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Simulated Souls: Rethinking Humanity in a Posthuman Future

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Introduction

In this modern era, the advancement in technology has revolutionized the way we live and also how we define ourselves as human beings. The rise of artificial intelligence, biotechnology and cybernetics has made the lines thin between nature and artificial, conscious and programs. These developments have made an intense raise in the philosophical and literary sense of the human subject. Thus giving rise to the concept of posthumanism, a critical framework that questions the consciousness beyond traditional boundaries.

Posthumanism challenges human exceptionalism by accepting existence of hybrid forms that integrate the natural and artificial elements. It is focused on the question what does it mean to be a human in a world where machines mimic thoughts, emotions and creativity. It also focuses on ethical concerns when programmed entities exhibit qualities once believed to be uniquely human's sixth sense. A great literature transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote it. Literature with its power to reflect and critique a major shifts in the society has turned to these questions. Authors explore the transformative impact of AI on human identity through speculative structures. Within this context, literature on posthumanism becomes a vital site of dialogue between humanity, technology and the unknown.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? (1968) is a work of science fiction by the American author Philip K. Dick. It is set in a post-apocalyptic future following World War Terminus, the novel explores the blurred boundaries between humans and machines in a society where most of Earth's life has been destroyed by radioactive fallout. The survivors live in a decaying world marked by emotional desolation, artificial intelligence, and societal decay.

The novel revolves around Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter tasked with "retiring" rogue androids, extremely lifelike humanoid robots known as 'andys', who have escaped from Mars to Earth. The android

robots are almost impossible to differentiate from humans. The growing ability to mimic human emotions raises fundamental questions about consciousness, identity, empathy and morality. One of the novel's main themes is the value of empathy, a unique sense to humans. On the contrary to its theme many people own electric animals to keep up social appearances since genuine animals are rare and highly prized. Thus highlighting the contradictions of society obsessed with emotion yet driven by surface appearances.

The novel critiques consumerism, technology, and authoritarianism while delving into deeper philosophical and existential issues. It questions what it truly means to be "human" in an age where the artificial beings can think, feel, and question their own existence. This tension reflects Dick's recurring interest in posthumanism, simulation, and the instability of reality. Although it was loosely adapted into the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the novel offers a more introspective and richly layered narrative. It remains a powerful, thought-provoking work that continues to influence science fiction literature, cyberpunk culture, and contemporary debates about artificial intelligence and ethics.

The Posthuman Landscape of Dick's Future

The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world that was devasted by nuclear fallout after the World War Terminus. The isolated uninhabited environment not only serves as a backdrop but as a metaphor for the diminishing human experience. In this new era, life is made a product, real animals are rare and prestigious, while electric animals are substituted to maintain social status. This synthesis extends to human relationships, as androids become increasingly indistinguishable from their creators.

Critiques to the anthropocentric worldview finds a compelling expression here. The androids are emotionally aware and capable of mimicking empathy, particularly the Nexus-6 models are hyper-intelligent. Their very existence challenges the notion of the human as the centre of meaning and intelligence and Dick urges the reader to question the authenticity of human superiority.

Empathy as the Measure of Humanity

Another central point to the novel is the Voigt-Kampff test, a tool used to detect androids by measuring empathic responses. Empathy is portrayed as the last bastion of human uniqueness. Yet this definition is problematized by the androids' evolving emotional complexity. Characters like Rachael Rosen and Pris Stratton complicate this distinction, they exhibit behaviour which is difficult to classify as either purely mechanical or fully human.

Rick Deckard, the protagonist, undergoes a moral and emotional transformation as he interacts with androids. Initially viewing them as "retrievable" machines, he grows increasingly conflicted, especially after forming a complex bond with Rachael. This tension illustrates Dick's critique of empathy as a clear boundary, humans often lack it, and machines increasingly simulate it convincingly. The novel asks whether empathy is truly intrinsic or merely performative, a simulation just as programmable as any algorithm.

Simulated Souls and Android Consciousness

The androids possessing the ability to reflect on existence, the author introduces the concept of simulated souls, beings that may not be biologically human but express internal lives that seem conscious. This makes the title of the novel itself poses a metaphysical puzzle: "Do androids dream?" The act of dreaming implies an inner life, a subjective reality.

Characters like Roy Baty and his fellow Nexus-6 fugitives resist their programming, question the authority and even grieve their mortality. What were considered as traditionally a hallmark

of human consciousness like the awareness of death, are now being possessed by the androids too, which suggests that the androids are not mere machines but entities deserving of ethical consideration. In this regard, Dick destabilizes traditional humanist ideals and opens the door to machine subjectivity.

Conclusion: Towards a New Understanding of the Human

Through *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Philip K. Dick offers a profound path on the shifting boundaries of humanity in an age increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence and technological simulation. The novel makes the readers question the conventional definitions of what it means to be human by presenting androids who think, feel, suffer, and dream, qualities traditionally reserved for biological beings. In this landscape of artificial empathy and simulated identity, the essence of humanity emerges not as a fixed biological trait, but as a fluid, relational, and evolving concept.

Dick urges us, the readers to confront the fragility of our moral and ontological certainties. If an android can love, question its own existence, or mourn its impending death, can we deny its sense of personhood simply because it was manufactured? Conversely, when humans themselves exhibit empathy, emotional detachment, or mechanized behaviour, can they still lay sole claim to the moral high ground of empathy and consciousness?

This posthumanist perspective invites a basic rethinking of ethical responsibility and identity in the face of intelligent machines. It challenges the humanist tradition that has long positioned humanity at the centre of meaning and moral value. By dismantling binary oppositions, human versus machine, organic versus artificial, authentic versus simulated, Dick envisions a future where personhood is no longer restricted to carbon-based life forms, but extended to any entity capable of relationality, reflection, and ethical action. In our contemporary world, where AI technologies are no longer speculative but increasingly integrated into daily life, Dick's vision proves remarkably prescient. The novel anticipates current debates about robotic rights, digital consciousness, and the ethical treatment of nonhuman intelligences. It also urges us to adopt a more inclusive, adaptable, and compassionate definition of humanity, one that prioritizes ethical agency and empathetic engagement over biological origin.