

Bladerunner and do
androids dream of
electric sheep?



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Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is a tormented exploration of the nature of what it means to be human. The Protagonist is a bounty hunter chasing human simulations known as “ androids” and he struggles with his feelings about the task of killing androids throughout the book. He begins to identify with the human replicants as the novel progresses which causes him to question what it means to be human and shakes his certainty that what he is doing is morally justifiable. The attempt to adapt this novel and these concepts to film known as Blade Runner fell horribly short of translating Philip K. Dick’s message from Literature into film. The Protagonist of Bladerunner does not grapple with the same dilemmas of identity that are dealt with in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, and the ultimate message is lost in the action film because of several inconsistencies and one glaring mistake made in the definition of what an android is in the film. The movie Blade Runner takes a few liberties with Dick’s storyline and the most notable is the way they identify and define an android. The androids in Blade Runner are capable of becoming indistinguishable from human beings because they develop emotions based on collected experiences. The Tyrell Corporation tries to nurture this by giving the androids memories of pasts that the androids never really had. This helps them form emotions and become harder to detect as inhuman. It takes Deckard one hundred questions when testing Rachel, a new Nexus6 android, when on previous models of androids twenty to thirty questions would have been sufficient. The audience can then assume that if the androids were not given a four year lifespan as a failsafe to prevent them from becoming completely indistinguishable from humans that they would eventually collect enough experiences to simulate sincere emotion flawlessly. The questions of identity

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that are addressed in the book are ignored, in part, because of this addition to the idea of the story. The androids in the movie are already capable of becoming indistinguishable from humans and the power of the message sent in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is lost. In the book the androids are not exactly human. They have short life spans because science could not perfect cell replication and they are also incapable of simulating empathy because of some problem that is implied to be more inherent and inseparable from android nature. These Androids are not capable of becoming exact replicas of human beings and are therefore separated from humanity. Dick establishes this intentionally while simultaneously dehumanizing humanity greatly throughout the book. The protagonist struggles with his own identity as well as the identities of the androids and the possible value of artificial life when so much of his supposedly valuable organic life is reliant on technology on a day to day basis. The main character in the book is tormented by poignant internal struggles while the tough guy Deckard of *Blade Runner* seems to have no problem doing something that should probably be even harder in this movie that abruptly descends into almost pointless action by the end. Rick Deckard is brought to life on the first page of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by his Penfield Mood Organ. The electric machine he depends upon to get through each day sets a tone of a skewed sense of humanity for its dependence on and use of technology. Deckard then argues with his wife, Iran, about the nature of emotion and whether it is natural for them to manipulate their emotions. He goes up to his roof to check on the electric sheep he uses to deceive his neighbors because life is so valuable in this world. He goes to work and retires a few androids all the while evaluating their emotions to determine

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whether or not they are human while his own emotions are simulated by a machine. He has sex and shows affection toward an android who he was first fooled into believing was human (and who, contrary to Dick's claim that androids do not empathize, shows a remarkable amount of empathy for other androids by trying to prevent Deckard and other bounty hunters from "retiring" androids). He partners up with bounty hunter Phil Resch who is fooled by several androids that were right under his nose and Deckard believes—and even convinces Resch—that he is an android. He is told by the sage, Mercer—who turns out to not be what he seems—that his job is a necessary evil, and he is finally given a toad by Mercer (a word that, interestingly enough, is a term for a dealer in textile fabrics) that is a fake. Deckard goes home after all of this with his fake toad to the corpse of his precious goat that was killed by the android he seems to love and who claims to love him and he refuses to alter his mood before going to sleep. He takes the opposite position of his initial argument in the beginning of the book and he surrenders to the way he feels. Who is human and what counts as life in this convoluted emotional concoction? When humanity is dehumanized by technology and technology is humanized by humanity what counts as life? There are certainly some issues with identity in this book and these are the extremely complex questions addressed by Philip K. Dick in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* that are largely forsaken in *Blade Runner* for mere action. The Deckard of *Blade Runner* does not ever seem to question the morality of "retiring" androids because the androids he approaches all try to kill him. The audience is spared the emotional and moral dilemma because Deckard has the excuse of self defense from extremely heinous enemies. They make comments to the effect of " how <https://assignbuster.com/bladerunner-and-do-androids-dream-of-electric-sheep/>

does it feel to be hunted,” and the audience can certainly understand their plight, but the overtly violent and destructive actions of the androids ultimately make them unsympathetic characters. The final eloquent speech of Batty to Deckard caused a slight shift in the understanding of the androids, but they essentially were violent creatures who greedily wanted more time to live rather than the passive and sympathetic androids of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* who merely wanted to be left alone during their time alive. The film touched on the Deckard’s struggle through his relationship with Rachel, but it was never clearly articulated or fully developed and the poignant and devastating struggle with identity that the Deckard of the book experiences is almost completely ignored and at the very least is confused and misinterpreted. The movie took the path of least resistance by translating the story as an action movie with plenty of sex, nudity, violence, and a climactic ending. The fact that the androids were capable of becoming identical to humans emotionally if it were not for their intentional four year life spans makes it more obviously wrong to kill them and that problem is solved by making them murderous. The struggles faced by Deckard in the book are so much less certain because of the degrees of life and the obvious flaws in artificial life juxtaposed with the obvious flaws in humanity. By the end the Deckard of the book is exhausted by the dilemma that intensifies with his increasing physical exertion and the reader is left thinking about the same questions that plague the protagonist. The movie was a cool sci-fi action movie that most likely left the audience thinking about Pris’s breasts or the way Batty gouged out Tyrell’s eyes. The encapsulating scene in the book where Deckard is viewing Munch’s *Scream* displays both Deckard’s almost realized qualms with killing androids and the

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plight of the androids themselves. Resch says at one point “ that is how an andy must feel” as the two view the painting and Deckard contemplates his feelings of attraction towards the android Luba Luft. The android’s feelings of hopelessness are confounded with those of the main characters and at this point, and for the first time, Deckard is empathizing with the androids who can not (supposedly) empathize themselves. This is largely started by Deckard’s attraction to Luft, something that the reader assumes has never happened before. Attraction is a powerful feeling and Deckard is shown to be sensitive and perhaps particularly vulnerable to being affected by it through his comparison to his callous counterpart, Resch. Resch uses heartless and cold logic to cope with his job of killing androids and Deckard finally realizes that he is not right for bounty hunting through his experience with Luba Luft and Phil Resch and he ends up being profoundly disturbed by his decision to finish hunting the rest of the androids after he had decided that it is wrong. All of Do Androids Dream of Electric sheep? is a struggle with identity, life, and reality. The man who maintains himself and relies on artificial moods produced by a machine hunts androids who he detects based on their insufficient emotions while driven by his desire to possess life and rid himself of his fake animal. He ultimately gives in to the despair he was trying to talk his wife out of at the beginning of the book and he does, in fact, finally possess the life he sought the entire book—his own. Blade Runner falls way short of making any profound statements, though it does briefly touch on the theme of identity between sex scenes, fights, and rugged quips from Harrison Ford. The questions applied to the human condition and the sense of self that humanity must face in an increasingly technological world are complicated and distressing. This is what Philip K. Dick is articulating in Do <https://assignbuster.com/bladerunner-and-do-androids-dream-of-electric-sheep/>

Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? and what Blade Runner is imitating with its cinematic adaptation.