

PHILIP K. DICK

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?



มหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีราชมงคลพระนคร

ห้องสมุดพระนครเหนือ



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INTRODUCTION

It's a commonplace to say that the works of Philip K. Dick (1928–82) are centrally concerned with the question of what is real. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) looks at a particular branch of that question: what is a fake? And, if you can make a fake seem authentic enough, does it matter? The book's adaptation into Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) changes a great deal, but keeps this idea at its heart. Someone who's seen the film, but for whom this is a first encounter with Dick's work, is likely to be most surprised by how much time the book spends on character rather than visuals. Dick is always concerned to show the inner life of his characters, and let the philosophical questions that concern him flow naturally from their lives and the world in which they find themselves.

In the opening scene, the protagonist Rick Deckard is woken by music from his 'mood organ'. As he talks to his wife Iran, it becomes clear that this mood organ can indeed make someone happy, sad, or angry depending on how it's set. That begs the question: what's the line between being 'made happy' by a mood organ or a drug, and being made 'really' happy by, say, love? Fakes – or what we would consider fakes – are everywhere in the book. Deckard keeps an electric sheep on his roof, but has to pretend to his neighbours that it's real. In this near-future world, much of the ecosystem has been devastated by 'World War Terminus', and so to own a real animal, as Deckard pretends to, would be a colossal status symbol.

The central plot of the book (and film) follows Deckard's work for the police, tracking down and 'retiring' replicants. These are

lifelike androids created as, in effect, slaves for humans; a group of them have fled to Earth in search of freedom. An early scene defines the difference between the two: Deckard travels to Seattle, where he uses the 'Voigt-Kampff test' to work out whether a woman named Rachel Rosen is an android. The androids are supposed to lack human empathy, so the test is to see whether they exhibit normal human reactions when confronted with various social situations. But Rachel is so sophisticated a creation that she almost defeats the test; and Deckard gradually falls in love with her.

So the central question the book raises is what it means to be human, to have an identity, to exist in relation to other humans. That, and the post-war setting, could easily make it seem like a dry or grim read. But, like most other Dick novels, it has an acute sense of humour and absurdity – who else would come up with a robot sheep, pretending to eat grass atop an apartment building, as a social statement?

In terms of Dick's career, *Do Androids Dream . . .* comes towards the end of his most productive decade; the 1970s would see him producing far fewer novels as he grappled with his own problems and the religious vision that he believed he was granted in 1974. It doesn't, though, have the nightmarish sense generated by other Dick novels such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) that its world is a labyrinth with no exit. This is a world, however depleted and diminished, where love and restoration might be possible. What's not so clear, though, is whether they might be possible for Rick Deckard. After a while, the book's thriller plot becomes so enmeshed with its questions of identity that many of the assumptions readers will have started with are upended. Yet Dick manages to create pathos in the most outlandish situations – for androids without empathy of their own, for J R Isidore, a disabled victim of the war, even for artificial animals. If nothing else, he seems to be saying, the fake has value. If you were an android and dreamed of electric sheep, would it make you less you?

– Graham Sleight,
August 2009

CHAPTER ONE

A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised – it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice – he rose from the bed, stood up in his multicolored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again.

‘You set your Penfield too weak,’ he said to her. ‘I’ll reset it and you’ll be awake and—’

‘Keep your hand off my settings.’ Her voice held bitter sharpness. ‘I don’t *want* to be awake.’

He seated himself beside her, bent over her, and explained softly. ‘If you set the surge up high enough, you’ll be glad you’re awake; that’s the whole point. At setting C it overcomes the threshold barring consciousness, as it does for me.’ Friendlily, because he felt well-disposed toward the world – *his* setting had been at *D* – he patted her bare, pale shoulder.

‘Get your crude cop’s hand away,’ Iran said.

‘I’m not a cop.’ He felt irritable now, although he hadn’t dialed for it.

‘You’re worse,’ his wife said, her eyes still shut. ‘You’re a murderer hired by the cops.’

‘I’ve never killed a human being in my life.’ His irritability had risen, now; had become outright hostility.

Iran said, ‘Just those poor andys.’

‘I notice you’ve never had any hesitation as to spending the

bounty money I bring home on whatever momentarily attracts your attention.' He rose, strode to the console of his mood organ. 'Instead of saving,' he said, 'so we could buy a real sheep, to replace that fake electric one upstairs. A mere electric animal, and me earning all that I've worked my way up to through the years.' At his console he hesitated between dialing for a thalamic suppressant (which would abolish his mood of rage) or a thalamic stimulant (which would make him irked enough to win the argument).

'If you dial,' Iran said, eyes open and watching, '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. Dial and see; just try me.' She rose swiftly, loped to the console of her own mood organ, stood glaring at him, waiting.

He sighed, defeated by her threat. 'I'll dial what's on my schedule for today.' Examining the schedule for January 3, 1992, he saw that a businesslike professional attitude was called for. 'If I dial by schedule,' he said warily, 'will you agree to also?' He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

'My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression,' Iran said.

'What? Why did you schedule that?' It defeated the whole purpose of the mood organ. 'I didn't even know you could set it for that,' he said gloomily.

'I was sitting here one afternoon,' Iran said, 'and naturally I had turned on Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends and he was talking about a big news item he's about to break and then that awful commercial came on, the one I hate; you know, for Mountibank Lead Codpieces. And so for a minute I shut off the sound. And I heard the building, this building; I heard the—' She gestured.

'Empty apartments,' Rick said. Sometimes he heard them at night when he was supposed to be asleep. And yet, for this day and age a one-half occupied conapt building rated high in the

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