

The Posthuman Vision of Philip K. Dick in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Gilbert McInnis

HJEAS

In the *Abolition of Man* (1942), C. S. Lewis asserted that if there ever comes a time when humans will be treated as “conditioned material,” then a “world of post-humanity” would ensue: “Man’s conquest of himself means simply the rule of the Conditioners over the conditioned human material, the world of post-humanity, which some knowingly and some unknowingly, nearly all men in all nations are at present labouring to produce” (51). Lewis’s notion of post-humanity eventually became a focus of discussion in book-length studies, such as Robert Pepperell’s *The Post Human Condition* (1995),¹ Katherine Hayles’s *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), Francis Fukuyama’s *Our Posthuman Future* (2002), Jon Huer’s *The Post-Human Society* (2005), and Bruce Clarke’s *Posthuman Metamorphosis* (2008). Yet, years before these publications, Philip K. Dick spent twenty-seven years writing about two central themes similar to later ideas developed by posthuman theorists. For instance, in an essay he wrote in 1978 near the end of his life, Dick described how he investigated the meaning of what constitutes an authentic human being as he pursued those two issues: “‘What is reality?’ and ‘What constitutes the authentic human being?’”:

Over the twenty-seven years in which I have published novels and stories I have investigated these two interrelated topics over and over again. I consider them important topics. What are we? What is it which surrounds us, that we call the not-me, or the empirical or phenomenal world? . . . My two topics are really one topic; they unite at this point. Fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans, turning them, eventually, into forgeries of themselves. So we wind up with fake humans inventing fake realities and then peddling them to other fake humans. (260-61)

In pursuing the two topics as “really one,” Dick unknowingly unearthed themes that later posthuman theorists would exploit. For example, in the essay on “The Android and the Human” (1972), Dick argues, “[W]e are merging by degrees into homogeneity with our mechanical constructs” (188). Four years later he revised that title to read, “Man, Android and Machine,” making a distinction between the android and the machine. Moreover, he highlights the fundamental difference among a human,

android, and a schizoid, or a person who behaves like a machine. In the context of his discussion on the “clinical entity schizoid,” which lacks proper feeling, Dick claimed, “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 . . . basically, someone who does not care about the fate which his fellow living creatures fall victim to” (211). Dick worked at clarifying the distinction between the android and the schizoid over his entire writing career and his earlier thoughts on the subject compared to his later ones no doubt created some ambiguity. And this ambiguity—between the android and the schizoid—has caused confusion among posthuman theorists. For example, Hayles yokes Dick’s notion of the schizoid to the android when she claims: “At the center of this extraordinary complex traffic between cultural, scientific, and psychological implications of cybernetics stands what I will call the ‘schizoid android’. . .” (161). Moreover, Hayles states that the “schizoid android represents the coming together of a *person* who acts like a machine” (161; emphasis added).

Nowhere in his writing does Dick assert that a schizoid *is* an android, rather he argues that a schizoid “without the proper empathy” *is the same* as an android. Therefore, the schizoid is not the one “merging by degrees into homogeneity with our mechanical constructs,” but instead the schizoid is characterized by how the person behaves—how like a machine. Thus Dick warns his readers not to “posit a difference of essence, but a difference of behavior” (“Man, Android and Machine” 211). His struggle to reach a clearer understanding of the posthuman continues to the end of his life when, in a 1981 interview with Paul M. Sammon, Dick contends: “The word android is a metaphor for people who are physiologically human, but psychologically behaving in a non-human way” (Sammon).² Dick therefore created androids to represent people behaving in a non-human way, which is the same as Dick’s literal interpretation of a human without empathy—the schizoid. In addition, androids become metaphors for schizoid humans, or posthumans. Likewise, when Dick refers to a schizoid we should understand it as a literal interpretation for the emerging notion of the posthuman. Furthermore, there is a metaphysical worldview underlying Dick’s notion of empathy, which comes into conflict with the materialistic worldview represented both by the posthuman and by the androids and schizoids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

The English artist and polemicist Robert Pepperell, in the first book-length study on the emerging phenomenon of *The Post-Human Condition*, defines the posthuman as:

a number of things at once. Firstly, it is used to mark the end of that period of social development known as Humanism; in this sense it means “after Humanism.” Secondly, it is used to refer to the fact that our own view of what constitutes a human being is now undergoing a profound transformation. Thirdly, the term refers to the general convergence of organisms and technology to the point where they become indistinguishable. (i)

For Pepperell, humans are “Post-Human” when “they become indistinguishable” from technology. He, like Hayles after him, holds the view that the posthuman has emerged because there is a “convergence of organisms and technology.” Therefore, his view is not based on a difference in behavior as much as it is based on a difference in essence, if, as he claims, organisms are merging with technology.

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles recognizes that Dick’s exploration of the “schizoid android” occurred mostly in three novels: *Simulacra* (1964), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), and *We Can Build You* (1969). Of the three, she argues that *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* presents the clearest and most provocative understanding of an emerging posthuman culture and she makes use of Dick’s writings as evidence for a materialistic view of the posthuman. Writing four years after Pepperell, her materialistic views are noticeably similar to his.

First, the posthuman view privileges informational patterns over material instantiation. . . . Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness . . . as an epiphenomenon. . . . Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses [machines] becomes a continuation process. . . . Fourth . . . the posthuman view configures human beings so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulations, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (2-3)

In arguing that the posthuman “can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” Hayles diverges from Dick’s later preoccupation with behavior. Perhaps her reliance on the philosophy of “essence” to describe the posthuman is inspired in part by Dick’s earlier view that the human is “merging by degrees into homogeneity with our mechanical constructs”

("The Android and the Human" 188). Clearly, Dick's more developed vision of the posthuman, as entrenched in behavior, is ideologically different from these two early critics of the posthuman, because for Dick the posthuman is someone who is not physically a machine, or part machine, but instead is someone who behaves like a machine. Yet, Hayles's notion that "the posthuman view considers consciousness . . . as an epiphenomenon" is certainly exemplified by the androids and schizoids in the novel.

Pauline Kael was the first writer to recognize the link between Dick's work and the notion of the posthuman. In a July 1982 *The New Yorker* review of *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott and based on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, she stated that the environment portrayed in the film "sets you down in this lopsided maze of a city, with its post-human feeling" (82). Months before his death in February 1982, Dick was interviewed by James van Hise for *Starlog* about the February 1981 rewrite of the screenplay by David Peoples. Dick admitted to the interviewer that he was more content with the Peoples's script than Hampton Fancer's earlier draft because Peoples captured that "post-human feeling" explored throughout the novel. Dick was not completely satisfied with the script, however, since the "replicants become more and more human," while Deckard becomes "more and more dehumanized." In fact, Dick found the script horrifying because the distinction between machine and human disappears. Rather than highlighting any similarities in their essence Dick emphasizes that Deckard's schizoid behavior shows he "is now [dehumanized] as the [machines] are":

So you have Deckard becoming more and more dehumanized, and the replicants become more and more human, and at the end they meet and the distinction is gone. But the fusion of Deckard and the replicants is a *tragedy*. This is not a victory where the replicants become humanized and there is some victory by humanity over inhumanity. This is horrifying *because he is now as they are* The value is that it shows that any one of us could be dehumanized. (Van Hise 22)

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Deckard's schizoid character becomes noticeable when he shows less empathy for his fellow living creatures while showing more for the androids, especially the android-operasinger Luba Luft. When he watches her perform as Pamina, his feelings for her are evident.

Rick studied Pamina in her heavy, convoluted robes, with her wimple trailing its veil about her shoulders and face. He re-examined the poop sheet,

then leaned back, satisfied. I've now seen my third Nexus-6 android, he realized. This is Luba Luft. A little ironic, the sentiment her role calls for. However, vital, active, and nice-looking . . . (98)

When Deckard and a second bounty hunter Phil Resch catch Luba, she tries to escape her imminent death by acting out the role of the willing informant on her fellow androids, which illustrates Dick's notion that an android "does not care about the fate which [her] fellow living creatures fall victim to." Also in this scene Luba alerts us to Deckard's schizoid quality:

"An android," he said, "doesn't care what happens to another android. That's one of the indications we look for."

"Then," Miss Luft said, "you must be an android."

That stopped him; he stared at her.

. . . "Maybe there was once a human who looked like you, and somewhere along the line you killed him and took his place . . ." She smiled. As if inviting him to agree. (101-02)

Dick's two categories of essence and behavior are here juxtaposed. Fundamentally, the two are materially different; he is a human and she is an android. However, Luba recognizes early signs that he is becoming a new sort of human, the posthuman, and she also highlights his responsibility for that change when she says, "there was once a human . . . and somewhere along the line you killed him." Patricia Warrick argues that when Deckard behaves like a machine, he does so because he is driven by unrecognized impulses deeply hidden in the underground of his mind (137), and this unrecognized impulse is characterized by Deckard's empathy for machines. For example, before Deckard and Resch terminate her, an android police officer arrests them, allowing Luba to escape. When Deckard hunts her down again, "Luba Luft did not come willingly, but on the other hand she did not actively resist; seemingly she had become resigned. Rick had seen that before in androids, in crucial situations. The artificial life force animating . . ." (132). Just prior to her termination, she admires a print of Munch's *Puberty* and pleads with Deckard to buy her the book in which the print is published. When Deckard does purchase it, she remarks, "There's something very strange and touching about humans. An android would never have done that" (133). Deckard then attempts to stop Resch from killing her and only after Luba's numerous screams does he terminate her. Deckard's unrecognized impulse surfaces in what follows:

“You could have kept the book yourself,” Resch said, when it had been done. “That cost you—”

“Do you think androids have souls”? Rick interrupted.

Cocking his head on one side, Phil Resch gazed at him in even greater puzzlement. (135)

Resch’s puzzlement leads to Deckard’s next thought. “She was really a superb singer . . . I don’t get it; how can a talent like that be a liability to our society? But it wasn’t the talent, he told himself; it was she herself” (137). As Sherryl Vint claims, “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 . . .” (116). He is unable to separate cognition from affect because he is driven by this unrecognized impulse to feel empathy toward machines, for, as the narrator comments, he was not fond of “her talent” but “it was she herself.”

Deckard’s wife Iran is the most extreme example of schizoid behavior in the novel and, therefore, Dick’s most literal critique of the posthuman. She, like her husband, has an unrecognized impulsive affection towards machines, although for different reasons. As a consequence, she is cold to any affection, she does not want to live with his most human side, and she wastes most of her life hooked up to machines in an attempt, ironically, to fill her emotional vacuum. “At the black empathy box his wife crouched, her face rapt. He stood beside her for a time, his hand resting on her breast; he felt it rise and fall, the life in her, the activity. Iran did not notice him; the experience with Mercer had, as always, become complete” (177-78). In addition, Iran’s refusal of her husband’s affection in lieu of the affection she has for the machine causes him to feel alienated from his human self. “Mercer doesn’t have to do anything alien to him. He suffers but at least he isn’t required to violate his own identity” (178). Iran expends so much of her affection on the mechanical mood organ and not on him, her unrecognized impulse is also a cause of Deckard’s alienation and to some extent a violation of his own self. Iran’s schizoid behavior provides evidence of the dehumanizing factor involved.

Jill Galvan’s 1997 article, “Entering the Posthuman Collective in Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” examines for the first time the notion of the posthuman in the context of Dick’s fiction. According to Galvan, Dick warns that when humans (as in the case of Iran) treat machines as replacements for human contact, an insulated posthuman collective manifests, when technology

. . . drastically compromises an insulated human community in two ways: it separates the individual from human contact; but more significantly, it makes her [Deckard's wife] dependent upon—*addicted* to—the life of the machine. Hooked up to her empathy box, entranced by the simulation of the television screen, the human has already, in fact, become the posthuman. (418)

In this posthuman collective humans, like Iran, become insulated from one another because, ironically, convergence virtually isolates them from any human interaction. Therefore, Iran buys into the larger consciousness of technology because she believes it will fulfill an emotional need; in doing so she hopes the rewards of convergence—contact with a larger human community—will satisfy her, but tragically the television screen, or mood organ, provides only a virtual mechanical simulation or a fake reality of a fake human community.

Iran's need for human contact is not only unsatisfied, she feels emptier after her convergence has happened. She feels worse because her escalating addiction to the machine dehumanizes her more as she embraces it. The consequences of her addiction are noticeable:

“At the moment,” Iran said, “When I had the TV sound off, I was in a 382 mood; I had just dialed it. So although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I didn't feel it. My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield mood organ. But then I realized how unhealthy it was sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting—do you see? I guess you don't. But that used to be considered a sign of [her schizoid] mental illness; they called it ‘absence of appropriate affect.’ So I left the TV sound off and I sat down at my mood organ and I experimented. And I finally found a setting for despair.” (5)

Although she realizes “how unhealthy it was sensing the absence of life . . . everywhere,” Iran comes to the conclusion that when one is emptied of life, or the feeling of life, only despair remains, and this posthuman feeling eventually becomes debilitating. “I can't dial a setting that stimulates my cerebral cortex into wanting to dial! If I don't want to dial, I don't want to dial that most of all, because then I will want to dial, and wanting to dial is right now the most alien drive I can imagine; I just want to sit here on the bed and stare at the floor” (6). The genuine empathy she searches for is faked by a mood organ, or television screen; another technological mask which is

nothing more than an illusive image portraying an expected human community, and behind that “metal face” is the artificial life force of an electrical surge. But when she unplugs from it, her life force shuts down so much that she can only sit on the bed and stare at the floor. She is unplugged from life when the machine is unplugged. Similarly, when she—albeit unconsciously—recognizes how this counterfeit falls short of fulfilling her genuine emotional needs, she out of desperation *jams* her “psyche-self” with even more of these virtual images, thus making her addiction even worse. What happens from this illusive dependency is a posthuman-virtual-neurosis, which occurs when humans attempt to meet their need for social interaction by this seamless s(t)imulation, or, as Dick notes, the mask over the metal face: the technology (“Man, Android and Machine” 213). Thus the human becomes the posthuman when these unrecognized impulses create an “absence of appropriate affect.” This transformation also explains why Dick asserts, “My two topics are really one topic; they unite at this point. Fake realities will create fake humans. Or, fake humans will generate fake realities.”

John Isidore is probably the most human of all the novel’s characters, yet, like Iran, he is often portrayed hooked up to the empathy box. But unlike Rick or Iran, Isidore’s relationship with the machine is described as a spiritual experience rather than a physical dependence. John’s first impression is that “he had been a special now for over a year, and not merely in regard to the distorted genes which he carried. Worse still he had failed to pass the minimum mental faculties test, which made him in popular parlance a chickenhead” (because his physical genes are scientifically categorized as inferior) (19). He has been codified as mentally deficient according to a list of prearranged scientific categories. Consequently, his physical status evidently causes him to feel shame, which is one reason why he fuses with the machine; the other reason has its basis in a material explanation: he does not earn enough money to own a real animal. “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. Time to grasp the handles, he said to himself, and crossed the living room to the black empathy box” (21). In his moment of feeling rejected or in “the echo of nothing” he, like Iran, reaches for the handles to fill that void of nothingness caused by that unrecognized impulse of shame hidden in the underground of his mind. This notion of shame is connected to his chickenhead status, and John’s embrace of the black empathy box attempts to remove that negative status and thereby remove his shame:

The visual image congealed; he saw at once a famous landscape, the old, brown, barren ascent, with the tufts of dried-out bonelike weeds poking slantedly into a dim and sunless sky. One single figure, more or less human in form, toiled its way up the hillside: an elderly man wearing a dull, featureless robe . . . The man, Wilbur Mercer, plodded ahead, and, as he clutched the handles, John Isidore gradually experienced a waning of the living room in which he stood; the dilapidated furniture and walls ebbed out and he ceased to experience them all. . . . He had crossed over in the usual perplexing fashion; physical merging—accompanied by mental and spiritual identification—with Wilbur Mercer had reoccurred. (21-22)

His merging with Mercer invalidates his feelings brought on as a result of his chickenhead status, and nullifies those scientific categories of distorted genes and minimal mental faculties with which society has labelled him. His fusing with Mercer redeems these feelings of insufficiency not just by his physical merging but also by his mental and spiritual identification with Mercer. His transformation touches on two of Dick's central ideas of the posthuman, but instead of having John behave physiologically and psychologically in a non-human way, John exemplifies the contrary—a non-material solution to his material cause of shame through mental and spiritual identification with Mercer. Hence, for John the empathy box fulfils a need for affirmation and transcendence, unlike Iran whose goal is material gratification.

Furthermore, Dick would have us believe empathy and our linguistic ability are what differentiate us from machines— notions clearly influenced by René Descartes. At the end of Section V of the *Discourse of Method* (1637), Descartes claims:

[I]f there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two most certain tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men. Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others The second test is, that . . . it must be morally impossible that there should exist in any machine a diversity of organs sufficient to enable it to act in all the occurrences of life, in the way in which our reason [the soul for Descartes] enables us to act. (32)

For Descartes, what separate us from machines (and machine behavior) are 1) our linguistic ability, and 2) we have a soul that enables us to act rationally.

In the novel, Dick explores simultaneously Descartes's two tests with the schizoid Deckard and the android Rachael, but it is only Deckard who proves to be a true human in the end—at least according to the terms chosen by Dick. Earlier Dick stated that the schizoid literally is a being without the proper empathy or feeling, or an “android [as a metaphor] built so as to lack it,” and someone who *literally* does not care about the fate which his fellow living creatures may fall victim to. Similarly, Warrick asserts that the characteristics that separate an android from the authentic human in Dick's novels are: “paucity of feeling, predictability, obedience, inability to make exceptions, and inability to alter with circumstances to become something new” (145). These characteristics are examined throughout his novel in various ways through various androids beginning with Rachael Rosen, who is supposedly the niece of the founder of Nexus technology, Eldon Rosen. Deckard has been ordered to meet the elder Rosen so he can run a verification test with his Voight-Kampff machine, a “simple polygraphic instrument” (46) that is used in determining the presence of an android and “applied to a carefully selected group of schizoid and schizophrenic human patients” (37).

When the first part of the test begins Deckard asks Rachael a barrage of questions involving animals, because apparently androids do not have empathy for animals. “‘You are given a calf-skin wallet on your birthday.’ Both gauges immediately registered past the green and onto the red; the needles swung violently and then subsided” (48). Rachael's response has been confirmed by the machine to be correct. However, Deckard slowly notices a flaw or gap in her memories when questions of a historical nature are asked. When his suspicion is aroused, she attempts to divert his attention by resorting to a sexual discussion, but he wisely brings the topic back to empathy for animals, “Do you know how bullfights ended?” She responds with, “I suppose somebody got hurt.” “‘You're an android,’” he said. “That's the conclusion of the testing” (51). Deckard's initial conclusion, which he later changes, has its basis in a reason or logic that is similar to that of a machine. Deckard has asked all the *programmed* questions, according to his “poop sheets,” and he has followed the right procedure. Hence, he relies on the indicators of the machine to make a final judgment. Rosen, however, persuades Deckard that the test proved wrong because his niece is a human. Moreover, Rosen asserts that Deckard has failed, and with the aid of a bribe, Deckard is persuaded to agree with Rosen.

Deckard's personal failure, being won over by Rosen and Rachael, happened because Deckard, like Rachael, acted in a predictable and obedient

fashion. He is obedient to Rosen's authority, and like her programmed responses, he accepts Rosen's program. He is as predictable as Rachael when he responds to Rosen's reinforcement. As Vint argued earlier, it is evident here, too, that he has failed to separate cognition from affect because he is driven by the unrecognized impulses of material bribes and status that are "deeply hidden in the underground of his mind." As for Rachael, she is not free to respond to his questions because her memories (thus her words, too) are programmed, and, therefore, she is predictable and obedient as well. Hence, their behaviors are alike. For Deckard, he recalls the questions from the poop sheet, and for her, she responds to the questions *linguistically*—according to the way Rosen programmed her.

However, the schizoid Deckard is not entirely programmed to the extent the posthuman Rachael is. Later in the second part of the test, Deckard shows an ability "to make exceptions" and "to alter with circumstances" by his ability to exploit language and by doing so he is able to unmask the fake reality and free himself. Dick brings us back again to the "animal-like" theme when the two Rosens attempt to bribe Deckard with an owl many times over (56). The bribe almost works when Deckard demands a condition on it: "I'll divide the brood" (57). In this instance, Rachael responds according to the program or according to the conditions of Rosen, "'No,' Rachael said instantly; behind her Eldon Rosen shook his head, backing her up. 'You can't will your owl to anybody; at your death it reverts back to the association'" (57). Here, Rosen controls Rachael like a puppet master by speaking his *words* through her. Finally, Rachael is caught when Deckard becomes aware that, "She keeps calling the owl it. Not her" (58). Hence, Rachael is unable to make an exception or change with the new circumstance because she is programmed to "keep calling the owl it." When Rachael's linguistic limits are noticed by Deckard, he is able to alter with the new circumstances, and by his unpredictable *human* method finds her out.

"My briefcase," Rick said as he rummaged for the Voigt-Kampff forms.
"Nice, isn't it? Department issue."

"Well, well," Rachael said remotely.

"Babyhide," Rick said. He stroked the black leather surface on the briefcase. "One hundred percent genuine human babyhide." He saw the two dial indicators gyrate frantically. But only after a pause. The reaction period had come, but too late." (59)

Rachael is not only proven to be an android because of her lack of empathy for “babyhide,” but more so she is found out because of her inability to reason through the linguistic trap Deckard sets for her. This trap finally leads Deckard to a logical conclusion, and the reader understands that, like Deckard earlier, she cannot separate cognition from affect. For instance, Deckard lies to her intentionally about the “Department issue” briefcase being made of babyhide, yet she is unable to reason through Deckard’s language (his lie) to understand the real logic, the truth of the situation: his Department should not and would not have issued a “babyhide” briefcase to him. Understanding this lie should have led her to the truth, but instead she accepts what he says at face value, as she has done previously with Rosen. Her ignorance of being an android is the result of her being programmed with faked memories, and as her “Conditioner” rationalizes to Deckard, “We have programmed her completely” (59). Rachael’s behavior is, therefore, representative of the posthuman because they include elements of “predictability, obedience, inability to make exceptions, and inability to alter with circumstances” (Warrick 145).

Because she is programmed completely, Rachael is unable to use her words creatively, and this inability exemplifies the posthuman. Furthermore, Descartes’s two tests allow Dick—through the Voigt-Kampff device—to investigate how the ideology of materialism is central to the posthuman worldview. First, the Voigt-Kampff device features an examination of language—in the question/response part of the test—as a central part of human linguistic material activity. According to Manuel DeLanda, “a linguistic assemblage [like Dick’s use of the Voigt-Kampff device] is sustained or entrenched in part because language is a kind of coding device that replicates and repeats, and also because it infiltrates all scales of our material activity, be it conversations or policy manuals” (qtd. in de Freitas and Curinga 260). Second, in the “material activity” of the Voigt-Kampff test we observe how language is a coding device for Dick’s notion of empathy; it not only differentiates humans from non-humans (with its emphasis on the material activity of language), but it is the defining element between a metaphysical worldview and the materialistic posthuman worldview.

According to Vint, Dick’s animal-android theme depicted in the Voigt-Kampff test of Rachael is not only for spectacle, that is, not only for entertainment purposes, but highlights how the posthuman ethic of Eldon Rosen disenfranchises women for the purpose of commodification. “Just as the novel warns us of the risk of becoming android, it also points to the risk of becoming only animal-like in our existence, of failing to nurture aspects of

human happiness and fulfillment that exceed the relationship of commodity exchange” (Vint 123). Rachael unknowingly is an example of the conditioned material of Lewis’s post-humanity, which in this case leads to commodification. For instance, in response to Rachael’s shock and surprise, Rosen says, “Don’t be afraid of him . . . You’re not an escaped android on Earth illegally; you’re the property of the Rosen Association, used as a sales device for prospective emigrants” (60). Rachael is a metaphor for Dick’s theme of female commodification when she is treated as the property of the Rosen Association. For this reason, Victoria Flanagan argues that “Posthumanism takes issue with liberal humanism’s relegation of the body to a position of inferiority in comparison with the mind. This marginalization of the body has been particularly disenfranchising for women” (41).

Androids as metaphors for people behaving in a non-human way exemplify how the posthuman behaves according to the ethics, or these unrecognized impulses, of a materialistic world view. In the novel the behaviors of the androids Buster Friendly, Pris, Roy, and Irmgard Batty exemplify this posthuman ethic. When the androids meet Isidore, he reflects, “I think . . . they’re exploiting me sort of. But he did not care. They’re still good friends to have, he said to himself” (205). When Isidore happens to come across a live spider, the group dynamic transforms into a parody of a biology experiment:

“I’ve never seen a spider,” Pris said. She cupped the medicine bottle in her palms, surveying the creature within. “All those legs. Why’s it need so many legs, J. R.?”

“That’s the way spiders are,” Isidore said, his heart pounding; he had difficulty breathing.

“Eight legs.” Irmgard Batty said. “Why couldn’t it get by on four? Cut four off and see.” Impulsively opening her purse, she produced a pair of clean, sharp cuticle scissors, which she passed to Pris. A weird terror struck at J. R. Isidore. (205-06)

The spider, alive but mutilated, is, according to Vinci, a symbol now of J. R. and his world. “This brutal destruction of J. R.’s conceptions of the world and himself, alongside the physical mutilation of the spider, evinces the very real threat of the posthuman” (105). As the parody of scientific mutilation/exploitation unfolds, Dick exposes the “metal face” behind the posthuman ethic, especially when Buster Friendly, with his “rigorous laboratory scrutiny,” invalidates any element of transcendence in life, as exemplified by the character of Mercer.

Pris clipped off another leg, restraining the spider with the edge of her hand. She was smiling. “Blowups of the video pictures,” a new voice from the TV said, “when subjected to rigorous laboratory scrutiny, reveal that the gray backdrop of sky and daytime moon against which Mercer moves is not only not Terran—it is *artificial*.” (206)

Buster, who eventually is found out to be an android, is the *real-artificial* one, and as Warrick points out, a “reflective step of reversal is required to drop beneath the surface of the plot and catch” Dick’s purpose (137). Buster is a metaphor for those humans behaving in a non-human way, or the posthuman materialist. Dick contends, “The word android is a metaphor for people who are physiologically human, but psychologically behaving in a non-human way” (Sammon).

In the novel, Dick subverts the materialistic worldview of the posthuman with a metaphysical worldview. We observe the deceptiveness of the materialistic worldview when Buster is battling against Mercerism for control over the human psyche:

Mercurism reduced crime by making citizens more concerned about the plight of their neighbors. Mankind needs more empathy. . . . Maybe Buster is jealous, Isidore conjectured. Sure, that would explain it; he and Wilbur Mercer are in competition. But for what? Our minds, Isidore decided. They are fighting for control of our psychic selves; the empathy box on one hand, Buster’s guffaws and off-the-cuff jibes on the other. (75)

Buster’s “rigorous laboratory scrutiny” convinces his listeners that the metaphysical world view of Mercerism is nothing more than a fake reality. Buster’s behavior thus exemplifies one of Dick’s principal topics, “fake humans will generate fake realities and then sell them to other humans.” Moreover, at the core of Buster’s fake reality is the world view of scientific materialism, which is the basis for the posthuman ideology; it fosters “consciousness as an epiphenomenon” (Hayles 3).

Buster’s fake reality is at odds with Mercerism because Mercerism has its basis in that very element of empathy, which differentiates humans from Dick’s androids, schizoids, and posthumans. The reader observes this difference when Irmgard responds to Buster Friendly’s question that he puts to his audience: “Ask yourselves what is it that Mercerism does.” Irmgard responds:

“It’s that empathy that humans have,” Irmgard said vigorously. Fists clenched, she roved into the kitchen, up to Isidore. “Isn’t it a way of proving that humans can do something we can’t do? Because without the Mercer experience we just have your word that you feel this empathy business, this shared, group thing. How’s the spider?” She bent over Pris’s shoulder. (209-10)

Empathy thus characterized as a “shared group thing” is defined in opposition to the android’s survival of the fittest behavior. In addition, Dick’s invention of Mercerism—especially his notion of empathy—highlights Descartes’s second element of the importance of the soul in defining our humanity, or as Irmgard puts it: “It’s that empathy that humans have . . . this shared, group thing.” This shared group thing—or the soul for Descartes—is another key element that the Voigt-Kampff test searches for.

In contrast to the materialistic behavior of the androids, the metaphysical worldview underlying Dick’s notion of empathy and Mercerism becomes evident in the character of J. R. Isidore when he reacts to the androids killing the spider. Vinci argues that J. R. is “Dick’s archetypal figure of empathetic openness, a position that places him somewhere in between the human and the posthuman” (102). As J. R. witnesses the destruction of life by the androids, he suffers too: “J. R.’s liminal status highlights the traumatic nature of losing the human and existing within the unformed posthuman space of radical vulnerability” (Vinci 104). Because of his radical vulnerability, Dick’s archetypal figure of empathetic openness turns to Mercer for help. But instead of turning to Mercer to heal his own individual pain, Isidore seeks out Mercer to restore life to all the dead. “He started toward it, feeling stick-like bones, dry as weeds, splinter under his shoes. . . . A dry wind rustled, and around him the heaps of bones broke. . . . *The bones*, he realised, *have reversed themselves*; the spider is again alive. Mercer must be near” (213). Hence, Mercer restores life to the dead because for Mercerism all life is sacred. The allusion to Ezekiel Chapter 37 also reinforces Dick’s metaphysical response to the materialistic worldview of the posthuman.

Again He said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you and you shall live.’” (NKJV 4-6)

The Mercer/God parallel becomes evident when Mercer, too, breathes life into the dead bones. If Mercer becomes a mask for God, then Dick is himself a stand-in for the prophet Ezekiel as he attempts to breathe new life into a society that is becoming posthuman. Hence perhaps it is appropriate that he should have the prophetic title: “prophet of the posthuman age.”

Philip K. Dick’s insightful vision in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* attempted to warn a society against becoming posthuman. He wrote about the notion of the schizoid and android as prototypes for the posthuman long before anyone else. He created androids to *represent* people “physiologically” while “psychologically” behaving in a non-human way, which is the same as a human without empathy—the schizoid. Androids become metaphors for schizoid humans, or posthumans. Hence, Dick’s two topics are really one. Moreover, the metaphysical worldview underlying his notion of empathy comes into conflict with the materialistic worldview of the androids and schizoids in the novel, for it is the metaphysical worldview underlying Dick’s notion of empathy that differentiates the posthuman from the human. Consequently, if we reduce our selves to just essence, we open our psyche to the possibility of becoming conditioned human material; then, as Lewis believed, the world of post-humanity would only overcome us.

University College of the North

Notes

¹ Pepperell’s study does not discuss Dick but is included here as the first book-length study on the subject.

² See also Paul Sammon’s *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner* (1996).

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