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The Deckard Question

Philosophers for centuries have explored the question of what it means to be alive, or simply, to be human. Scott's *Blade Runner* and Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049* present us with the same question. What does it actually mean, to be human? Both directors in their film adaptations to Philip K. Dick's Novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* explore and expand the universe centered around Rick Deckard, a member of the LAPD tasked with the mission to hunt and retire artificial humans or replicants, or Blade Runner. We're shown the dehumanization of Deckard throughout his quest as we can see the humanization of those who he hunts. However, we are not shown anything about Deckard's true nature or origin as the directors seem to allure to Deckard being a replicant himself. This mystery, is the symbolic representation of our question, what does it means to be human? Deckard's initial humanity is crucial to these film adaptations but throughout the films, it is realized that Deckard is a replicant and to be human, one doesn't actually have to be a human being.

Scott's *Blade Runner* opens by showing us the humanity within Deckard. Deckard had used to be a Blade Runner and was apparently was one of the greatest on the LAPD. He had quit presumably due to the uncomfortableness of the murderous characteristic of his job. Given no choice he is forced to set out once again as a Blade Runner. The first implication is seen in this early scene where Captain Harry Bryant gives Deckard no choice other than to embark on his mission. Bryant, leader of the Blade Runner division of LAPD, could very easily have known the

true origin of Deckard as he was the one tasked with employing him. He insinuates that Deckard's refusal to work is not an option and would most likely retire him should he not comply. Deckard does not realize this implication as he does not know he is of replicant origin, he simply believes that he is human, and embarks on his journey to hunt down the four replicants that he is tasked with. Obviously, this simple interaction is pure speculation as we are given no clear detail on Bryant's knowledge or intentions. We have to dive further into the encounters of Deckard to fully understand his origin.

We learn, in the very first scene of *Blade Runner* that the best way to determine if a person is human or replicant is through a series of emotional tests known as the Voight Kampff test. During this test, the interrogator, usually a Blade Runner, interrogate the assumed replicant and uses a machine to watch for signals in the eye to determine if the assumed replicant is a human or not. Deckard boasts his ability to administer this test as he states he has never accidentally retired a human whom he believed to be a replicant. During his investigation, Deckard meets a new experimental replicant, Rachel, who is designed by the Tyrell Corporation to have implanted memories, which serve as a cushion for emotions. Tyrell, the owner of the Tyrell Corporation believes that these cushions will allow for easier control of replicants in the future. Deckard interrogates Rachel using the Voight Kampff test and ultimately learns of her replicant origin although, it takes him 100 questions to make the decision, something he has never seen before. Deckard is ordered by Bryant to retire Rachel, but winds up falling in love with her, an event that may be best described as fate.

Rachel, at first, is not aware she is a replicant, although is slowly starting to be suspicious. After Deckard administers the test, Rachel asks Deckard if he ever performed the test on himself. If Deckard was purely human, there would be no need to administer the test on

himself so he could simply answer with that. This is not the case however, Deckard avoids the question and doesn't answer Rachel. We begin to see the dehumanization of Deckard here as perhaps Rachel suspects that he is a replicant, and that Deckard isn't completely aware of his own origins of life either.

The relationship between Rachel and Deckard is a crucial part of the theme presented to us as we ask what it means to be human. Rachel learns of the true nature and realizes that she is a replicant herself. She discusses with Deckard a plan to leave and escape to the North. We see, in this scene an obvious red glow in Rachel's eyes, which is a trait only shared by replicants. This is proven when Scott shows us scenes of replicant animals, such as the owl, or other replicant humans, such as Roy Batty, the leader of the replicant squad that Deckard is tasked with retiring, with the same red eye glow. What is not obvious is that in that scene, when Rachel's red eyes glow, we see a slight red glow in the eyes of Deckard, again a trait only shared by replicants. This is an indication of not just Deckard's replicant origins, but his ignorance of it. Rachel's much like the eyes of Roy Batty, are clearly red as they are aware of their replicant status. Deckard is not and therefore is symbolized with his hidden red eyes.

If Deckard is indeed a replicant, then someone, if not Bryant or just Bryant, has to know. This should be assumed as if Deckard is a replicant, then someone, somewhere created him and therefore the information, although not directly presented to the audience, exists. Officer Gaff, another Blade Runner of the LAPD, appears to know more than meets the eye during his encounters with Deckard. Gaff, throughout the movie, taunts Deckard with various origami shapes to symbolize the situation. He uses a chicken to symbolize cowardice and a human like figure to symbolize Rachel. However, what is interesting is his choice to make and leave an origami unicorn for Deckard to find. Tyrell explains Rachel's memories as artificial implants,

memories put into her head to make her more human and to build that cushion for emotion. If Deckard were a replicant, let alone a trusted one, it would go without saying that his creator would also implant memories in him to create that cushion for emotion and make him easier to control. It is shown that Gaff is aware of this because, we are shown a scene where Deckard has a dream of a Unicorn, a mystical creature that does not exist. This scene at first does not exhibit much information or at first seems particularly useful to Deckard's replicant origin, but when Gaff presents him with the origami unicorn, it is then revealed that Gaff must know something about the contents of Deckard's mind. The only possible way for a man to know the contents of another man's mind would be if those memories were fake and implanted by someone else. Due to Deckard's controlled nature, it makes sense for him to have the emotional cushion of implanted memories, just like Rachel.

At the end of *Blade Runner*, Deckard has retired all but one replicant, that being the very Roy Batty, our antagonist leader. He saves Deckard from falling to his death and ultimately expires and dies as replicants were designed to only have 4 year lifespans to avoid them fully developing their own human emotions. One could argue that Deckard does not appear to have this four-year lifespan, especially as we see him age in *Blade Runner 2049*, but this argument can be ruled out simply because of the replicant that *Blade Runner 2049*'s main LAPD Blade runner, K, is tasked to retire. Morton, a pre blackout replicant, is retired by K in the beginning of this film and has very obviously aged. Being a pre blackout replicant, he has obviously been around much longer than 4 years since the blackout was said to have happened in 2022 and Villeneuve's Film takes place in 2049. This being said, Deckard notably does not have the same super human strength that all replicants, including Roy and Morton, seem to have. The simple argument for this is that Deckard is an older model and this technology was not available for his line. Again, a

counter would be, if Deckard was an older model, why did he not die in 4 years as it seems Nexus 7s, like Rachel, were the ones who has longer lifespans and Nexus 6s, like Roy, had 4 year lifespans. We must look at the creator of the replicants to answer this. Tyrell, the creator of them, obviously wanted more replicants and a much more efficient way to produce his product. The point of his experiment with Rachel was to design a more controllable replicant to avoid a revolt and thus lift the ban of replicants on earth. Now if this went well, he could produce these controllable replicants and bring light back to his name. But the means of production can always be improved. We see in *Blade Runner 2049* that a replicant child is born from none other than Rachel and Deckard, the couple of interest in Scott's original movie. K is tasked to find this child and destroy it and all evidence to prevent a social collapse as this means that replicants have evolved enough to create on their own. The key here is the words "on their own". If replicants could reproduce without the need of a creator, this could actually shatter human society, as thought by Lt. Joshi, K's superior. However, from a production standpoint, if replicants could reproduce on their own, then that would surely lessen the cost for their creator, the Tyrell corporation.

Before the year 2049, Tyrell Corporation was bankrupt and picked up by the Wallace Corporation, led by Niander Wallace, designer of the Nexus 9 model. These models were completely obedient; the end goal of the Tyrell corp. Wallace sought the child of Deckard as the key to replicant reproduction as he believed that replicants that could reproduce would increase the production so intensely that Nexus 9s who could reproduce would take humanity to greater heights than ever before thought possible. This vision is evidently obvious for Wallace but can easily be thought to be the same for Dr. Tyrell. After all, Tyrell was the initial creator of the replicants so allowing them to reproduce on their own along with the ability to control them

would not only save the Tyrell Corporation but humanity as well. Tyrell knew this and sought to create replicants that could reproduce and could be controlled, and this was the actual purpose of the experimental Nexus 7, Rachel. To complete this feat, then Rachel cannot have a lifespan of just four years, and after all, her implanted memories allow for easier control so why would she need a four-year life? Since this is true for Rachel, it also must be true for Deckard. As a replicant, it is factual that he would be designed and created by Tyrell, who gave him a longer life than the four-year standard. The implanted memories, such as the unicorn, would explain his ability to be controlled and therefore explain why a four-year lifespan is unnecessary for Deckard. These similarities between Deckard and Rachel could not be pure coincidence as they were created, by the same creator, for a purpose. This purpose was to reproduce. From this, it goes without saying that the meeting of Deckard and Rachel, falling in love, and producing an offspring had to have been fate constructed by their creator. With Tyrell's goal in mind, this fate was programmed into his two beloved replicants, Rachel and Deckard, to fulfill his goal.

Blade Runner 2049 explains to us that Wallace sought the same goal, as noted before, and therefore seeks out Deckard for his child as he is aware of the child's origins. Wallace believes that Deckard is a replicant and was indeed programmed to meet and fall in love with Rachel. Wallace bought Tyrell's company and took over his once mighty empire. It would make sense that Wallace would have the same goal as Tyrell and would have access to any Tyrell records that hold the truth to Deckard's replicant origins thus knowing everything about him factually.

The efforts put through by K, the replicant Blade Runner of *Blade Runner 2049*, cannot go unnoticed. He actively lies to his superior to protect Deckard and his child as he explores the mystery that surrounds his own origin. He begins to believe that he is the child of Rachel and

Deckard as he has the same memories that the child was found to have. His AI girlfriend, Joi, assures him that he is special and this must be the case. However, as the film progresses, we learn that K is merely the replicant copy of the actual child who is revealed to be a girl whose records were faked to hide her, and his memories were simply implants of her childhood memories. During this struggle he must fight to understand himself as it is unclear to him the point of his existence. We notice Joi become more and more human throughout the film until she is ultimately destroyed by Wallace's beloved replicant, Luv who is then retired by K. This is simply symbolic use of names for Love being the death of K's Joy and K sacrificing his own Love for Deckard. K struggles and questions his own feeling when watching an ad for Joi, as she is simply programmed to say everything the user wants to hear, after her death. His Joy seems to have been just purely programmed, so again the question is asked, what does it mean to be human?

As we watch the dehumanization of Deckard in *Blade Runner*, we notice the humanization of none other than Roy Batty. In our end scene, when Roy saves Deckard, we hear a speech from Roy about his life and its meaninglessness. Roy does not wish this to be true, after all, his goal was to get Tyrell to grant him and the Nexus 6 models extended life. Roy has a clear will to live and saves Deckard because he senses Deckard's own will to live, something that seems to be more evident in replicants rather than humans. In fact, in *Blade Runner*, humans on Earth seem to be desensitized and zombie like, as they just follow the dystopian will of society. The replicants exhibit emotion and a clear will to progress and live on. We can argue this to be an evident trait of being human as, after all, emotion is a human trait. We see many instances where replicants show human traits. Morton in *Blade Runner 2049* is an excellent example as, before his retirement, tells K that he has never seen a miracle before. A miracle is simply and

event that has extremely low odds but happens anyway but brings about very welcome consequences. In other words, in order for an event to be a miracle, there must be hope. Then it must go without saying that the replicants who consider the birth of Deckard's child a miracle, have hope that they may one day be no longer oppressed by humans. Hope is a historically evident human trait as throughout history, many people have oppressed other groups of people who must have hoped for a miracle to save them. K states in *Blade Runner 2049* that to be born is to have a soul. If it's possible for a replicant to be born, then it then must be possible for a replicant to have a soul. The bible, states that "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36), which is a spiritual definition of soul saying that the soul is the very essence that makes up a person's feelings, desires, affections and essentially makes them who they are, or human.

Simply put, who we are or what we do defines us, we can see that Deckard is a replicant, created to push the boundaries of machine and create an entire new era of replicants. Looking past the Tyrell corporation reason for this type of creation, it is a creation of entity, of mind, of being and of soul. We may never truly answer the question of what it entirely means to be human, but the choices that Scott and Villeneuve made in the creation of their films allow us to explore this as a main theme of their work. Deckard was written and made to be a replicant so that we could explore the actual purpose of his origin, and in doing so, we can clearly see that in order to be human, one does not have to have be an actual human being. There are traits that make us all human, our emotions, our desires, our memory, our feelings and the collective characteristics that all make up our soul.

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