androids, killing them, as is the job of bounty hunters, is supposed to legitimize the status of

humans as distinct and superior. Paradoxically, it is the very act that makes Deckard into something of an android. If the only human feature left is that of empathy, then he can no longer call himself human. Dick writes, “the difference between what I call the ‘android mentality’ and the human is that the latter passed through something the former did not, or at least passed through it and responded differently—*changed*, altered, what it did and hence what it was; it *became*” (*Shifting* 203). The story of Deckard is a story of that transformation, from android-like Cartesian cogito, to a new kind of critical posthumanist understanding of the world, which I discuss in the next chapter.

4. Probing Posthumanism: Empathy and Mercerism

In the previous chapters, I have shown how most humans in the novel have lost a sense of genuine empathy toward each other, as shaped by the anthropocentric values imposed by their society. The empathy that they practice by owning and caring for animals functions above all as a way for humans to display their humanity, and does not reflect genuine compassion for animals. Humans have in many ways become android-like, exhibiting the very characteristics that they despise in their robotic counterparts.

At this point, it is important to look more closely at the concept of empathy. I have so far treated empathy as a rather one-dimensional feature that individuals either possess or lack, or as something that is either genuine or fake. In this chapter, I clarify the distinction between two types of empathy manifested in the main characters of the novel: *emotional* empathy and *cognitive* empathy. My claim is that the difference between the two provides crucial insight into the characters' behavior.

Although empathy must be re-examined with these new concepts in mind, one of the major themes in the novel still remains the question of authenticity: What is genuine? What is fake? In the age of humanoid robots, humans have reached a point where even the authenticity of their own humanity in the posthuman world is in doubt. Mercerism is subject to this same challenge when at the end of the novel it is revealed that the religion is founded on lies and deceit, and the sacred figure of Wilbur Mercer is no more than a hired actor. However, despite this revelation, both Deckard and Isidore go on to have genuinely transformative quasi-spiritual experiences that involve Mercer appearing to them and giving them guidance. Before analyzing these encounters and their implications, I look more closely at the religion of Mercerism and examine its real purpose in the novel. First, I discuss the dual nature of empathy.

4.1. Emotional Empathy and Cognitive Empathy

Empathy can be defined as a “sensitivity to, and understanding of, the mental states of others” (Smith 3), and its evolutionary origins stem from the demands of a complex social environment. Empathy is central to human behavior, as it facilitates socially inclusive behavior such as bonding, altruism, and group cohesion, but at the same time “helps us to manipulate or deceive people to our own advantage and gives us a chance of realizing when someone is lying or holding a false belief” (4). These two

facets of empathy are what psychologists have identified respectively as *emotional* empathy (EE)—or “the vicarious sharing of emotion”—and *cognitive* empathy (CE)—or “mental perspective taking” (3). A psychologically healthy individual would have a balance of both EE and CE. Cases where either type of empathy dominates the other are linked to various personality and developmental disorders, such as psychopathy, autism, and Williams syndrome.

Individuals with cognitive empathy deficit disorder have lowered CE ability but higher EE sensitivity. EE enables people to share each other’s emotions and experiences, and feel them as their own, but without CE to balance it out, they can experience “major social problems and a reduced tendency to understand others’ behavior in mental state terms” (Smith 9). With lowered CE an individual would have

difficulty communicating and they would struggle to understand deception.

They might be gullible and honest. They might behave unconventionally and lack awareness of how others perceive their behavior. [They] might find the social world confusing, unpredictable, or frightening. They would be highly sensitive to the expressed basic emotions of others. (In emotional terms, they might have a confusingly permeable sense of self.) (9)

John Isidore’s behavior throughout the novel is indicative of cognitive empathy deficit disorder. He is depicted as having severe anxiety in normal social situations, so that even making a vidcall reduces him to terrified stuttering: “I c-c-can’t use the vidphone,” Isidore protested, his heart laboring. ‘Because I’m hairy, ugly, dirty, stooped, snaggle-toothed, and gray’” (68). He deplores his job as an electric animal repairman because of how emotionally affected he is by the suffering of animals even though they are synthetic. With a balance of CE, he would be able to rationally overlook their suffering, but instead, as his co-worker points out, “[t]o him they’re all alive, false animals included” (67). Vinci argues that since “the codes of anthropocentric human culture have thoroughly colonized his worldview” (104), Isidore’s sensitivity to the suffering of animals is not a mark of genuine empathy, but rather a sign of his desire to belong to the category of human from which he has been excluded. Indeed, as evident in constant self-belittlement, Isidore’s low sense of self-worth is very much rooted in his acquired status of “special”: “Nothing depressed him more than the moments in which he contrasted his current mental powers with what he had formerly possessed” (63). However, I would disagree with Vinci, because even though Isidore desperately wants to be classed as human, his empathy is a genuine emotional reaction, because it

naturally extends to the androids as well. His EE sensitivity and lowered CE abilities, makes it so that he is emotionally affected not only by the suffering of ersatz animals, but also by the suffering of humanoid robots, which is decidedly contrary to “the codes of anthropocentric human culture” (Vinci 104). He even admires the androids for their higher mental capacity: “I wish I has an IQ like you have; then I could pass the test, I wouldn’t be a chickenhead. I think you’re very superior; I could learn a lot from you” (142). It is in his interactions with the androids where his EE sensitivity and CE deficit is most evident, and where he shows that he is truly different from other humans.

Isidore’s emotional sensitivity makes it so that he is able to pick up on the androids’ frightened state in his apartment building, even before meeting them face-to-face: “He sensed, behind the closed door, the presence of life, beyond that of the TV. His straining faculties manufactured or else picked up a haunted, tongueless fear, by someone retreating from him” (53). Although he is welcoming of the androids and sensitive to their desperate circumstance, he also senses something abnormal in their demeanor without being able to understand what it is. After reassuring the android Pris of his good intentions, he notices something odd in her:

Now that the initial fear had diminished, something else had begun to emerge from her. Something more strange. And, he thought, deplorable. A coldness. Like, he thought, a breath from the vacuum between inhabited world, in fact from nowhere: it was not what she did or said but what she did *not* do and say. (58)

The cold vacuum that Isidore senses is the void embodied in the android, which he has been aware of in his surroundings, but for the first time encounters in another being. He recognizes this void in the other androids as well:

[Irmgard], too, like her husband, seemed strangely resigned, despite her superficial agitation. All of them, Isidore thought; they’re all strange. He sensed it without being able to finger it. As if a peculiar and malign *abstractness* pervaded their mental processes. (136)

Owing to his lowered CE, it takes him a long time to figure out that the androids are not human. But when he finally does, because of his heightened EE, he nevertheless chooses to help the androids. However, having little CE makes it difficult for Isidore to understand others’ hidden intentions and motives, which makes him vulnerable to manipulation. This is related to what Adam Smith refers to as “a confusingly permeable

sense of self” (9), a facet of Isidore’s character that I discussed in chapter 3. His empathic openness leaves him exposed and susceptible to outside forces of influence.

Despite their superior intelligence, androids find it difficult to understand Isidore’s EE sensitivity, which is one of the characteristics of someone with emotional empathy deficit disorder, consisting of low EE sensitivity but high CE ability. Whereas EE enables people to resonate with each other on an emotional level, CE involves a rational understanding of another person. Smith describes people with a CE-dominated empathic imbalance as having

a strong tendency to understand others’ behavior in mental state terms. They would not find the social world confusing and would have good or excellent social skills. They might appear to be charming people. They would have a good cognitive understanding of other people’s mental states but minimal capacity to share the emotions of others. (In emotional terms they would have a very narrow sense of self). They might be highly skilled in the arts of manipulation, pretense, and deception. Their CE ability would enable them to appear to be sensitive to others’ emotions but their behavior would not be limited by those emotions. [They] would be selfish and tend to harm or exploit others. They would be unlikely to form enduring friendships or to be faithful to sexual partners. (9-10)

These characteristics of a person with high CE ability describes the androids. Although they show some sensitivity to Isidore’s emotions, the androids still manipulate him for their own purposes. They demonstrate little care for anyone but themselves, and cannot understand Isidore’s distress when they dissect a live spider purely out of curiosity. When the leader of the renegade androids, Roy Baty, delivers news to Pris about the death of Luba and the other androids, he smiles “as if, perversely, it pleased him to be telling this. As if he derived pleasure from Pris’s shock” (135). Deckard also observes similar discord in Rachael’s behavior:

She smiled innocuously – at variance with her words. At this point he could not discern her degree of seriousness. A topic of world-shaking importance, yet dealt with facetiously; an android trait, possible, he thought. No emotional awareness, no feeling-sense of the actual *meaning* of what she said. Only the hollow, formal, intellectual definitions of the separate terms. (165)

The android is an imitation of the human, and so in order to pass as human, androids by their very nature must be “highly skilled in the arts of manipulation, pretense, and

deception” (Smith 10), all of which are human features. Although Isidore and Deckard can recognize an unnatural emotional detachment that gives them away as android, the androids are still able to manipulate both Isidore and Deckard.

Deckard, having become android-like himself, also behaves as a person with little EE sensitivity and high CE ability, and in fact, his job as a bounty hunter depends on it. In order to hunt down androids, he must adopt their mentality so that he can kill them without any emotional repercussions. His heightened CE and low EE sensitivity is directly linked to his Cartesian subjectivity and a dualistic conception of others. A Cartesian understanding of another person’s thoughts and feelings assumes that “[t]he other person’s mind, if it exists, is only conceivable by that person in the same manner that I conceive my own mind as an internal realm. The only way to understand the other’s mind is to observe the bodily behavior and then infer or self-simulate” (Tanaka 459). In such a way, Deckard can rationally understand his wife’s misery and the androids’ strife, but does not emotionally connect. However, when Deckard realizes that he is beginning to show signs of EE toward the android Luba Luft, he immediately goes out to buy the goat “in an attempt to embrace the emotional and instinctive part of himself, yet still direct his empathy toward appropriate objects” (Vint 121). Vint argues that trying to control emotional empathy only strengthens his Cartesian subjectivity, which is why when Iran suggests that they share their joy of having a new pet animal by means of fusion through the empathy box, Deckard responds: “They’ll have our joy ... but we’ll lose. We’ll exchange what we feel for what they feel. Our joy will be lost” (151). Although he is becoming more emotionally empathetic, Deckard still prefers to think of himself as an individual rather than a part of a whole, and the purpose of fusion is lost on him. But what *is* the purpose of Mercerism and the ritual of fusion? Below, I examine the religion, its practices, and its overall implications in the novel.

4.2. The Purpose of Mercerism

Mercerism is central to the functioning of the futuristic society in which humans have become emotionally disconnected and distant from each other. Not only does the theology help humans cope with alienation from nature by sanctifying animals and requiring humans to care for them, it also provides an embodied connection to other humans and nurtures a sense of community. The empathy box allows for the ritual of fusion, which involves both physical and spiritual unity with everyone in the universe.

Upon clutching the handles of the empathy box, the body and mind of the self and others merge through the Christ-like figure of Wilbur Mercer, “an archetypal entity from the stars, superimposed on our culture by a cosmic template” (60). A person is transported into the virtual reality of a dreary and decaying landscape where they experience the pain and suffering of Mercer as he climbs a hill. As he ascends, rocks are hurled at him from unknown assailants until he falls back down the hill into the tomb world, “a pit of corpses and dead bones” (20) of animals, from which he, much like Sisyphus, struggles to climb back up and repeat the cycle. Mercer’s struggle of ascension connects humans to each other and provides the feeling of embodied empathy.

Although Isidore is unable to own and care for an animal, which is expected of every Mercerite, he is portrayed as the most devout follower of the religion. The empathy box is especially important because it allows him to feel connected with the rest of humanity when in every other way he has been alienated: “But an empathy box ... is the most personal possession you have! It’s an extension of your body; it’s the way you touch other humans, it’s the way you stop being alone” (57). Shogo Tanaka notes that humans are able to experience others directly through one’s perception: “In these experiences, others do not appear as mere physical entities or inaccessible minds, as in the case of Cartesian reflection, but as whole persons who are not divided into the body and mind” (459). Similarly, the practice of fusion allows for humans to experience each other as an undivided entity through the compound figure of Mercer, not only in the communal sense, but also in the corporeal sense.

However, as with most facets of the society, what on the surface may seem to work for the benefit of humanity, disguises a darker side. One of the central practices of Mercerism is based on the exploitation of animals. As Hayles notes, the novel “emphasizes the capitalist marketing of animals, an industry fuelled by the religious significance that owning an animal has under Mercerism” (175). Thus, the cult-like following “joins with capitalism to create a system in which the financially privileged merge seamlessly with the religiously sanctified” (175). Moreover, fusion serves its practitioners like a drug that, much like the mood organ, brings temporary relief from their dreary existence, as in the case of Iran: “I had hold of the handles of the box today and it overcame my depression a little ... And I remember thinking how much better we are, how much better off, when we’re with Mercer” (150). Furthermore, even though fusion is a practice based on communion with others, it is also an act of detachment, as

Deckard observes in his wife: “Going over to the empathy box she quickly seated herself and once more gripped the twin handles. She became involved almost at once. Rick stood holding the phone receiver, conscious of her mental departure. Conscious of his own aloneness” (153). This paradoxical effect of both fusing and separating people, reflects what Toth identifies as the central tension in the novel, that is, “the tension between a need to experience empathy ... and the paradoxical desire to assert and maintain a sense of selfhood” (67). The experience of fusion itself is described as being a sort of schizophrenic communion: “[Isidore] experienced them, the others, incorporated the babble of their thoughts, heard in his own brain the noise of their many individual existences” (18). This has an adverse effect on someone like Isidore whose sense of self is already confused and vulnerable. He believes that fusion is necessary because it provides immediate relief from the void that penetrates his apartment building and threatens to further estrange him from humanity. It is a way for him to escape kipple, the force of entropy: “the entire universe is moving toward a final state of total, absolute kipple-ization ... Except of course for the upward climb of Wilbur Mercer” (57). Despite the relief that fusion provides from the forces of absence and entropy, it further complicates his sense of self.

The “mental departure” that Deckard witnesses in Iran as she grabs the handles of the empathy box indicates an even more serious problem. Isidore is close to figuring out the truth when he wonders why Buster Friendly, the TV talk show host, continuously tries to undermine the religion:

Why did Buster Friendly always chip away at Mercerism? No one else seemed bothered by it; even the UN approved. And the American and Soviet police had publicly stated that Mercerism reduced crime by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbors. Mankind needs more empathy, Titus Corning, the UN Secretary General, had declared several times. Maybe Buster is jealous, Isidore conjectured. Sure, that would explain it; he and Wilbur Mercer are in competition. But for what? Our mind, Isidore decided. *They’re fighting for control of our psychic selves*; the empathy box on one hand, Buster’s guffaws and off-the-cuff jibes on the other. (65, emphasis added)

As Isidore observes, the religion and the practice of fusion functions as an opiate of the people, fostering passivity among citizens and making them easier for the government to control. Isidore’s suspicion is confirmed toward the end when Buster Friendly, who turns out to be an android, exposes Mercerism as a sham: “Wilbur Mercer is not human,

does not in fact exist. The world in which he climbs is a cheap, Hollywood, commonplace sound stage which vanished into kipple years ago” (182). He goes on to suggest the true implications of the religion:

Ask yourselves what is it that Mercerism does. Well, if we're to believe its many practitioners, the experience fuses ... men and women throughout the Sol System into a single entity. But an entity which is manageable by the so-called telepathic voice of 'Mercer.' ... An ambitious politically minded would-be Hitler could—” (182-183).

Mercerism holds the power to pacify and control a population of humans that might otherwise have the potential to rise up against the state that suppresses them. Thus, from the android's point of view, humans are prisoners of an illusion. The androids scorn empathy, because they see it as a means to deceive humans into thinking that they are a special category, superior to androids. However, as Neil Easterbrook points out, what the androids cannot understand is that although Mercerism is revealed to be ontologically ingenuine, it is no less ethically useful (389). They think that by unmasking Wilbur Mercer as a fraud and Mercerism as a hoax, humans would give up empathy. As I discuss in the next sections, Mercer still plays a key role toward the end of the novel when both Deckard and Isidore have revelatory and transformative posthuman experiences, both of which involve an animal.

4.3. Isidore and the Spider: Mutilation and Restoration

While harbouring the escaped androids, Isidore feels his sense of self waning, and his loss of identity reaches its culmination when he discovers a spider in his apartment building. The animal is mentioned earlier, when Deckard contemplates the qualities that separate humans from animals and androids: “the emphatic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; 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” (26). Deckard conceives the spider as an android-like anti-empathic predator, and therefore classifies it as the least human-like animal. However, when Isidore finds the spider—“undistinguished but alive” (179)—it is sacred in his eyes, which makes its subsequent mutilation all the more traumatic for him.

When Isidore presents the spider to the androids, they are fascinated with it, particularly with its numerous legs: “Why couldn't it get by on four? Cut four off and

see” (179). They proceed to clip the spider’s legs off one by one with “a pair of clean, sharp cuticle scissors” (179), echoing, as Toth puts it, “the cold objectivity of scientists engaged in exploratory vivisection” (70). Isidore is struck by a “weird terror” (179) in the face of such cold-blooded torture, and pleads for the androids to stop, but to no avail. For the first time, the androids reveal their true, megalomaniac nature to Isidore. As Vinci notes, for Isidore “[t]o witness an event of such extreme ‘inhuman’ cruelty breaks his notion of personhood as well as his conception of the divine category of animal” (105).

In their experiment with the spider, the androids essentially seek to answer, how many parts of the spider can be taken away and still call it a spider? Like Cartesian scientists who have no concern for the pain inflicted on the animal, they probe at the boundaries of the spider’s ontology. In this sense, the mutilation of the spider represents the mutilation of the ontological category of the human that transhumanists enact in their aim to achieve a perfected posthuman. The danger in experimenting with the limitations of human ontology and picking away at the parts that they deem unnecessary or restricting, is that they are liable to strip away parts of the human to the point where the human is utterly dehumanized. Thus, the mutilation of the spider not only signals the dehumanization of Isidore, but also demonstrates the inhumanity of the androids, so that “[b]y the end of the scene, then, neither the androids nor Isidore are identifiable as (human) subjects” (Toth 71). With their humanity destroyed, “[t]he corpse of the spider has taken over” (185).

The mutilation of the spider coincides with the revelation that Mercerism is a sham, and thus, causes a parallel destruction of Isidore’s “primary system of beliefs that structures his identity” (Vinci 105). With each snip of a leg, Buster Friendly is heard on TV revealing Mercerism and the experience of fusion as an elaborate hoax. With this revelation, Isidore’s reality comes crashing down: “...the spider is gone; Mercer is gone; he saw the dust and the ruin of the apartment as it lay spreading out everywhere – he heard the kipple coming, the final disorder of all forms, the absence which would win out” (185). Vinci notes that “[w]ithin this traumatic space, [Isidore] confronts the dissolution of not only his human self but also his entire environment-world” (105), and, as Toth puts it, “succumbs to an extreme form of ‘psychotic schizophrenia’” (71).

As his world begins to fall apart and objects in his immediate surroundings begin to dissolve at his touch, Isidore suddenly finds himself in the tomb world. Hayles writes that the tomb world represents what Dick describes as the mental state of

someone in severe mental distress: “The dreariness, the hopelessness, the feeling that time has stopped and there is nothing to do but wait, the deadness inside projected onto an exterior landscape” (176). She further notes that “[t]he tomb world appears in several of Dick’s fictions from the mid-sixties, and it is always associated with a deep confusion of inside/outside boundaries” (176). Thus, the tomb world indicates Isidore’s loss of the self at the hands of the androids.

Despite the disintegration and displacement that he experiences within and without him, Isidore speaks out against the androids, saying, “Mercerism isn’t finished” (184). This pronouncement of his faith allows him to have an experience in which Mercer appears to him. In the ensuing exchange, Mercer confirms Buster Friendly’s revelation that he is merely an actor playing a part, and explains that Isidore is “too close” (187) to see Mercerism for what it really is: “You have to be a long way off, the way the androids are. They have better perspective” (187). Toth offers an interpretation of what Mercer means by this: “In mutilating the spider, the androids demonstrate an almost maniacal desire to separate, or ‘distance,’ themselves from all that is *not* them. This distance, this state of being (as Mercer says) ‘a long way off,’ ostensibly ensures their sense of dominance” (72). From this objective and mistakenly superior perspective, Mercerism appears to the androids as nothing but a sham and a means to control people. However, for someone like Isidore, who is acutely empathic and thus radically enmeshed with his environment, Mercerism’s worth as an ethical tool remains intact and Mercer continues to be the sacred emblem of empathy. This is why, as Mercer says, “[the androids] will have trouble understanding why nothing has changed. Because you’re still here and I’m still here” (187). Following this revelation, Mercer resurrects the spider and restores its legs, signalling the restoration of Isidore’s confidence in Mercerism and his sense of identity. His empathic openness is undamaged. Mercer goes on to say, “I lifted you from the tomb world just now and I will continue to lift you until you lose interest and want to quit” (187), meaning that Mercerism will continue to be real for Isidore as long as he places his faith in it. This is why when Deckard finally comes to kill the androids, Isidore demonstrates that his unimpaired empathy for the androids by refusing to give away their location. He even warns Deckard: “If you kill them you won’t be able to fuse with Mercer again” (191). However, as I discuss in the next section, Mercer’s purpose for Deckard is very different.

4.4. Deckard and the Toad: Violation and Transformation

Before continuing to hunt down the androids that are hiding out at Isidore's apartment, Deckard's misgivings about his job as a bounty hunter cause him to seriously rethink his mission. He feels that his situation is even more dire than Mercer's never-ending ascension up the hill: "Mercer doesn't have to do anything alien to him. He suffers but at least he isn't required to violate his own identity" (155). Deckard can no longer justify the anthropocentric view that considers humans empathic beings at the expense of androids, nor can he reconcile the empathy that he personally feels for the androids with the job that he must complete. His very identity as a human subject is at stake. In an act that reaffirms his departure from Cartesian rationality, he grabs the handles of the empathy box to confront Mercer. But just as Mercer confirms to Isidore that he is both fake and real, so does he inform Deckard that although killing the androids is wrong, it must be done:

You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity. At some time, every creature which lives must do so. It is the ultimate shadow, the defeat of creation; this is the curse at work, the curse that feeds on all life. Everywhere in the universe. (155)

He tells Deckard, "you aren't alone. I am here with you and always will be. Go and do your task, even though you know it's wrong" (155), and although he does not yet fully understand the significance of Mercer's message, Deckard is compelled to finish the job at hand. He manages to kill all three remaining androids, including Pris, the identical copy of Rachael. By killing Pris, he essentially kills Rachael, just as Phil Resch had advised him to do, and thus, he "undoes the 'human' part of his subjectivity" (Vinci 108). What separates him from Phil Resch, however, is that he is overcome by the weight of his actions: "But what I've done, he thought; that's become alien to me. In fact everything about me has become unnatural; I've become an unnatural self" (201). He now understands that the human as a uniquely empathic being is proven to be false, which causes him to feel "defeated in some obscure way" (202).

In this traumatic state, Deckard heads out to the desert north of the city where the landscape mirrors the scenery projected through the empathy box. He then begins to climb a hill and unwittingly acts out the ascension of Mercer, except for the feeling of being utterly alone: "Here there existed no one to record his or anyone's degradation ...

the dead stones, the dust-stricken weeds dry and dying perceived nothing, recollected nothing, about him or themselves” (202). He is then struck by a rock, and all at once “the pain, the first knowledge of absolute isolation and suffering, touched him throughout in its undisguised actual form” (202). The full significance of the experience then dawns on him: “I’m Wilbur Mercer; I’ve permanently fused with him” (204). His fusion with Mercer allows him to experience Other as himself, without the need of the empathy box. Having violated his anthropocentric human identity, he is now able to suffer as Mercer does, both alone and together with the other. Thus, Deckard internalizes the critical posthumanist view that “we are what/who we are because we are also Other” (Nayar 170). His defeat of the anthropocentric Cartesian part of his subjectivity and his subsequent fusion with Mercer allows him to transform into a new posthuman subject—not posthuman in the transhumanist ontological sense, but in way that critical posthumanism conceptualizes the posthuman. This view of the posthuman rejects anthropocentric notions of exclusionary boundaries and hierarchical binaries in favor of “greater inclusivity, interconnections, co-evolution and mutualities” (Nayar 53), and therefore fosters a more ethical understanding of the world.

Once Deckard has gained this new perspective, the final step in his transformation into this posthuman subject comes in the form of a toad, “[t]he critter most precious to Wilbur Mercer” (207). He is able to discern the animal from the dusty scenery only because his newfound perspective allows him to see life as Mercer does:

So this is what Mercer sees ... Life which we can no longer distinguish; life carefully buried up to its forehead in the carcass of a dead world. In every cinder of the universe Mercer probably perceives inconspicuous life. ... And once having seen through Mercer’s eyes I probably will never stop. (208)

Ecstatic about his discovery, Deckard takes the toad home to show it to his wife. However, Iran immediately sees the toad for what it is, a false animal. Assuming that that Deckard is dejected by this discovery, she offers the mood organ for him to ease his disappointment, but Deckard refuses, saying, “I’ll be okay ... The spider Mercer gave the chickenhead, Isidore; it probably was artificial, too. But it doesn’t matter. The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are” (211). This statement completes his transformation into a posthuman subject as it signifies a “new awareness that he lives in fluid conjunctions with the technologies that populate his environment” (Galvan 426). No longer does his identity rely on the dichotomies of human/non-human, fake/genuine, that have dictated his view of the world until now. The spider and

the toad being revealed as fake is equally inconsequential as the revelation that Mercer is fake. The only thing that matters is how he relates to other beings and environments, whether artificial or genuine. As Vinci notes, by the end, Deckard's understanding of empathy "changes from a culturally codified act of performance to an openness that invites and recognizes the trace of others within the self and, perhaps more importantly, the external imbrications between beings that necessitate a lack of classification" (107). Empathy for all beings, not as a way to exclude and dominate, but as a way to co-evolve, is thus the next step in human evolution in the posthuman world. This realization marks him as a member of the posthuman community.

5. Conclusion

The dystopian world of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* depicts humanity at a vulnerable point in its history, as humans are not only forced to cope with the aftermath of worldwide environmental destruction, but also the implications of the android challenging the human as a unique subjectivity and ontological category. The novel reveals the pitfalls of a transhumanist society that still clings on to the idea of human exceptionalism. The anthropocentric ideology of transhumanism perpetuates speciesist values that lead to the commodification and exploitation of non-human beings and the dehumanization of humans. Thus, the ambition to achieve a perfected posthuman form by enhancing the human subject comes at the expense of others. The humanization of androids in the novel functions as a way to challenge these anthropocentric ideologies, and shows how even empathy, the last vestige of humanity, is a social construct.

Critical posthumanism challenges the anthropocentric notions of transhumanism by calling “for a more inclusive definition of life, and a greater moral– ethical response, and responsibility, to non-human life forms” (Nayar 138). Deckard comes to accept this new way of viewing the world at the end of the novel when he finally rejects his dualistic Cartesian cogito, and embraces the self as Other. Deckard’s transformation signals a rejection of the essentialized view of humans as exceptional empathic beings, to a critical posthumanist acknowledgment of the socially constructed nature of this view as revealed by Mercer. Only by recognizing this, can he enter the posthuman collective of seeing the self as Other, of being mutually dependent, and thus truly understanding the meaning of empathy.

Philip K. Dick’s novel is an exemplary work of speculative fiction that bridges the gap between science fiction and science fact in way that is highly anticipatory and even cautionary. In today’s world of advanced scientific and technological advancement, a transhumanist vision of the future is becoming increasingly more attainable, but as *Do Androids Dream* shows, transhumanism perpetuates deeply flawed anthropocentric notions that must be re-examined. Critical posthumanism rejects an exclusionary way of relating to non-human beings and environments, and thus provides a more ethical vision of the future, one based on empathic openness and connectedness.

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