

Aspelien, August

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- Master's Programme

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Philip K. Dick uses technology as a lens to explore the degradation of empathy within humans. His works *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* show how humanity's interactions with technology such as mind-altering devices and androids can alter the human psyche. The assessment of how their empathy is affected is discussed through the lens of transhumanist theory. Through their interactions with the artificial, humanity is shown to benefit from the environment that technology creates, as it helps them develop mentalities and emphatic understanding. However, technology is also shown to have a negative impact on empathy, as it brings out the undesirable qualities of humanity's nature. These findings imply that Dick had a cautious view on technology, due to the positive and negative implications that it has on empathy.

The novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* takes place in a post-nuclear war Los Angeles in the year 2021. It centres around the bounty hunter Rick Deckard mission to retire a group of rouge androids on earth, in order for him to raise enough money to purchase a real animal, which there are few of left in the world (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 12). As Deckard retires the androids throughout the novel, he develops sentimental feelings towards them as he begins to question the morality of his actions. The novel also follows a secondary protagonist named J. R Isodore, a loner who has been reduced to a "chickenhead" due to brain damage caused by the radioactive aftermath of the war.

The short story *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* also takes place in the distant future, and tells the story of Douglass Quail who desperately wants to visit the planet Mars. This desire leads him to Rekal Incorporated, where a machine implants him with false memories of visiting the planet, due to his inability to travel there in real-life (Dick, "Wholesale" 160). Quail ultimately gets more than he bargains for, as he discovers both his previous life as an assassin for the government agency Interplan, and his crucial role in preventing an extra-terrestrial invasion of the Earth.

Transhumanic theory will be incorporated to analyse the intricate connection between empathy and technology in the two works. Julian Huxley states that a central thought within transhumanism is humans discovering the true potential within themselves (73). This is a gradual process, where humans must discover the extent of their possibilities. However, several people are unable to do so, as they're living in conditions that are negatively affecting

their physical and mental health. To fix these problems, Huxley suggests that humans must create a social environment where mental development can take place (76). This will result in the population gaining well-rounded personalities, where knowledge and understanding are seen as important hallmarks. As such, a depth and wholeness of the inner life will also be achieved. After reaching this stage of development, humans can improve both themselves and their communities to advance mankind as a whole. This will cause humanity to reimagine itself as something new, something which stays human, but realizes new possibilities of human nature. This paper assesses that technology has the potential to fulfil two important criteria within transhumanism, namely creating an environment where human growth is possible and exploring the new sides of human nature.

One way the connection between technology and empathy is discussed in both works, is through the influence that technology has on mental development in humans. The nature of this development is evident through the reactions that humans have when they experience the environment that technology produces (Huxley 76). The impact this encounter has on a person ultimately alters their sense of empathy. As a result, their development towards a well-rounded personality is affected either positively or negatively.

The humans in both of Dick's works use technology to create foundations that develop their mentalities and improve their inner life. The "mood organ" serves this function in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, as it lets people alter their state of mind. The consequences of using this device are demonstrated when Deckard and his wife Iran are awoken by their mood organ. Deckard's device causes him to arise feeling well-disposed towards the world (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 4). Iran however, wakes up irritated, having her mood organ at a different setting. An argument quickly breaks out between the two, where Iran threatens to use the device to invoke feelings that will cause an argument like no other. Despite the altercation leaving him spiteful, Deckard deescalates the situation. He resets the tension between the two by using the device to inflict them both with feelings of empathy. This instance shows how technology can cause humans to show empathy to one another, by creating a situation where understanding is needed to overcome adversity. Thus, the mood organ has a positive effect on their mental development, as they're made more emphatic through its presence (Huxley 76).

Another way technology is used to discuss mental development within humans is through the "empathy boxes", which are used by humans to temporarily fuse their minds and share experiences together. During the fusion, the participants take control of a man scaling a

large mountain while simultaneously sharing their thoughts and emotions with each other. The following passage from the novel shows how the chickenhead J. R. Isodore experiences this event:

God, he thought in weariness. In what way is this fair? Why am I up here alone like this, being tormented by something I can't even see? And then, within him, the mutual babble of everyone else in fusion broke the illusion of aloneness. You felt it, too, he thought. Yes, the voices answered. We got hit, on the left arm; it hurts like hell. Okay, he said. We better get started moving again. He resumed walking, and all of them accompanied him immediately. (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 22)

As shown here, the empathy box is a vehicle which unites the users on an emotional level - regardless of who they are. Even J. R. Isodore, who is forced to live in solitude due to his condition, partakes in the experience. The brief pain he endures after being struck is quickly surmounted once he receives encouragement by the other participants. While taking part in this event, Isodore's status as a chickenhead becomes obsolete and he can once again interact with the outside world. Thus, the empathy box becomes an environment where people can experience empathy and learn personal growth through interactions with others (Huxley 76). The affinity Isodore gets from this event can be used to surmount negative feelings like loneliness, which hampers development within a person.

As opposed to the other technical appliances within *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the artificial animals seemingly invoke feelings of mental despair within humans. This is apparent in the relationship Deckard has with his artificial sheep, which replaced his real sheep "Groucho" after it passed away (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 12). To Deckard, the electric sheep is a facade that maintains his social status, as the people of his time considers it anti-emphatic to not care for a real animal. As such, he's forced to begrudgingly care for a being he has no desire owning. J. R. Isodore also has a negative relationship with this kind of technology. He works as a truck driver for a fake animal repair shop and witnesses their simulated suffering every time they have a break-down. Listening to their artificial agony makes Isodore wish that he wasn't a chickenhead and causes him to reminisce of when he possessed the abilities of a normal human (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 68). For Isodore, the fake animals serve as a grim reminder of being a sub-human who has no choice but to live out the rest of his days on earth working a dead-beat job. Thus, the situations both men are put in have caused them to develop a lack of empathy towards artificial animals. These spiteful feelings can in turn causes mental distress, which hampers a person's development of a

satisfying inner-life (Huxley 76). As such, the presence of fake animals can have negative consequences on the personal development of humans, as it stagnates their emphatic connection towards non-organic beings.

In contrast to fake animals, receiving false memory implants within *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* provides personal growth. This occurs through a procedure where a machine inserts "extra factual" memories into someone's mind, giving them recollections of any action or set of events, despite never having experienced them in real-life (Dick, "Wholesale" 160). As a result, people can experience their deepest fantasies and dreams, which lets them achieve a type of self-realization previously thought to be impossible. This is emphasized in the conversation the protagonist Douglas Quail has with Mr. McClane, a Rekal Incorporated executive, who reemphasises to Quail how memory-implants are the only way of achieving his dream:

As you explained in your letter to us, you have no chance, no possibility in the slightest, of ever actually getting to Mars; you can't afford it, and what is much more important, you could never qualify as an undercover agent for Interplan or anybody else. This is the only way you can achieve your, ahem, life-long dream; am I not correct sir? You can't be this, you can't actually do this. (Dick, "Wholesale" 159)

The impossibility of attainment that is described in this passage mirrors a thought within Julian Huxley's theory on transhumanism. This is the idea that large groups of the human population are unable to achieve their true potential due to either physical or mental obstacles in their lives (Huxley 73). Through the aforementioned procedure of memory implantation, people like Douglas Quail can experience fulfilment of their deepest wishes by surpassing the hindrances that prevent them from being acquired in real-life. This will likely have a positive effect on the mental development of both themselves and those around them, as they are freed from the demons that prevented them from showing empathy towards others. However, if these desires remain unachieved, they can have negative effects on a person's mental growth, as the human spirit of exploration is hindered by negativity (Huxley 76). This is quite evident in the manner Quail lashes out at those around him when he discovers that he was implanted with fake memories (Dick, "Wholesale" 168). Thus, the implementation of artificial memories is humanity's way of strengthening their psyches by overcoming the melancholic corners of the human mind.

Another way the relationship between technology and empathy can be discussed through transhumanism, is in how technology can be used to realize new possibilities of human nature. As such, the emotional changes that humanity experiences within each new circumstance affects their empathic development in different ways.

The act of resetting one's mentality with a mood organ is quite emblematic of the reality which humans have created for themselves in the dystopian world of Dick's novel. With the ability to alter their emotional state at will, they could possibly have developed a different emotional dynamic than the present-day humans. As a result, humans have seemingly become nonchalant towards the process of naturally fluctuating between emotions. This change is indicative of Dick's concern with the ways technology sways beliefs and practices within people (Calvin 343). Thus, technology may have made it more difficult for humans to feel true emotions. This is apparent when Iran tells Deckard that she has begun to use the mood organ to induce depression in herself. This change came about due to her overreliance on the mood organ to bring about positivity, which Iran mentions made her numb to the world around her (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 5). She even compares her inflicted dissonance to a mental illness, which also puts Deckard's relationship with the device in perspective, as he immediately considered using the device in the prior argument instead of instinctively trying to solve the situation with his own merits (Viskovic 163). The dilemmas surrounding the mood organ is indicative of how humans are living in a confused state where they are unable to manifest their natural reactions to the world around them. This in turn raises the question of whether the people of Dick's novel are losing the ability to develop empathic feelings, due to an overreliance on artificial stimuli. As such, the mood organ highlights a new type of addiction that is starting to plague the human mind and can have grave consequences if kept unchecked.

While mood alteration seemingly affects humans negatively, the empathy box indicates the opposite, as it strengthens the empathic bond between humans. This is due to the communicative qualities of the device highlighting a human desire to connect with one another. Using the device to unite minds has become a common practice, as mentioned by Deckard's wife Iran. She also reveals that all the participants exchange their positive feelings when entering fusion, leaving some revitalized and others drained. When recalling her own experiences of fusing, she mentions how people consider it immoral to not share feelings of joy with other participants (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 160). As such, trading and sharing positivity is a regular affair amongst the humans who partake in fusion. Thus, the empathy

box makes humans more emphatic towards one another, as they are willing to sacrifice their own joy for the collective wellbeing of complete strangers, despite it having negative consequences for themselves.

The androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* also provide emphatic development for humans, despite it occurring as a result of their own cold nature. Throughout the novel, the androids are depicted as ruthless beings with no compassion towards people nor animals. They are even willing to selflessly kill other androids if it can guarantee their own safety in return (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 175). Despite these actions contrasting with the terms that are commonly associated with empathy, their depictions are crucial in assessing the true meaning of empathy and the consequences of possessing it. This ties into Philip K. Dick's own assessments of empathy, where he states that possessing the term is crucial to determine someone's humanity (Calvin 353). Dick also believes that humanity is a trait that simply isn't conferred upon someone at birth, as it must be earned instead. As such, these distinctions are crucial in determining someone's humanity, and in turn, which acts can be considered empathic (Gillis 267).

In the novel, Dick's assessments of humanity and empathy culminates in the Voight-Kampff test, which is used to determine whether someone feels empathy or not (*Do Androids Dream* 36). The premise of the test is simple, as a suspect android is hooked up to a testing device and is asked several questions regarding sensitive topics like animal abuse and infidelity. The test-subject is considered an android if they fail to conjure up a proper emotional response to the questions. This is shown when the android Rachel Rosen fails the test by not recognizing the moral implications of slaughtering calves for manufacturing purposes (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 56). In response, Deckard ponders that a human would have solicited an emotional response due to their inner empathy. Thus, the androids reinforce the empathic nature of humans by underlining it as an important quality of their being. Additionally, this distinction is determined through actions, as only humans can act empathically.

While the androids within Dick's novel define the importance of empathy for humans, the disregard people show towards artificial animals seemingly indicate that they lack this quality. In spite of fake animals behaving exactly like their real counterparts, humans have a stronger desire owning authentic ones, as they are considered more "valuable" to them. The value that humans place on real animals shows that they are unable to see all life as equal, and

to an extent unable to love equally. This is apparent in the final chapter of the novel, where Deckard brings a toad from the wastelands home to his apartment. His glee and enthusiasm of discovering such a rare find is suddenly cut short when he uncovers the animal's artificial nature (Dick, "Do Androids Dream" 221). This fall in positivity seemingly resets his newly acquired affection towards all artificial life. Perhaps this is an indication people like Deckard truly can't develop lasting feelings of empathy towards the inorganic. This notion isn't unlikely, as the Rosen family, the ones who produced all artificial life on earth, are quite negligent towards their creations. To them, even real animals are just objects to their owner, as they are only seen for their material value. This is evident when Eldon and Rachael Rosen attempts to buy Deckard's silence with an owl, as a means of keeping the results of the Voigt-Kampff test a secret. Such, displays of favouritism and disregard throughout the novel indicate a lack of empathy within humanity. By failing to realize the intrinsic value of living beings, humans suddenly mirror the disdain seen within their own artificial counterparts.

In spite of these occurrences, there are events within the novel that contradicts these views. This includes J.R Isidore seeing the androids mutilating the organic spider he discovered moments earlier. The act shocks him and breaks his spirit, which indicates that there are people who genuinely care about the authentic qualities of animals. As such, the humans within the novel seemingly show the potential for developing a non-exploitive relationship with both real and fake animals.

Technology's negative implications on empathy continues in *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale*, as the concept of memory implants showcase how humanity is inclined feed into their denial by avoiding reality. As stated by Mr McClane, Rekall Incorporated implants people with fake memories on a daily basis, where they are tasked of implementing everything from visits Pluto to recollections of intergalactic dynasties (Dick, "Wholesale" 160). Like Quail, these people are presumably unable to fulfil their deepest wishes in real-life, and must resort to memory implants to satisfy their desires. In one way, this can have positive effects, as these people can forgo the crushing negativity that comes along with never achieving one's goals. However, these procedures may have grave consequences, in which the humans get lost in the counterfeit reality which they have created for themselves.

The implementation of this concept likely comes from Dick's thematic inclusion of simulation and artifice within his works, which are used to comment on how humans perceive reality (Umberto 400). In this regard, memory implants can distort a person's worldview to the point where they do not realize they are living in a lie. This is quite apparent in Quail's

relationship with the technology, as he cannot deal with the mediocracy of being a government desk-clerk and must fulfil his dream of going to Mars (Dick, "Wholesale" 158). Gilbert McInnis assesses in his paper "The Posthuman Vision of Philip K. Dick in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*", that this kind of technological dependency can have severe consequences for humans. These repercussions come in the form of humans becoming isolated and wholly relying on machines to soothe their needs (McInnis 100). As a result of this solitude, humans may experience difficulties in developing empathy towards others, due to them favouring illusions of success rather than learning understanding from real relationships. As such, humanity's denial of reality can cause them to get lost in the artificial worlds they have created for themselves.

The insertion of false memories can also be used in an unemphatic manner, which is apparent in the way Quail continually gets his deepest desires suppressed by others (Malmgren, 24). One of the first implications of this idea is seen in how Quail's wife treats him, as she continually reminds him that a trip to Mars is a pipe-dream that he needs to quit obsessing about (Dick, "Wholesale" 158). Her attempts to dishearten her husband are revealed to come from her obligations towards the Interplan agency, who previously implanted Quail with false memories. Despite successfully convincing Quail of his new life as a government desk-clerk, his memories of Mars remained and eventually turned into a deep obsession of visiting the planet. As such, Quail is hunted down once again by Interplan and is to be administered one last memory implant to relieve him of his desire. However, this procedure reveals that the suppression of Quail's thoughts has a final layer, which stems from alien interference. As it turns out, Quail befriending a group of aliens as a young boy. Quail showed the aliens empathy, which caused them to delay their invasion of earth for as long as Quail is alive on the planet. After their encounter, Quail's memories were overwritten by the aliens, which resulted in this event only remaining within his consciousness. Thus, Quail is revealed to be the most important human alive (Dick, "Wholesale" 170).

Due to his significance towards the plant's survival, it is likely that Quail was given one last procedure in order to not let this realization go to his head. As such, it becomes apparent that Quail has had his deepest desires suppressed for nearly the entirety of his life (Malmgren, 24). Both humans and aliens have used implantation-machines to continually deny him of achieving true satisfaction, which are highly unemphatic acts. This lack of concern has in turn made Quail unemphatic, which is evident in the spitefulness he shows towards his wife and Mr. Clane. As such, the ability to suppress someone else's desires

highlight a dangerous possibility of human nature, due to the negative effects it can have on empathy.

Another negative side that fake memory implants reveal, is that the procedure highlights humanity's obsessive nature. This is evident after Quail's true identity has been unveiled, as his encounter with the aliens made him feel like the most important person in the world. Even after having his memories of the event overwritten, those feelings still resided within him. This in turn made him pursue a life of significance, as he becomes an Interplan assassin who partakes in missions of planetary importance. Even after having these memories suppressed, Quail is still unable to discard his desire for greatness. This never-ending infatuation can be a signal of a mental illness, which is a concept Dick has incorporated into several of his works (Viskovic 163). In this regard, Quail's behaviour can be deemed obsessive, which is eminent in how death is the only consequence which makes him reconsider his motives (Dick, "Wholesale" 170). Such an obsession can make a person disregard others in pursuit of their goal, which indicates a lack of empathic development them. As such, this kind of technology reveals that humanity may have difficulties developing empathy and understanding, due to them obsessing over their own satisfactions.

In the works *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale*, the author Phillip K. Dick assesses that technology has both a positive and negative effect on the emphatic development of humans. The nature of this relationship becomes apparent when viewed through the lens of transhumanist theory, as it presents two important criteria to assess how empathy is affected by technology. In regards to the first of these principles, most of the technology within the works provide humans with an environment where they can experience mental growth through empathy. However, artificial animals have an undesired effect in this regard, as they invoke feelings of spite and self-pettiness which makes the humans less emphatic. The second principle showcases that technology has the potential to empower the sides of human nature that lessens their sense of empathy. However, there are instances where technology emphasizes the sides of human nature that sustains this quality, which is evident in their interactions with androids and the empathy box. In light of this information, Dick is seemingly conveying a broader meaning through both works, namely that humans mustn't sacrifice their emphatic qualities in pursuit of their true potential. He also suggests that technology can make them less emphatic, as it amplifies the negative sides of human nature. As such, the depictions of the relationship

between technology and empathy in Dick's works, suggests that humanity must be weary of the consequences technology can have on the human mind.

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