

Discovering the Electric Dystopia: An Analysis of
Conversation in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

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1.Introduction

The human desire to create an ideal world, a utopia, has existed at least since Plato's utopia, "The Republic", was written (Shelton). The desire for a better life gave rise to many more works, such as Thomas More's "Utopia", that explore what the ideal society should look like and how it functions. However, with the concept of utopia, comes the concept of an anti-utopia or dystopia. According to Hellerung, "it can be said that dystopias are [...] descriptions of 'bad places' and the conflicts within them" but "[t]his is of course a generalized way to put it" (11). Phillip K. Dick's "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"¹ takes the concept of dystopia and applies it to a post-human, possible future, where humans and androids living together forces humans to keep redefining what it means to be human. Due to the government implementing inequality, based on empathic abilities, androids are unable to become equal to humans. For bounty hunters like Deckard, fighting humanity's own creation and maintaining the boundary between what is human and what is not, is part of his daily life. On the other hand, Isidore, who is a special², finds it increasingly difficult to tell apart the real from the mechanical and thus maintain that boundary for himself. The society they live in is far from ideal and while neither of them is very happy with the life they live, it is not necessarily a bad place either. Deckard is looking forward to earning extra bounty money and buying a real animal. Isidore is proud of having a slightly higher IQ than most specials and is able to hold a steady job. Initially, they seem to have found a way to live reasonably content in a world that is far from any utopian ideal. However, the novel describes the 24 hours in which their definitions of man and machine are being tested and changed, along with their perception of the world they live in. This change in perception seems to make them temporarily view their

¹ The novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" by Philip K. Dick will from now on be referred to as DADoES.

² The word special is used in DADoES to refer to people whose IQ is lower than that of the average person.

world as a dystopia, a place in which they don't want to live. Only through divine intervention do they seem to overcome this personal crisis and find a way to accept the world as it is.

Conversation is an important aspect in analyzing this novel, because both Isidore and Deckard have some important conversations with both humans and androids that cause them to reevaluate their ideas about humans, androids, and religion. This thesis seeks to analyze how conversations in Philip K. Dick's DADoES influence Deckard and Isidore, in terms of the dystopian and utopian, the androids they are living with and their definitions of the human and the android. A contrast will be made between staged conversations and spontaneous conversations and how these conversations raise the issues of inequality, empathy, and defining the human in a world where androids, are becoming increasingly more advanced and desire freedom and equal rights. This thesis argues that the conversations Deckard and Isidore have in DADoES are important and play a significant role in making them view their world as a dystopia, where humans are no longer in control of their own creation and challenging humanity's superiority, causing them to nearly lose their sanity, until after divine intervention they are able to accept their imperfect lives in a dystopian world.

2. Staged Conversation & Empathy

“‘An android,’ he said, ‘doesn’t care what happens to another android.’
‘Then,’ Miss Luft said, ‘you must be an android.’”³

Both Deckard and Isidore are influenced by the conversations they have during the event in DADoES. Their conversations with both androids and humans force them to rethink their definitions of the human, the android, and the legitimacy of their government’s distinction between the two. However, before analyzing the conversations in DADoES, it is important to be aware of two different types of conversations that Deckard and Isidore have in this novel. As a bounty hunter, Deckard occupies a unique position in which he has access to various means to distinguish between humans and androids, such as the Voigt-Kampff apparatus. Due to the conversation oriented nature of this scale, consisting mostly of question and answer sequences, the interaction Deckard has with suspects through means of administering this test can be categorized as him having a, somewhat limited, conversation with them. On the other hand, Isidore also occupies a unique position, due to him being a so called “chickenhead” (Dick, 15). He lacks social contact with other humans around him due to his status as a special and frequently listens to his TV in order to replace this lack of social interaction. The process of Isidore listening to the TV and responding by thinking about what has been said, could also be considered a form of conversation. These kind of conversations, that are influenced by the Voigt-kampff scale or limited by the TV, will from now on be referred to as ‘staged conversations’, because the key difference between these and other conversations, from now on referred to as ‘free conversations’, is that both Deckard and Isidore are not able to express themselves as freely as they otherwise might have.

In response to the increasing amount of androids impersonating humans the “Voigt Empathy Test has been devised by the Pavlov Institute” and approved by the government (Dick, 25). While administering this test Deckard has to pick from a series of preselected

³ (Dick, 88)

questions and interpret the responses, their corresponding response time, and the data gathered by devices that monitor behavioral changes, such as eye movement and blushing. However, a new, more advanced, type of android has been invented, “The Nexus-6 android” (Dick, 25) and this is a reason for concern. As Deckard describes it:

“the new Nexus-6 brain unit had from a sort of rough, pragmatic, no-nonsense Standpoint evolved beyond a major – but inferior – segment of mankind. For better or worse. The servant had in some cases become more adroit than its master. But new scales of achievement, for example the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test, had emerged as criteria by which to judge” (Dick, 25-6).

Not everyone is convinced that this empathy test can accurately expose a Nexus-6 android. Deckard is therefore sent to the Rosen company, who manufactures these androids, in order to test the Voigt-Kampff scale.

Administering of the Voigt-Kampff scale is part of his job and it requires Deckard to put on a serious and business-like attitude. However, he also seems to do this to protect himself from the emotional impact the results might have on him. If a suspect turns out to be an android he or she will be retired. Deckard seems to hide behind the rules and limitations provided by the scale in order to ignore the moral implications of killing androids. The first time Deckard administers the test, his attitude changes from having a relatively casual conversation with Rachael and Eldon Rosen, to him becoming more distant while he sets up his equipment and explains how the test works. This distant and almost clinical attitude, revealing no emotions to the unexpected news that Rachael might be an android, is typical for the state of mind he enters every time he administers this test. Regardless of the subject and his feelings towards them and their possible fate, he remains professional.

This is an important change in his behavior considering that The Voigt-Kampff scale is meant to test for the presence of a key component of human nature, namely empathy. Deckard accepts his society's definition of the android, which despite its intelligence, is a machine and unable to feel empathy (Galvan, 414). The Voigt-Kampff test is based around this assumption and so is Deckard's faith in its ability to distinguish between humans and androids. However, "[Deckard] had wondered [...] precisely why an android bounced helplessly about when confronted by an empathy-measuring test" (Dick, 26). He eventually comes to the conclusion that "[e]mpathy, evidently, [exists] only within the human community [...]" and that it requires "an unimpaired group instinct" (Dick, 26). However, according to Seegert, "[e]mpathy is rooted primarily in a subject's ability to identify imaginatively with another being" (39-40). This definition of empathy would prevent humans from defining themselves by rejecting others without feeling guilty (Toth, 66). However, the sole purpose of this scale is to exclude androids. The assumption that androids cannot feel empathy seems to ease the human collective's conscience, because "if humans alone have the power to empathize, then their only emotionally profitable, mutually beneficial relationships occur with each other" (Galvan, 414). This philosophy allows humans to "violate [...] an android without having to violate their own identity" (Toth, 66).

The scale's focus on non-electric animals in order to test the subject's ability to feel empathy is also questionable. While administering the test Deckard usually "[outlines] a number of social situations" and the subject is supposed "to express [their] reaction to each as quickly as possible" (Dick, 41). While testing Rachael, all of the scenarios that Deckard chooses from his list include some form of animal abuse. There is mention of a "calf-skin wallet", a "butterfly collection", a "bearskin rug", the act of boiling a live lobster, and even bullfights (Dick, 41-3). When Deckard tests Luft, she responds like an android, without empathy, to the suggestion of being served boiled dog, by saying: "Nobody would kill and eat

a dog [...] [t]hey're worth a fortune" (Dick, 89). However, her verbal response is "consistent with attitudes toward animals displayed by [humans]" (Vint, 4), which raises the question of whether it really is empathy or greed that makes animals so valuable in this setting. On the other hand, there are scenarios that include some form of human interaction, but those are meant as a distraction. In these scenarios an android would fail to register the important part, the hidden animal abuse, and focus on the human interaction.

The first time Deckard administers the test, this tunnel vision almost leads Deckard to believe that he misdiagnosed a human as an android. Only when he is allowed to ask one more question does Deckard divert from the standard by suggesting that his bag is made from "babyhide", to which Rachael responds too late, proving she is indeed an android. While Deckard manages to correct his mistake, this first staged conversation sets the tone for his changing attitude towards both the scale and his views on androids and humans throughout the rest of the novel.

Luba Luft, a German opera singer, is the second person Deckard has a staged conversation with. Even though Deckard has a fondness for opera and Luft's singing voice, he almost immediately becomes cold and professional while preparing the test. While the question and answer sequences with Rachael were very organized, it seems as if Luft's lack of knowledge about the English language, due to her German roots, is hindering her ability to respond properly. Due to her confusion about the meaning of certain words and unorthodox responses, Deckard cannot properly interpret her answers. While most notable interactions between Luft and Deckard take place outside of this segment of staged conversation, the way this conversation progresses is an interesting diversion from a set standard.

Rachael was the ideal test subject, despite the fact that she briefly made Deckard doubt the reliability of the scale. On the other hand, Luft is making it impossible to use his test and is manipulating language in order to survive. While Deckard doubts whether she is sabotaging

the test on purpose or not, he finds he has come across another possible case of a human being misdiagnosed. While Rachael's excuse was that she grew up on a space station, and therefore had an underdeveloped sense of empathy, Luba might indeed be suffering from the test being administered in something other than her first language. Both these staged conversations show that there are issues with the Voigt-Kampff test, which is something that Deckard cannot help but notice.

Neither of the tests performed on androids proceeded flawlessly and eventually Deckard uses the test on a human. This is the only staged conversation that is not described in detail, but the results confirm that Phil Resch, another bounty hunter, is a human. This news shatters Deckard's old definition of what it means to be human. Due to the lack of material to analyze it is impossible to see how Deckard's feelings changed as he came closer to reaching this conclusion. However, it is evident that in order to protect his definition of what it means to be human, Deckard felt that, due to Resch's cold attitude towards androids and the pleasure he seemed to derive from killing them, he had to conclude he was an android. However, the scale failed to give him the answer that he was not so much expecting as he was hoping to receive. The contents of this staged conversation are not as important as the reason for having it and the conclusion Deckard received from it.

Shortly after testing Resch, Deckard wants to be tested himself. Resch's lack of empathy for androids does not prevent him from being categorized as a human. Therefore Deckard wonders whether something is wrong with himself, which results in the following short, staged conversation:

“Aloud, Rick said, ‘I’m going down the elevator with an android I’ve captured. And suddenly someone kills it, without warning.’

‘No particular response,’ Phil Resch said. [...]

Rick said, 'A female android.'

'Now they're up to 4.0 and 6 respectively'" (Dick, 123).

Deckard has to manipulate the language of the test by coming up with his own scenario, because the scale does not test for empathy towards androids. Deckard takes on the role of both the interviewer and the interviewed, while Resch has to read the results. Deckard previously only tested androids or people he suspected were androids. However, this time he knowingly uses the test on himself to confirm the change in his empathic abilities.

While Deckard's staged conversations rely on both parties interacting, the one sided ones Isidore has with his TV and Buster Friendly do not. He is forced to watch the only channel his TV can receive a channel that promotes emigrating from Earth to Mars and Buster Friendly. While the fragments of conversations he listens to help him feel less lonely, they also create a new type of loneliness due to him being reminded of society's views on specials. The ads "[inform] him in a countless procession of ways that he, a special, wasn't wanted" (Dick, 17). Buster Friendly is first mentioned in DADoES when Isidore visits his new neighbor(s). After he knocks on the door the TV is turned off. However, Isidore senses "the presence of life beyond that of the TV" (Dick, 53). The TV, the people, and conversations that appear on it represent life to him. The fact that Isidore considers an electric machine, such as the TV, a replacement for human interaction is the first case of a human in DADoES showing this kind of attitude to machines. Compared to Deckard, Isidore occupies an entirely different emotional vantage point. He misses human interaction and tries to hold on to any type of interaction he can find. Buster Friendly represents "twenty-three unbroken warm hours a day" (Dick, 63), but Isidore also notices Buster's subtle criticism of Mercerism, a religion revolving around empathy. To Isidore it seems as if Buster and Mercer are "fighting for control of our psychic selves" (Dick, 65). Buster seems to be manipulating language in order

to fight this religion. As a host for a popular show he can reach a large audience, but in order not to alienate them he has to be careful when expressing his criticism. In his announcement he exposes the lie that is Mercerism to the world, in the hopes that it will change humanity's ideas about empathy. However, Isidore remains faithful, because his sense of empathy is also what allows him to care about his android neighbors.

Initially, Deckard wants to hold on to the conclusions he can draw from administering the Voigt-Kampff test. However, ultimately it is these staged conversations that make him doubt his own definition of the human, the android, and the legitimacy of humanity's superiority over androids. Every time he applies the test it fails to give Deckard the conclusive answer he wants and needs in order to feel justified in killing them. He does not doubt the results, but he does start doubting their meaning. The scale can be used to clinically discern between humans and androids, but Deckard's emotions and growing empathy towards certain androids are preventing him from doing his job. According to Vint, it is also "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" (4). However, Deckard is not the first person to develop this kind of attitude towards androids, as Isidore walked this path before him.

In DADoES empathy is a clearly defined concept that can be detected by a conversation oriented scale. Empathy has become the binding factor for the human collective versus that of the android individual. Language itself has become a trap for androids, because they can never pass the Voigt-Kampff test. For androids, "[t]o respond means to submit to the code's inherent lack of reciprocity" and thus contribute to their own undoing (Galvan, 421). Rachael and Eldon Rosen are the first to try and undermine this test, but this is only a small attempt compared to Luft's complete resistance of the test. She fights the language aimed at convicting her by manipulating her own. This urge might come forth out of self-interest, but

that on its own is not an indicator of a lack of empathy. Luft “destabilize[s] language, in such a way that throws into question [...] previously unexamined structures of power”, leaving Deckard to realize that the boundaries by which he did his job are not set in stone (Galvan, 421). The only crime androids seem to have committed is their desire for freedom and their increased self-awareness. This is ironic, because androids are human-made simulations of humans and the purpose of inventing new brain types seems to be for the purpose of allowing them to be more realistic replicas (Seegert, 40). However, the rogue androids seem to have evolved beyond their original purpose as servants and their creators have lost control over their creation due to the android’s desire for freedom. The language used by the Voigt-Kampff scale serves as a boundary to prevent androids from successfully passing themselves off as humans, thus allowing humanity to maintain their superiority in the current hierarchy (Seegert, 40). Deckard’s job initially seems to be to maintain a natural border between humans and androids, but once he realizes that this border is an artificial human design, he finds himself unable to do his job properly. Isidore on the other hand does not seem to maintain any border, because of his wide range of empathic abilities.

Buster Friendly manipulates language in order to address this inequality based on empathy by showing the world that empathy as defined by Mercerism is fake and artificial. However, “[a]fter this announcement, the world continues just as usual [...] it does not produce the panic and uproar that Buster Friendly obviously hoped for” (Plura, 4-5). While “what passes for ‘empathy’ among humans derives far more from a cultural construction than from any categorical essence” it is something that the human collective holds on to in order to not have to redefine what it means to be human (Galvan, 415). While Buster sees empathy as defined by humans as the enemy, it is because of empathy that Isidore and eventually Deckard come to care for androids and mechanical animals. Through staged conversations the definition of empathy is challenged, but its old definition is not completely cast aside. For

both Deckard and Isidore its meaning is altered and has expanded to include more controversial life forms. If it is true that “the empathic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim” (Dick, 26), then Isidore’s vision seems to have always been blurred while Deckard reaches this point near the end of DADoES. The staged conversations Deckard has have a significant influence on his empathic ability, while listening to Buster Friendly tested Isidore’s. Both of them will be further influenced and tested by the free conversations they have during the course of the novel.

3. Free Conversations & Equality

“I’ve never killed a human being in my life’
Iran said, ‘Just those poor andys.’”⁴

In this thesis the term free conversation includes the other conversations both Deckard and Isidore have in DADoES. While Deckard has conversations with both humans and androids, most of Isidore’s conversations are with his android neighbors and he only has contact with other humans at his work.

The mood organ⁵ is mentioned when Deckard is first introduced. Emotions are one of the many factors that influence the course of a conversation, but the mood organ reduces them to settings that are categorized by number. However, even though “he hadn’t dialed for it” Deckard’s wife manages to irritate him (Dick, 1). They have a discussion concerning the misuse of the mood organ, which escalates when Iran threatens to dial the maximum by saying: “for greater venom, then I’ll dial the same [...] I’ll dial the maximum and you’ll see a fight that makes every argument we’ve had up to now seem like nothing”, in order to win their argument (Dick, 2). Iran argues it is unnatural to influence her feelings and started to resent using the mood organ. Instead of preventing herself from feeling the silence and loneliness, she would rather face it and suffer, knowing that it is a natural human reaction. Deckard tries to convince her to dial something else. While it is natural for him to be concerned about her, the way he tries to solve the problem feels artificial:

“[W]e’ll dial a 104 together and both experience it, and then you stay in it while I reset mine for my usual businesslike attitude [...] meanwhile I’ll know you’re not sitting here brooding with no TV.’ [...]

‘I can’t stand TV before breakfast.’

⁴ (Dick, 1)

⁵ The mood organ is a fictional machine in DADoES that artificially alters the users mood and state of mind.

‘Dial 888 [...] [t]he desire to watch TV, no matter what’s on it.’

‘I don’t feel like dialing anything at all now,’ Iran said.

‘Then dial 3,’ he said.

‘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!’ (Dick, 4).

Deckard’s reliability on artificial emotions to get him through a conversation with his wife is similar to the way he puts on a businesslike attitude when he has staged conversations. “[T]he artificial simulation of emotion is normalized” by Deckard over his “‘natural’ expression” (Vint, 3). In this conversation Deckard does not let himself feel natural emotions and tries to stay in control by artificially altering his mood, creating distance between him and his wife.

This first conversation Deckard has with his wife sets the tone for an important issue raised in DADoES. When Deckard says that he never killed a human being in his life, Iran replies “just those poor andys” (Dick, 1). Deckard refuses to consider androids human beings and distances himself from them by referring to them as “it” or by their brain unit type. He also calls his sheep a “fake electric one”, showing that this behavior also includes android animals (Dick, 2). Deckard confesses to his neighbor that “[he’s] put as much time and attention into caring for it as [he] did when it was real [...]” but that “[i]t’s not the same” (Dick, 9). However, when Deckard gets close to Rachael he briefly lets go of this habit and refers to her as ‘she’, only to reduce her to ‘it’ again when he finds out she deceived him. According to Brand “[t]he way in which the robots are addressed and treated by humans, [...] show the unequal relationship between the two” (12). This form of distinction separates man from machine and shows that in his free conversations Deckard also tries to maintain this boundary of inequality between androids and humans, thus allowing him to feel in control over his feelings towards them.

Throughout DADoES Deckard is confronted by the concept of (in)equality. He trusts the Voigt-Kampff scale to distinguish humans from androids. However, in his first conversation with his boss, Inspector Bryant, his faith is tested. Bryant, a man with authority over Deckard, openly doubts the scale's ability to distinguish between humans and the latest android brain unit. Deckard attempts to defend the scale which is the only thing preventing androids from infiltrating into human society without being detected. However, if the latest android brain unit is able to pass the empathy test, it would also suggest they have become equal to humans when it comes to empathic abilities. By defending the test Deckard tries to "reclaim the disturbed hierarchy between human and machine" (Galvan, 419). However, Bryant is afraid of the consequences if a human is misdiagnosed as an android, telling Deckard "[y]ou'd be wrong, but by then they'd be dead" (Dick, 32). Deckard argues that "these individuals [...] would all be [...] in institutions" (Dick, 32), revealing that there are humans, schizophrenics, who could possibly be misdiagnosed. This statement contrasts the idea that humans are the superior race due to their empathic ability. Deckard is reluctant, but at the end of the conversation he leaves for the Rosen Company where he has his first free conversation with an android.

In Deckard's first conversation with Rachael he tries to distance the concept of human from that of the android by saying: "[a] humanoid robot is like any other machine; it can fluctuate between being a benefit and a hazard very rapidly" (Dick, 34). Rachael then asks him whether he has "no difficulty viewing an android as inert [...] so [he] can 'retire' it" (Dick, 34). He does not answer, but from this point on that Deckard's free conversations will alter his view on androids.

After testing Rachael, Deckard briefly believes that he misdiagnosed her. While he maintains his professional attitude, he is confused. Deckard eventually notices that Rachael keeps referring to the owl she claims is real as 'it', which suggests a lack of empathy typical

for androids. However, he does not recognize how similar Rachael's attachment to a fake owl is to his relationship with his electric sheep. Her lack of empathy could be explained and her behavior towards an electric animal is similar to his own. At this point Rachael provides Deckard with an example of how similar androids and humans have become. However, Rachael's influence continues as she also manages to shed a new light on the extent of androids empathic abilities. After their first encounter Rachael calls Deckard and offers her help to catch the escaped androids. It is not unusual for her to make this offer, because as an android she would not feel empathy for other androids. However, when he accepts her offer she tries to stall him, offering to come by the next day instead. When Deckard offers to not retire the last three androids if she goes to a hotel with him that night, she does not hesitate and complies. Rachael seems intent on sabotaging Deckard's resolve to retire the androids, risking her own safety and dignity to protect them. She even says that she loves Deckard and that "[i]f [she] entered a room and found a sofa covered with [his] hide [she'd] score very high on the Voight-Kampff test" (Dick, 169). Rachael suggests that she can feel empathy for certain humans, showing her "humanlike qualities" (Brand, 14). By confessing that she and Luba Luft were close friends, Rachael suggests that androids also "exhibit what appears to be caring for their own kind" (Galvan, 414). Whether her ability to feel empathy comes forth from genuine emotions or the intellectual ability to identify with certain beings, she shows Deckard how close the gap between androids and humans is becoming.

Luba Luft takes on a similar role in educating Deckard. Rather than showing that androids feelings extend beyond the accepted standard, she makes Deckard doubt himself and his role as a bounty hunter. Before confronting her Deckard realizes that "[m]ost androids [he's] known have more vitality and desire to live than [his] wife" (Dick, 82). Luft is one of those androids and she attempts to convince him that he is an android with a fake memory. However, when she has the chance to kill him she does not, which is unlike Deckard's idea of

android behavior. After Deckard buys her a book, Luft says something interesting about androids and humans:

“[t]here’s something very strange and touching about humans. An android would never have done that. [...] I really don’t like androids. Ever since I got here from Mars my life has consisted of imitating the human, doing what she would do, acting as if I had the thoughts and impulses a human would have. Imitating as far as I’m concerned, a superior life form” (Dick, 116).

It is ironic that Luft considers humans a superior life form, because she despises Resch. He does not match her idea of the human, whom she is trying to imitate. While in her general behavior she seems to have surpassed Resch at acting like a human, she is unable to become one, not because she is unwilling, but because society and empathy scales do not allow her to become one. Deckard realizes that Luft is not necessarily a danger to society, but instead willing to integrate and do what it takes to be successful in that. Deckard realizes that “the androids are not so different from humans after all, or that humans are not so different from androids” and that some androids appear to share desires similar to most humans (Brand, 17). While Luft spared Deckard’s life, Resch becomes irritated and attempts to convince Deckard to retire Luft on the spot. Deckard says: “[r]etire it; kill it now [...] [s]how it that it’s right” (Dick, 116), which Resch uses as an incentive to kill her.

While Rachael shows Deckard that androids feel a kind of empathy and Luft shows him that androids are not necessarily a threat after they have gained their freedom, Resch shows Deckard the android human, “who is untroubled by the dissociative state required to retire androids” (Vint, 4). Resch redefines Deckard’s opinion about the human. Even though they worked together for years, Resch does not hesitate to kill his boss, Garland. Before

Garland dies he convinces Deckard that Resch, unbeknownst to himself, is an android, by saying: “[o]therwise he couldn’t live out a life as a bounty hunter, a human occupation – hardly an android occupation” (Dick, 106). However, because androids supposedly do not empathize with other androids they would make perfect bounty hunter according to Deckard. Garland’s statement contradicts this theory. When Deckard realizes he is able to empathize with androids, Resch “perverts [his] empathy [...] into its opposite [...] into lust” (Galvan, 423). Because of his lack of empathy Resch is the perfect bounty hunter. However, it also makes him dangerous and after killing Luft, Deckard realizes that Resch likes to kill, saying to him “[a]ll you need is a pretext” (Dick, 119). While Rachael and Luft show Deckard the android who attempts to become like its creator, Resch shows the human who has become less empathic and more like an android.

Most of the conversations Deckard has seem to make him doubt his original point of view. First, he has to test the scale that he trusts to make the distinction for him and then he starts to empathize with certain androids. He finds it difficult to justify the lack of equality between androids and humans from an emotional perspective. While it is their lack of empathy that makes them dangerous, but in various conversations he has with them, they express the ability to empathize. However, if empathy is no longer a means of distinction then nothing prevents androids from becoming human’s equals in terms of social standing and rights. According to Barlow, “Deckard at least, does learn to respect the ‘life’ of the android” (77) when, in a conversation with his wife, he concludes that “[t]he electric things have their lives too” (Dick, 211).

If one only looks at Deckard’s perspective of equality and how this changes, it might seem as if DADoES argues for equal treatment of humans and androids. However, when taking into account Isidore’s point of view, one might come to a different conclusion.

Isidore's point of view is interesting due to his own social standing. "Like the androids, Isidore occupies a marginal ethical position in the novel", because he does not have equal rights to non-chickenhead humans. However, he is not an average chickenhead either, because he is smarter and able to keep a steady job. Even though he is not hunted and killed like androids, Isidore's position in society is one grey area, in which he is devoid of human contact outside of his work.

Isidore's job is bringing broken electric animals to a fake veterinary clinic and he has to bring in a malfunctioning cat. However, when he arrives at the clinic the cat turns out to be a real one. His boss asks him "[c]ouldn't you tell [...] [d]idn't you notice the difference"(Dick, 67) and one of his co-workers confirms that "[t]o [Isidore] they're all alive, false animals included" (Dick, 67). When Isidore has to call the owner to tell her that the cat died, he struggles to have a proper conversation. This could be caused by his overall lack of social interaction. However, he also struggles to understand why the woman does not like the suggestion of getting a replacement that is an exact replica. This behavior does not seem to originate from a lack of empathy, but similar to not being able to distinguish a real from a fake animal it seems to come from the inability to see what makes them different and unique individuals. When he learns his neighbors are androids "he [doesn't] care" because "it [makes] no difference to him" (Dick, 141). He seems to understand there are differences between fake animals and real ones, and between androids and humans, but he is unable to recognize this difference and then act accordingly.

When Isidore first meets Priss Stratton, she seems to conform to the image of the victim android. She is afraid of Isidore and reluctant to let him get close. When Isidore accidentally confesses he is a chickenhead, Priss' attitude changes. Isidore tells her that "Mercer doesn't care about" IQ, to which she replies "you can count that as a major objection to Mercerism" (Dick, 57). Because Mercerism is based on the ability to feel empathy it would

be natural for androids to resent this human activity of fusing with Mercer. However, Priss also reveals her dislike of the lack of distinction between smart people and chickenheads. Most androids are smarter than humans, but are still unable to fuse. While this would mean that chickenheads occupy a higher social standing than androids, “[l]ike androids, Isidore is also treated badly by others” (Brand, 17). However, Priss, an android, also judges him for being a chickenhead. She makes several comments about his lacking intellect, suggesting his boss is someone who “doesn’t exist outside [his] imagination” (Dick, 58) and saying “[m]ore of your chickenhead imagination [...] [p]oor Mr Isidore” (Dick, 59). While empathy-wise Isidore is her superior, Priss seems to care only for the difference in intelligence. Isidore admits that he thinks she is “very superior” and wishes “[he] had an IQ like [hers]” (Dick, 142). Even though she is not a direct threat to him yet, it is obvious she does not respect or appreciate his efforts.

While Priss, by being judgmental about Isidore’s status as a special, shows the reader the less perfect side of androids, it is still something humans do as well. However, when Irmgard and Roy Baty, two other androids, move in with her it becomes clear from their conversations with Isidore that androids are not just victims of a system that targets their weak point, empathy. Initially, Irmgard scolds Priss for calling Isidore a chickenhead by saying “[t]hink what he could call you” (Dick, 138). However Roy is more calculated and willing to survive regardless of the cost. While commending Isidore for his loyalty, he does suggest they “kill Mr. isidore and hide somewhere else” (Dick, 144). When Isidore brings back a spider, the androids show the true extent of their lack of empathy when they decide to cut off four of its legs out of curiosity. They offer to pay Isidore its catalogue value, but fail to understand why he is upset. Even though Isidore has accepted their status as an android, the androids are unable to truly emotionally appreciate it. When Roy carelessly suggests to kill him and when Priss and Irmgard enjoy mutilating the spider, they “show that they on occasion may actually

pose a threat to humans [...] [exposing] their less empathic side” (Brand, 19). While some of the androids Deckard encounters make the reader empathize with them, the androids Isidore encounters show why androids and humans are not equal.

Empathy plays a big role in the unequal treatment of androids in DADoES. If it were not for android’s measurable lack of empathy and human’s lack of empathy towards androids they might both have equal rights and social standing. Even though androids seem to be capable of feeling some sort of empathy or at least identifying with others, they do not meet the human standard. On the other hand, Resch’s lack of empathy makes him an ideal bounty hunter and capable of maintaining the boundary of inequality between androids and humans. However, Deckard’s growing empathy causes him to have difficulty doing his job, because “his work as a bounty hunter emerges not from the difference between humans and androids, but because there is not sufficient difference to maintain the economic exploitation upon which their world rests” (Vint, 4). However, inequality does not limit itself to the relationship between androids and humans. For example, Isidore as a chickenhead receives hardly any benefit from being human other than not being killed by bounty hunters. Even Deckard has to answer to superiors, is jealous of those who can afford a real animal and is used by the system, being paid just too little to not have to risk his life to retire androids and get the bounty money. However, they are “apart from being seen as a dangerous” also “deemed worth less than animals” (Brand, 13). When it comes to equality DADoES society is not even close to reaching a utopian ideal and rather presents a possible dystopian future to the reader.

4. Discovering the Dystopia

“The electric things have their lives, too.
Paltry as those lives are.”⁶

At the beginning of the novel Deckard and Isidore seem to be reasonably content with the quality of their life, even though it is far from perfect. However, DADoES society is initially not perceived by them as a dystopia. Considering that utopia and dystopia are matters of perspective, the conversations they have contribute to them eventually perceiving their world as a dystopia.

The inequality between humans and androids is the topic of most of these conversations. Deckard used to blindly trust the scale approved by authorities to distinguish androids from humans, but discovers that the scale’s staged conversations are limited to trapping the android by detecting their lack of empathy. The scale does not take into account the androids intents and desires or their increased self-awareness. By having free conversations with androids and humans, Deckard begins to wonder whether androids deserve to die for acting upon their desire for freedom or whether DADoES “political authorities [...] ostracize the android, since the android [...] directly challenges the individuals perceived biological mastery over the machines” and uses inequality to remain functional (Galvan, 418-19). Even though the distinction between humans and androids might be justifiable, due to “[s]omething ‘human’ [...] always missing from them” (Barlow, 84) the androids in DADoES “have a life beyond [their] utilization” (Barlow, 76). According to Barlow, “[t]he greater conspiracy [...] is destroying them all, human, chickenhead, android” (84).

Throughout the novel, Deckard struggles with his role in humanity’s attempt to regain control over the android servant. Initially Deckard was able to cope with the moral impact that retiring androids had on him. However, through conversation he realizes that the line between android and human has blurred and is not as self-evident as he assumed. Advanced

⁶ (Dick, 211)

technology seems to challenge humanity's unique place in society's hierarchy. However, it was humanity that created this technology in the first place. Due to Deckard's changed perspective on his job the society he lives in becomes a dystopia for him. Retiring androids now causes him significant emotional distress and money is no longer a sufficient compensation. His desire to buy a real animal and moving to Mars seem to be an attempt to run away from the immoral things he has done and the responsibility of having to decide another android's fate. Free conversation confronts him with the dystopian nature of his work and life.

On the other hand, Isidore has trouble understanding society's distinction between mechanic and organic and tries to hold on to both his faith and his android companions. His faith in Mercerism and the satisfaction he gets from fusing allow him to feel like a proper member of society. Fusing provides him with some of the social interaction he needs and Mercerism itself provides him with a moral guideline by which to live. However, the androids criticize his religion and like Buster Friendly attempt to prove it is a scam. In order to hold on to this social interaction he allows them to treat him like their servant and endures them undermining his faith. The revelation that Mercerism is a proven to be a scam, along with the androids showing why they are different from humans by torturing a spider, changes his perspective. His world becomes dystopian, when the religion he used to hold on to lost its credibility.

Deckard seems to be unable to cope with his newly gained perspective and wanders off in the desert. Before, Mercer told him that "[w]hat you are doing has to be done" (Dick, 193). In the Desert he feels like he has permanently fused with Mercer and has become him, a godlike figure. He attempts to convince himself it is the death of the goat that upsets him and not the deaths of the androids he killed. This seems to be Deckard's attempt to compensate for losing control over his feelings toward them and ease his conscience. When he seemingly

finds a living frog, he is ready to return home. Only when the frog is exposed as a fake, is he willing to accept that the electric things have their lives too and most of all that ending those lives affects him. He stops fighting the aspects of his life that make it dystopian and gains some peace of mind. By accepting the frog, he acknowledges that technology has become advanced enough to have its own kind of life. Instead of forcefully trying to keep control over androids by enforcing the artificial boundary between them and humans, he lets go of it. He begins to accept androids and electric animals as part of the living scene of his society, which allows him to stop fighting its dystopian nature and rather start anew with a newly gained perspective

Isidore also needs divine intervention to come to terms with the news that Mercerism is fake. Mercer explains that because androids cannot join the fuse they look at it differently and realized it was fake. However, they did not understand that it did not matter whether Mercer was an ordinary man standing in a painted décor, because people will still continue to fuse, a feeling which they perceive as real, regardless of its origin. While he the possibility of losing Mercerism and the torture of the spider temporarily seem to drive him mad, he still attempts to protect the androids. When Deckard kills his neighbors he has to accept that androids, no matter how advanced, are different, sometimes dangerous, and unable to understand certain things humans can. He loses his android friends, but is able to make a new start due to his renewed faith in Mercerism and fusing.

Both Deckard and Isidore have to survive in a world in which technology becomes increasingly more advanced and both needed to change their view on their life and society, accepting it as it is instead of blinding themselves to the existence and the extent of the role of an essential part of it, namely androids. Deckard and Isidore's changing perspective on their lives are explored. However, there is a part of the world that the reader does not see, namely life in the Mars colony of which the reader only briefly catches a glimpse during a

promotional commercial on Isidore's TV. While Deckard and Isidore seem to view life on earth as less than ideal, even dystopian at some point, the life on Mars is idealized to the point where it seems to be utopian. However, whether the Mars colony really is a utopia is debatable, because all that is known about Mars is the small amount of information provided by the androids and humans who talk about it. While it might be a utopia for humans, it is not for the androids who want to escape. This suggests utopia is a matter of perspective. While the humans and specials who remained on earth might view their life as less than ideal, for the androids it is a better place, where they have a chance to be free of human control.

By buying a real animal or holding on to android companions, both Deckard and Isidore have been trying to create their own utopia within a dystopian world. In the end Isidore's faith in Mercerism, one of the most important things in his life is restored. On the other hand Deckard fights the dubious ethics of his work by buying a real animal. "[He] will discard an electric sheep for a real goat", but when this animal is killed he "ends up with an electric toad" and is forced to acknowledge he gained nothing from killing the androids (Easterbrook, 27).

The problems that DADoES post-human society is facing while having to keep redefining what is human in order to remain unique and in control of their creation, are thought provoking. As science fiction "it has the unique characteristic of taking important issues of today and situating them in a different setting from a different viewpoint" (Mous). When DADoES was first published in 1968 it might have been a response to the increased interest in technological advancement and its consequences. DADoES's world portrays a possible future for everyone on Earth in which technology is forcing humanity to define itself. This issue might be even more relevant nowadays as contemporary society's technology has advanced in a way which might allow DADoES future society to become a reality at some point. This makes the implicit questions that DADoES asks the reader, such as whether

androids and humans should be equal and whether humans have the right to control their own creation despite it having evolved beyond their original design as servants even more important. However, Dick does not seem to explicitly answer these questions and instead provides the reader with Deckard and Isidore's perspective on these issues. These are two limited perspectives, yet they are still thought provoking enough to make a contemporary reader wonder about the consequences of technology becoming increasingly more advanced.

5. Conclusion

The conversations Deckard and Isidore have with others change their perspectives on the quality of their life, the questionable way in which their society functions, and make them view their society as a dystopia. Deckard has conversations with androids and humans that make the distinction between human and android seem artificial, because androids appear to have evolved beyond what their human creators intended them to be, making it more difficult for him to justify what he does for a living. The staged language of the Voigt-Kampff test is used as a tool to help maintain control over androids and uses empathy as a condition. On the other hand Isidore, who treats everyone, human or android, the same and is generally unable to properly distinguish man from machine, is introduced to the darker side of the android. His interactions with his new neighbors test his faith in Mercerism and provide the reader with a contrast to the seemingly empathic androids Deckard encounters.

Both Deckard and Isidore are forced to redefine their definitions of the android and the human in this post-human society, along with the reader. The conclusions Deckard and Isidore reach allow them to accept that they are living in a dystopian world that functions by exerting control over androids and only allows certain people to emigrate to the seemingly utopian Mars colony. Through their interactions with androids both realize that their future version of Earth has become a dystopia and through their conversation with Mercer they learn to accept their imperfect lives. While the reader is left with the image of DADoES's post-human future Earth and its implications, both Deckard and Isidore seem to accept their society as it is and attempt to make a new start in life.

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