

Blade runner
empathy is mostly
understood
philosophy essay



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Empathy is mostly understood by the metaphor of standing in someone else's shoes or in other words when you see through someone else's eyes. Empathy is about how well you understand the feelings of others and how well you share feelings of another. Humans differentiate between what is human and what is not human through how empathic someone is towards people. In the novel "Blade Runner" by Philip K. Dick, empathy was what differentiated humans from androids.

As it was stated in the book that, "He had wondered as had most people at one time or another precisely why an android bounced helplessly about when confronted by an empathy-measuring test. Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnida. (Dick 28)" This quote means that, to be a human you have to have empathy as the author says it is only existed in human community. In other words if you do not have empathy you are dangerous for human and you can kill them. I disagree with this belief of author.

I personally think that it is not an appropriate way to judge an android based on empathy to see if an android can be fit in human society or not. The empathy should not be the only test to judge an android whether an android fits in humans or not. This paper will be focusing and discussing on the concept of human empathy from Blade Runner and today's concern about androids and how empathy can be developed in androids and other robots in today's society.

If we take a deep journey of this novel we see that not just androids who lack empathy but also the humans. The novel was set in a post-apocalyptic near future where it takes you where earth has been damaged greatly and population has been damaged greatly due to World

War Terminus, which was a nuclear war. Most of the animals were in danger or extinct because of extreme radiation that was used in war. The humans' society in Blade Runner was living after war conditions and was affected and many people migrated to other places so the population decreased and people were not empathic to each other because they were not interacting with each other so the belief of the author that humans are more empathic and androids do not have any empathy cannot be considered stronger if humans do not have empathy for each other.

First example of lacking empathy is Isidore. In the novel Blade Runner it was stated that, " He reached for the doorknob that opened the way out into the hall, then shrank back as he glimpsed the vacuity of the rest of the building. 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. (Dick 19)."

After the Terminus War, where animals were extinct it was hard to own an animal. The animals were more likely a symbol of status. The quote that is stated above shows how people in the Blade Runner were lacking empathy. Isidore was living alone in his own apartment and there was no one living in his neighborhood especially around his department. He did not have an

animal to get rid of his loneliness. He had his own empathy box that helped him feel that he is somewhat linked with society.

Since he was living alone he used to have conversations with himself in his empathy box. As it was stated in the Blade Runner that, " God, he thought in weariness. In what way is this fair? Why am I up here alone like this, being tormented by something I cannot 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 (Dick 21)." The question that comes up in my mind is how can we judge an android when human themselves are not emphatic.

The empathy box helped Isidore to get rid of his loneliness because when he was in the box he did not feel that he was lonely. It put him in someone else's position as I defined empathy in the beginning that it puts you in someone else's shoes and you feel their pain. Isidore was an empathic person, but as long as he was in his box but he did not have any real person in his life that shared his or her feelings with him or understood him.

He felt his life to be completed when he entered his empathy box and he felt someone else's pain. If humans take help from empathy box to maintain and improve their empathy for other humans then we cannot test androids for empathy then it should not be a big deal that androids are not empathic towards humans. This actually tells how important empathy is in Blade Runner as it was stated in the book when Isidore talked to his neighbor, " But an empathy box is the most personal possession you have. It is an extension

of your body; it is the way you touch other humans, it's the way you stop being alone (Dick 64)."

As it was stated in the novel, " Empathy must be limited to herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet. Because, ultimately, the empathetic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated (Dick 29)."

According to this quotation, empathy is what differentiates hunter from victim. However, if we read the novel it shows that humans in the Blade Runner were lacking empathy, instead of putting themselves in others shoes they were selfish and always concerned about themselves as it was stated in the novel Deckard says, " For you to have two horses and me none, that violates the whole basic theological and moral structure of Mercerism. Barbour says, " You have your sheep; hell, you can follow the ascent in your individual life, and when you grasp the two handles of empathy, you approach honorably (Dick 9)."

The quotation shows that Deckard and his neighbor did not have any empathy for each other. His neighbor did not want to lose any of his horse for Deckard and Deckard just thought about himself and wanted to have a horse from his neighbor.

On the other hand Isidore improved his empathy through his empathy box and he was an empathic person as it was obvious when his new neighbor moved in he actually helped them unpacking their stuff , whereas, Deckard and his neighbor had no empathy for each other. These 3 people help to understand how people behave differently if Deckard and Barbour were to <https://assignbuster.com/blade-runner-empathy-is-mostly-understood-philosophy-essay/>

get tested for empathy they might have considered androids. Empathy test is not something trustworthy to judge if androids should be living in humans or not.

Androids should be tested with different things like how dangerous are they and if they can take humans lives or if they can go out of control but if an android is living a normal life without harming anyone then I think society should give them some space too.

In Blade Runner, Voigt-Kampff test was used to observe empathy but it was also mentioned by runner of the test that this test was not the accurate test and it could go wrong and I personally think that testing someone based on empathy was a foolish thing to do what if any human would have failed the test and considered to be android then Deckard could have killed a human thinking that he was an android as he was told to kill them.

As it is stated in the novel that “ This problem has always existed since we first encountered androids posing as humans. The Leningrad psychiatrists think that a small class of humans’ beings could not pass the Voigt-Kampff Scale. If you tested them as humanoid robots you’d be wrong but by then they’d be dead (Dick 36).”

If we compare the life of Blade Runner to our lives, we see that our lives are way different than the one we read about in Blade Runner. We still do not have androids living in our society as we saw in the Blade Runner. We have been seeing technology increasing rapidly and changing our life-styles but still we cannot own our own robots. Even though the novel was written in the

past but what fascinating about it is that the author knew that the time will <https://assignbuster.com/blade-runner-empathy-is-mostly-understood-philosophy-essay/>

come when there would be humanoid robots. If we get to that point in the future where we see these robots are being part of our daily lives, we would have same concerns. There is no doubt about that robots will make our lives easier in order to do our hard tasks or time consuming tasks but they cannot be perfect in every aspect like human. Robots can be intelligent if they are programmed that way but they cannot have the emotions like humans do unless scientist work on them to program them somehow to have the emotions like humans.

As it was stated in the article, " Can Robots Feel Your Pain" written by Jeremy Adam Smith, " Perhaps no quality seems more human than our ability to empathize with others. Yet today scientists and engineers around the world are developing an oxymoron for the 21st century: the empathic robot (Smith)."

" In the future, I believe studies on social robots will give us many new insights on the nature of our social brain," he says. " Social robots can be used as an excellent simulation tool to investigate the nature of human emotion, empathy, and social interaction (Smith)."

The above quotations show that scientists have been working on the robots to develop empathy in them so they can be more human-friendly plus there will not be any danger if they do live in our society.

As stated in " Robots: Ethical by Design" published by Gordana Dodig Crnkovic and Baran Curuklu, " Among ethicists and engineers within robots there is an ongoing discussion to whether ethical robots are possible or even desirable one of the conclusions drawn is that artificial mortality must
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come in degrees and depend on the level of agency, autonomy and intelligence of the machine (Crnkovic, Curulu 61).”

In the above quotation author of the article explains that robots are desirable in our society only if they are built with intelligence and should have intelligence to complete its tasks only then they can be desirable in our society.

As it was stated in the article ‘ How Anthropomorphism Affects Empathy Toward Robots ‘ by Laurel D. Riek:

“ We explore an unexamined aspect of this problem: how people empathize with robots along the anthropomorphic spectrum. We conducted an experiment that measured how people empathized with robots shown to be experiencing mistreatment by humans. Our results indicate that people empathize more strongly with more human-looking robots and less with mechanical-looking robots (How Anthropomorphism Affects Empathy Toward Robots)”.

The above quotation clearly talks about the advancement of the robots and that if they built robots that look more like a human it will help humans to treat them nicely and they will be more comfortable to accept them in their societies. It’s not a big challenge for scientists to make humans that look more likely a human as I said before they have been working on robots to improve their empathy and look so human can welcome them in their society.

As stated in the article, "Moral Appearances: Emotions, Robots and Human Morality" by Mark Coeckelbergh states, "Can we build 'moral robots'? If morality depends on emotions, the answer seems negative. Current robots do not meet standard necessary conditions for having emotions: they lack consciousness, mental states, and feelings. Moreover, it is not even clear how we might ever establish whether robots satisfy these conditions. Thus, at most, robots could be programmed to follow rules, but it would seem that such 'psychopathic' robots would be dangerous since they would lack full moral agency. (Coeckelbergh, 235)."

In above quotation, the author of the article touched upon the serious issue that we are still debating on that what if robots harm humans, what if something goes wrong. The author talks about how some serious and very important rules should be made and followed and they should be programmed to obey these rules but he also does not give the guarantee that the robots that are being made so carefully will be harmless or not. He rather says that anything could go wrong because they will lack moral agency.

The advancement of technology where we are almost getting at a point where it will be harder for us to differentiate between what is human and what is non-human. The question that rises up is that how we would be able to recognize what is human like and what is non-human like. If we look at ourselves, whatever we are today is because we went through a procedure to be what we are today and it took so many years to reach this point. We were not programmed by anyone; we learnt everything little by little as we grew up and this is what makes us a human.

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On the other hand humanoid robots are programmed to be what they are today and that is only why they are more intelligent than human and that is what differentiates them from us. However, robots are being programmed by humans but once they are programmed they are more intelligent than an average person. The knowledge that we gain over the years we instill in robots and this is how they became smarter than an average man.

As it was stated in one of the article, ' Human Characteristics: What It Means To Be Human' by The Smithsonian Museum of Natural History: " Part of what it means to be human is how we became human. Over a long period of time, as early humans adapted to a changing world, they evolved certain characteristics that help define our species today (Smithsonian Museum of Natural History)."

It was stated in another article, ' The story of how humans evolved' by Roger Oakland, that , " Evolutionists claim humans have evolved over millions of years from brute ape-like creatures that were our ancestors(The story of how humans evolved)".

Unlike androids humans were evolved over the years. This is another big difference between humans and non-humans. In Blade Runner when one of the replicate was asked what generation is he from he told Nexus-6. Robot can be evolved but humans' evolution and robots evolution are way different.

As we can see today we are so used to technology that we do want it to be more advanced to make our lives easier. Humanoid robots are getting better little by little now they look so like humans that sometimes your eyes cannot
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tell the difference. However, if they are being made for our convenient then they should be welcomed in our society and we should not judge them on the things that we lack like empathy because if we keep on doing this we can harm someone in a doubt.

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