

Yi Michael

29/11/2019

Word Count: 2688

How Entanglements affect Power Balance and Who Benefits

There is a struggle for control between humans and non-human parties in *Blood Music*, *Dawn of Lilith's Brood* and *I, Robot*. The struggle begins with the non-human party being introduced, though not the same way, it is always either because of or during a moment of weakness from the human party. Then, throughout the duration of the struggle, the non-human party becomes more and more entangled with factors of the human party, from biological body parts of specific people to the working of human society. A higher degree of entanglement always results in the human party losing control to the non-human party. However, there are differences in how the struggle is introduced and how it plays out. For example, in *I, Robot*, robots are created by humans because humans are worse at some tasks compared to robots. Vergil, in *Blood Music*, begins the power struggle inadvertently when he tries to save his research, meanwhile in *Dawn*, the Oankali are introduced immediately after humanity's destruction of itself. The degree and process of entanglement are different as well. The noocytes of *Blood Music* gain their control over humans directly by entangling physiologically with humans while the Oankali of *Dawn* have absolute power of humanity from the beginning, but the degree of their power is discovered by humans through the genetic entanglements they force. The robots of *QT* and *The Inevitable Conflict* in *I, Robot* are entangled in human society by the humans to do specific functions but those functions give the robots power over humans in its context. Since *Blood Music* and *Dawn* are both based on relationships between two different organisms, it can be compared to ecological interspecies relationships, in which case entanglements take place which may benefit, harm or not affect the two involved parties. Robots are different for they do what humanity

intended for them to do, which leads into questions about whether those functions harm or benefit humanity. As both the power balance and the existence of the Oankali do not change in *Dawn* and only what humans perceive of them changes, it can lead to questions on whether reality matters more than human perception of reality. The fact robots follow human orders in *I, Robot* can lead to questions on whether robots controlling humans can be counted as humans still controlling humans. And as all non-human parties believe, or at least suggest, they are helping humanity whether humans want it or not, arguments can be made on whether pragmatic and measurable benefits to humanity matters more than free will and whether free will exists at all. The only true certainty in all three novels is the first level of entanglement is allowed by human deficiency and all further entanglements wrest power away in the area of which entanglement occurs from the human party into the non-human party, no matter if it is in reality or in the perception of humanity.

In *Blood Music*, the noocyte's ability to grow in power was created by an action Vergil took in a moment of weakness. Vergil had invented and built the noocytes previously and had injected it into himself. In terms of what would have happened if he had not taken these two options, the most obvious would be how if he did not invent noocytes, they would not exist, but it could be argued there would have still been a power balance if he did not inject them into himself. However, prior to injecting them into himself, Vergil was in absolute control of the noocytes and was able to destroy them easily (Bear, 20). While Vergil did not give the noocytes power over himself, he gave them the ability to achieve it. The reason for Vergil injecting them into himself was because he was being fired. It was a moment of vulnerability for him stemming from him being afraid of losing his research. The entire process of the power struggle which led to the eventual victory of the noocytes was allowed to occur because of a moment in weakness

from Vergil. Thus, the two conditions needed for entanglement to further develop in *Blood Music* was Vergil, representing the human party, must have been in a moment of weakness and must have given the noocytes the ability to entangle with him physiologically.

Throughout the story, as time passed, the noocytes and Vergil became entangled in more ways, directly relating to the noocyte's consistent growth in power. The noocytes began with the ability to learn from and alter other cells, meaning the amount they were capable of learning is directly affected by the number of cells they have access to. Being in the human bloodstream gave them the ability to travel within the human body, allowing them to learn from the cells they encounter and making them into more noocytes. After injecting himself with the noocytes, they begin to alter who he is in different ways from changing his preferences for food to changing his physical body, eventually making him a vessel through which the transfer of noocytes to the outside of his body was facilitated. Though it is arguable whether Vergil liked or disliked any of these changes, it does not matter as Vergil had no control over any of these changes and the abilities of the noocytes only expanded as they occurred. Thus, if he only lost control and the noocytes only gained control, the effect entanglement in general has on this power balance is basic, with any form of entanglement tipping the scale in favour of the noocytes.

The story *Dawn of Lilith's Brood*, also has a human and non-human party like in 'Blood Music.' It does differ from it in the way the Oankali were not created by the humans. However, the power struggle also began in a moment of weakness for the humans and it could be argued the concept of the Oankali did not exist to the humans until the moment. The Oankali took the human survivors of a nuclear war. It is unclear whether Oankali would have been able to have total control over all of humanity if the war had not happened, but the story would not have started with humanity having no power at all. The first contact between the two species occurred

because of the war. While the humans did not give existence to the Oankali, from the perspective of the humans, not meeting them is the same as them not existing. In a way, like ‘Blood Music’ a moment of vulnerability created the non-human party, which led to a power struggle.

There is no change to the power balance between Oankali and humans throughout the events of ‘Dawn’ but there is a change to the level and amount of entanglement between the two species. While the noocytes in ‘Blood Music’ gain power through entangling themselves with the human body, the Oankali gain the ability to entangle themselves with both a specific human body and humanity in general through the power they have over them. The first level of entanglement was Nikanj combining Oankali traits with Lilith’s existing human traits to give her better memory. The significance of this event is the lack of choice Lilith had, while it is true she could have chosen to refuse the change when it was offered, all of the options she had to choose from was given by the Oankali (Butler, 79). If the Oankali determines what the acceptable choices are, the option Lilith chooses and what it leads to is a result of Oankali power and not Lilith. The last level of entanglement reached in *Dawn* was Nikanj impregnating Lilith without her knowledge. This is considered to be a higher level of physical entanglement as it means Lilith’s body now creates and develops a new life with Oankali features. It is also when the Oankali’s most intense display of power was shown, as not only was it not Lilith’s choice, Lilith was not even given knowledge of the situation until after. While the Oankali always held absolute control over humanity, the increase in how much of that power they used, which equates to how much power Lilith knows of, was shown through the increase in the degree of entanglements the Oankali forced between the two species.

When only considering the relationship between a moment of human weakness and the appearance of the non-human party, *Blood Music* and *Dawn* show causation and correlation

respectively, as the noocytes begin to exist because of a moment in weakness for humans while the Oankali come into contact with humans during a moment of weakness. *Blood Music* shows an increase in the degree of entanglements causing an increase in power for the non-human party, while *Dawn* shows an increase in the degree of entanglements correlating with the displayed or perceived power of the non-human party. This means equally in both novels, humans perceive the other party as gaining more power when they become physically entangled further, and in *Blood Music*, the amount of power humans think the other party has is the same as the amount of power they actually have over them. In both novels, the non-human party has complete control over the attributes entangled, no matter to which party the changes are inflicted upon. Thus, the degree of entanglement is directly correlated with the degree of power the noocytes or Oankali have over the humans.

As both novels are about relationships between two different species, ecological relationship between organisms can be applied, to which whether an entanglement benefits or harms can be deduced. There are five kinds of interspecies interactions, they are generally determined by which party benefits and which is harmed (Brewer, 120-122). For the purpose of this comparison, benefit will be seen as an increase of power while being harmed will be seen as a decrease of power. As the process of the relationship between the noocytes and humans benefit the noocytes but harm humans, it might either be predation or parasitism. The difference between these two interactions is which direction entanglement goes. In predation, the prey becomes a part of the predator while in parasitism, the parasite becomes a part of its host. Parasitism applies more at first as the noocytes are completely dependant on the humans while predation applied better to later in the story when noocytes become an organism capable to consuming humans to benefit itself. While the factor of dependency in parasitism may make it seem as though the host

is in control rather than the parasite, the parasite is able to control all manners of the host through physical changes to changes in cognitive functions by entangling themselves within parts of the host's bodily systems (Liberat, 1-2). However, it is still unclear whether choice being taken away always means harm.

Parasitism between Oankali and humans in 'Dawn' can be ruled out because the Oankali have no dependency, however it is arguable whether the power of humans can be categorised as becoming weaker because, as shown previously, the only change in power occurs in perception. This means the relationship is either predation or commensalism. The difference in entanglement between predation and commensalism is while predation requires the prey to physically become a part of the predator, both parties in commensalism entangle with each other mutually in the same areas. It may seem commensalism applies more as human genes are incorporated into the Oankali, instead of only the human body being used to serve the needs of the Oankali, but for it to be so, it would have to mean humans neither benefited from nor was harmed by the process. Humanity starts with the earth destroyed and no control over their environment, however they did have more control over their own bodies compared to when they were taken by the Oankali. In exchange, humanity's survival went from impossible to possible if the Oankali allowed it. Whether the relationship between humans and Oankali counts as predation or commensalism depends on whether exercising one's free will is more important than survival or physical and biological ability and whether free will can be applied at all. Humans, as a conscious race, could have an additional factor determining whether entanglement with another species benefits them or not, the factor being whether they could have refused. This is the same question presented in the previous paragraph with the noocytes taking control, the answer is especially hard to find as both noocytes and the Oankali perceive themselves as helping humanity.

There are two short stories in *I, Robot* where robots establish control over humans, being *QT* and 'The Inevitable Conflict.' *QT* gains control over the ship because it determines it is what is needed to do its job and follow the three laws of robotics, the same reason the Machines take over the world economy (Asimov, 224). Because of the purpose the machines were built for, it is difficult to determine whether their taking control harms or benefits humanity, especially since the fact they were built by humans even muddles whether humanity is still in control. These two concepts, the laws and the duties, are respectively meant to protect humanity and serve humanity. Theoretically, it should mean the robots' actions all benefit humanity. However, if humans become unable to control what the robots do, would it count as harming humanity even if the robots continue to perform their function? *QT* did a better job of controlling the ship than the humans did, the same way the Machine did a better job of controlling the economy and society in general. The humans designed the machines for this purpose, so it could be said robots doing what humans intended it to perform and despite them controlling humanity, could it remain as humans controlling humans, except now through a proxy.

As AI replaces humans in various fields, whether it counts as being beneficial or not depends entirely on what one values. The purpose of artificial intelligence ranges from helping humans perform basic tasks to securing public safety. But whether their duty is to do what humans do not wish to do or what humans cannot do, implementing AI and robotics means replacing humans (Shabbir, 2-5). So, when AI is entangled into human society, it is not combined with humans. Another key difference in entanglement between 'I Robot' and the other two novels is humans are capable of determining the level of entanglement. Robots in both short stories become in control of the specific section of human society they are entangled in. Since it does lead to better results and the purpose of AI is to make better decisions for humans, whether

or not them taking control benefits humans depends on whether humans having free will is more important than humans obtaining better results in whatever they seek (Doyle, 3-9).

When the three texts are compared, the non-human factor is introduced because of the vulnerability of humans, from a specific human's panic in *Blood Music* to humans failing to preserve their own species in *Dawn* and to humans needing something more capable than they are in *I, Robot*, humans lose more and more control as the non-human factor is entangled further with humanity, whether culturally or physically. Since all the non-human factors gain power through entanglement, this concept is seen by the authors as a way in which humans specifically are only capable of losing control. As posthumanism is a concept in which the human species is modified, then these authors consider modifications to be a way to replace, with the free will of humans being reduced in whatever aspect of humanity is being replaced, be it an individual human or a human trait. This leads further into what free will is and whether the loss of free will, when started by humans, can be attributed to something other than the party with which the lost control now lies. Another question it leads to is whether lacking free will and being controlled by another group of conscious beings is a benefit or detriment when they do not make the mistakes humans do. However, these questions will all have to depend on the premise of free will existing at all.

Works Cited

- Asimov, Isaac. *I, Robot*. Del Rey, an Imprint of Random House, a Division of Penguin Random House, LLC, 2008.
- Bear, Greg. *Blood Music*. Open Road Integrated Media, 2014.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Liliths Brood: Dawn -- Adulthood Rites -- Imago*. Grand Central Publishing, 2000.
- Brewer, Richard. "Types of Interactions." *Principles of Ecology*, Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1979.
- Doyle, Jon. *Artificial intelligence and rational self-government*. Carnegie-Mellon University. Department of Computer Science, 1988.
- Libersat, Frederic, et al. "Mind Control: How Parasites Manipulate Cognitive Functions in Their Insect Hosts." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9, Jan. 2018, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00572.
- Shabbir, Jahanzaib, and Tarique Anwer. "Artificial Intelligence and its role in near future." *arXiv preprint arXiv:1804.01396* (2018).
- Thomas Frédéric, et al. *Parasitism and Ecosystems*. Oxford University Press, 2012.