

Criticism on *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* has focused on androids and ignored animals. The novel's ethical concerns are best understood through animal studies, revealing political deployments of the species boundary to disenfranchise certain humans. The novel suggests another model of subjectivity best understood through Marx's "species being."

## Speciesism and Species Being in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

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Central to Philip K. Dick's fiction is the question of what it means to be human, a question generally explored through the opposition between "authentic" human beings and various artificial beings made to imitate humans. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, whose popularity perhaps derives from the wide influence of the film *Blade Runner* which it inspired, is his best known novel in this mode. Similarities and differences between the two texts have been discussed at length and it is not my purpose to rehearse or contribute to those arguments or to engage with scholarship on these differences. Rather, I want to focus attention on an aspect of the original text neglected in both the film adaptation and criticism: the importance of animals, electric and real. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* develops its ideas about being human through *two* comparisons: animals and androids.

Dick's novel is set in a future earth that has been devastated by nuclear war. Most of the population has left the planet, a colonization effort aided by the free labour of androids. Those left are either too poor to emigrate or else are designated "specials," a category denoting decreased intelligence and hence ineligibility for emigration.

Androids are illegal on earth, although some have escaped slavery in the colonies and try to pass as human. They are hunted down and killed—retired—by bounty hunters such as protagonist Rick Deckard. The remnants of human culture are held together by a religion called Mercerism, which is practiced through empathic fusion with others via a technology called the empathy box. Animals, almost or perhaps actually extinct, are sacred to the religion of Mercerism and the culture in general. Owning and caring for an animal is a sign of one's social and economic status and also an expression of one's humanity. Androids, in contrast, do not care for others, neither animals nor other androids. Their inability to feel empathy is what sets them apart from humans and justifies their enslavement and execution. Organic machines, androids can only be distinguished from humans through the Voigt-Kampff test for empathy which measures involuntary emotional response to certain questions, predominantly about abuse and exploitation of animals.

There is a general critical consensus that the novel's major concern is with alienated, modern, technologized life rendering humans increasingly cold and android-like. While this argument usually concludes that Deckard is healed by reconnecting with nature, most critics ignore the important role of animals in the novel and the specificity of the category of the animal in Western culture.<sup>1</sup> Ursula Heise, one of a few critics attentive to the animals, concludes that, although animals are crucial to the definition of what is human, the novel's theme is that "the technological simulation of animal life" (79) is a sufficient substitute for real animals. In contrast to such readings, I argue that the representation of animals is central to the novel's critique of the Cartesian subject and commodity fetishism, and that only by realizing the centrality of animals can we perceive all the implications of Deckard's change. It is not, as often argued, that Deckard risks becoming increasingly like the androids through his work as a bounty hunter; rather, the risk faced by Deckard and other humans in the novel lies in realizing that they already are android-like, so long as they define their subjectivity based on the logical, rational, calculating part of human being.

**T**he version of the human self that emerges in the novel can be traced back to Descartes's *cogito*, which marks the entrance of a number of important distinctions that have structured modernity. Descartes conceptualized the human self as separate from nature, including the nature of its own body. He also argued strongly for an absolute split between humans and animals, asserting that animals are merely mechanical beings undeserving of our empathy rather than living and feeling creatures like ourselves. Descartes based this conclusion on his conviction that animals do not have mental capacities as do humans, and thus, while animals might feel sensation, they

cannot experience pain as such. Instead, animals respond to stimuli as if they were automata made of “of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins” instead of “wheels and other parts” (41), acting only from the “disposition of their organs” (42) rather than from understanding. The philosophical problem with which Descartes struggled—how to distinguish man from an other (in this case, animals)—is the same question with which Dick continually struggles. Descartes’s sense that animals are simply machines responding as designed is similar to the way androids are positioned within Dick’s novel: they appear to act as do humans, but lack some non-material capacity (mind for Descartes, empathy in the novel) that would make them truly the same as humans. Tom Regan offers a sustained critique of Descartes’s notion of animal subjectivity in *The Case for Animal Rights* (see 3–25). Nonetheless, as Gary Francione points out in *Animals, Property and the Law*, despite this critique and new developments in the study of animal consciousness since Descartes, scientific practice regarding animals continues to be structured by the assumption that they do not feel pain as humans do (220–24).

Descartes used such distinctions to insist that the *cogito*, or thinking self, was distinct from all other life. Dick, on the other hand, critiques the *cogito* and emphasizes the fragility of such demarcations. At one point in the novel, an android tortures a spider in order to discover how many legs it can lose while still being able to walk. This is typically described as the moment when the androids’ truly inhuman nature comes to the surface and all sympathy for them is lost. Another way of reading this scene, however, is as disinterested experiment rather than torture, mirroring the technique of scientists who were (and often still are) able to perform painful experiments on living creatures without any concern. Thus android subjectivity is similar to the Cartesian model of subjectivity, used to justify the exploitation of animals because of their mechanical nature and lack of a soul. The Nexus-6 androids, explicitly labelled “these progressively more human types” (Dick, *Do* 54), show us the limitations of the Cartesian self. The Cartesian self is clearly not the only way to understand human subjectivity, but as scholarship on posthumanism has established,<sup>2</sup> it is a model that persists in many of our assumptions around identity and technology. It is further central to Dick’s own concerns with human and android identity. Despite the need to posit empathy as the defining characteristic of human beings in order to distinguish humans from androids in the novel, the actions of most “normal” humans in the novel suggest subjectivities still dominated by the rational, calculating logic of the *cogito*.

Animals have long figured in Western religious and philosophical traditions as the other of humans. In many ways, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* simply puts androids in the place historically occupied by animals. They are classified as less-than-

human and any evidence of capacities they might possess that runs contrary to the hegemonic ideology (such as Luba's appreciation of art) is ignored. The reasons given for treating androids as disposable are clearly linked to human dependence on exploitable android labour, without which no one would have been able to escape the declining earth. From this perspective, the treatment of androids within the novel comments on our historical and current exploitation of animals, and also our exploitation of those humans who have been animalized in discourse, such as women, the working classes, and non-whites, particularly slaves. The homologous situations of androids and animals draw our attention to the discourse of speciesism.

The term speciesism came into popular use through Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*. He begins with Bentham's assertion that the critical question to ask about animals is "can they suffer" (rather than the more familiar ones such as can they use tools, language, reason, etc.). Singer links the capacity to suffer to the philosophical notion of having an "interest" in one's welfare. Possessing or lacking "interest" determines the different ethical categories that humans and animals occupy. Singer defines as speciesist "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species" (7), and argues that this attitude must be understood in analogy to sexism and racism. The question of speciesism has long been central to arguments for animal rights<sup>3</sup> and has recently also become of interest to philosophers of ethics in general and to the emerging discipline of animal studies. Such scholars have drawn attention to the way the category of "animal" functions ethically and politically to disenfranchise certain humans in the ongoing political deployments of this species boundary. There are many reasons that it is imperative at this time to re-examine both the category of "animal" and also our material relationships with non-human animals: the human/animal boundary is being breached by genetics research and practices such as xenotransplantation, the biodiversity of our planet is rapidly disappearing as species go extinct, we live in a society founded on the exploitation of animals for food and other resources, and developments in animal cognition suggest their capacities for things they were once denied, such as emotion, consciousness, and tool use.

The philosophical importance of the category of the animal is significant for understanding *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Derrida has argued that the question of the animal is crucial for metaphysics as Western subjectivity is based on a logic of sacrifice and "carno-phallogocentrism" (114), which privileges human over animal as much as it privileges man over woman. Giorgio Agamben's work in *Homo Sacer* and *The Open* argues for the centrality of biopower to modern political life, an exercise of power founded on the separation of "bare" biological life from the "proper" life of the citizen, which is also the separation of the "animality" from the "humanity" of *homo*

*sapiens*. He concludes *The Open* by arguing that this conflict is “the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict” (80). The central questions of the discourse of animal studies, like the central themes of Dick’s fiction, concern the ethics and ambiguities of what it means to be human.

These tensions are revealed in the novel through the problematic representation of Deckard’s work as a bounty hunter. Although Deckard is supposed to rationalize his work as a bounty hunter while still theoretically maintaining his reverence for empathy, he comes to realize that doing so requires precisely the sort of affect and cognition split that makes him both a proper Cartesian subject and an android subjectivity, experiencing emotions only as programmed. He understands that the ethical standard he is required to believe in is “In retiring—i.e., killing—an andy, he did not violate the rule of life laid down by Mercer. *You shall kill only the killers*” (Dick, *Do* 31), but he also realizes that “the killers” is an ideologically-constructed rather than ontologically-given category. As Deckard observes, “it was never clear who or what this evil presence was. A Mercerite sensed evil without understanding it. Put another way, a Mercerite was free to locate the nebulous presence of The Killers wherever he saw fit” (32). Thus, like the test for empathy that divides androids from humans, the line drawn between human and nonhuman that justifies the use of violence without ethical consequence exists only when and where its existence needs to be constructed.

Despite the centrality of the human/android distinction to the novel’s politics, from the opening pages it is shown to be constructed rather than natural. When we are first introduced to Deckard, the artificial simulation of emotions is normalized over their “natural” expression as he notes with surprise that he feels irritable “although he hadn’t dialed for it” on his Penfield mood organ. Deckard fights with his wife, Iran, over her plan to dial herself “a six-hour self-accusatory depression” (4), which he argues “defeat[s] the whole purpose of the mood organ,” but which she counters is the only thing that keeps her human; the mood organ dehumanizes because it allows her to separate her experience of the world from her emotional response to it. Failing to react with despair to depressing situations, she insists, “used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it ‘absence of appropriate affect’” (5). Paradoxically, absence of empathy for androids is also defined as human. A degree of inappropriate affect is also the heritage of the Cartesian *cogito*; the rise of modern science was made possible by the ability to ignore the suffering of those upon whom one experimented. Although vivisection is now conducted with more care regarding the animals’ suffering, it is worth noting that most of Dick’s audience would fail the Voigt-Kampff test. Its questions—about topics such as boiling live lobster, eating meat, or using fur—denote things that are commonplace rather than shocking in our world.

Deckard has an epiphany when Luba is killed. At this point, Deckard has met another bounty hunter, Resch, who is untroubled by the dissociative state required to retire androids. Deckard realizes that while he would have no difficulty killing Resch, he does have difficulty killing Luba, whose singing he has appreciated. This leads Deckard to realize that his work as a bounty hunter emerges not from the difference between humans and androids, but because there is not a sufficient difference to maintain the economic exploitation upon which their world rests. Deckard's discovery that he feels empathy for androids is the first sign that he is becoming a new sort of human, one who cannot separate cognition from affect, and thus is resisting becoming like an android himself. He realizes, "Perhaps the better she functions, the better a singer she is, the more I am needed. If the androids had remained substandard, like the ancient q-40's made by Derain Associates—there would be no problem and no need of my skill" (99). Once he has this insight that his skill is about making rather than policing a boundary, Deckard is unable to continue as before.

An insufficiently new relationship with animals lies at the heart of the problem of android subjectivity. Most of the scenes in the novel involving animals show that the animals exist as commodities rather than as beings for the humans in this world. Deckard fears that his neighbours will discover that his sheep is electric because of the loss of economic status this would imply; there is no sense that the death of his real sheep caused him any grief on a personal level nor that his relationship with the electric one is different in any way. Similarly, when Isidore's employers discuss the accidental death of a real cat, which was presumed to be artificial, they are not concerned about the loss of a unique and beloved pet or the suffering the animal experienced at death. Instead, "it's the waste" (77) that bothers them, and their discussion immediately moves to insurance and replacement costs. The wife who took care of this cat decides to replace it secretly with an electric one as her husband "never got physically close to Horace, even though he loved him" (81) and so will not notice the difference. During her empathy test, when told about a banquet at which dog was served, Luba responds, "Nobody would kill and eat a dog. [...] They're worth a fortune" (103), a non-empathic response that marks her as an android, but which is nonetheless consistent with attitudes toward animals displayed by the human characters.

The only character to demonstrate concern for animals as something other than commodities is Isidore, but as a special, he is faulted for his inability to distinguish between real animals (who deserve our sympathy) and electric ones (whose seeming pain is irrelevant). Like the androids, Isidore occupies a marginal ethical position in the novel. Peter Singer argues in *Animal Liberation* that if we are to be non-speciesist, we must accept that if we are willing to justify our exploitation of animals for experiments

based on their lesser mental capacity and thus lesser capacity for suffering than “this same argument gives us a reason for preferring to use human infants—orphans perhaps—or retarded humans” (16). When Isidore transports what he thinks is an artificial cat in his faux animal hospital van, he finds himself distressed by its anguish even though he “knows” the anguish is simulated. He tries to convince himself that the cat’s evident distress is “the sound of a false animal, burning out its drive-train and power supply,” but he still finds that the experience “ties [his] stomach in knots.” Isidore is not a good Cartesian scientist as he cannot refuse the empathetic response even though, rationally, he *knows* that this animal is electric, just as Descartes and his followers “knew” that all animals were automata. Isidore concludes that his response is related to his deficient mental status as a special, but decides it is “best to abandon that line of inquiry” (72).

Although Isidore abandons this line of inquiry, it is central to the connections the novel articulates among humans, animals, and androids. When he sees another being suffering, Isidore is unable to suspend his emotional response and work out logically whether it is reasonable (based on the status of the sufferer as real or artificial). In failing to be the *cogito* model of subjectivity, Isidore suggests a way of configuring subjectivity that would take seriously the differences implicit in Mercerism and identification with animals. As Deckard later learns, Mercerism rejects boundaries between self and other and hierarchies among living beings. Although Deckard is supposed to rationalize his work as a bounty hunter while still theoretically maintaining his reverence for empathy, he comes to realize that doing so requires precisely the sort of affect and cognition split that makes him both a proper Cartesian subject yet also an android. As other critics have argued, by the end of the novel Deckard learns not to draw this line.

What has been consistently overlooked is that Deckard comes to this realization only through embracing animal being, rejecting the speciesist discourse that attempts to construct hierarchies and divisions, a logic that rejects humans like Isidore within the novel, and which rejects animals and animalized humans in Western culture. The human/animal boundary is used to dehumanize the other so that ethics do not enter into certain kinds of killing: slaughterhouses, android bounty hunters, and concentration camps all operated on the same logic. Cary Wolfe has argued that as long as the “humanist and speciesist structure of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social Other of whatever species—or gender, or

race, or class, or sexual difference” (8). This distinction is the political core of why animals are in the novel: it is essential that Mercerism is founded on empathy *with animals* as it is precisely the human/animal boundary that provides the grounds upon which to deny empathy and continue exploitation.

**T**he limitations of speciesism and the failure to realize meaningful relationships with animals within the novel are connected to its critique of capitalism and to Marx’s analysis of the alienating effects of the commodity fetish. Cartesian subjectivity relies on an idealist notion of what is essential about the human, an essence of soul that humans are said to have while animals do not. This results in a damaging relationship to nature and to others, seeing them as exploitable resource rather than as subjects, as means rather than as ends. A more positive model of human uniqueness can be found in Marx’s materialist notion of species being, outlined in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx argues that humans are alienated from nature when they treat it as an object outside themselves to be appropriated rather than as a sensuous reality of which they are a part and with which they have a social relationship. Humanity loses something when it relates to nature in this abstract way, as, in reality, nature is a part of us, not something separate: “Man lives on nature—means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die.” In being estranged from nature, humanity is also estranged from itself; we are isolated as individuals alone rather than as part of a species and part of the larger, sensuous, material world. Alienation thus “changes for [humans] the life of the species into a means of individual life” (*Manuscripts* 112).

This alienated relationship to nature in which a part of human being is abstracted outside self and then related to as a thing with power over humans is similar to Marx’s notion of the commodity and the alienation that results from commodity fetishism. The capitalist mode of production and the domination of the commodity form turn not only nature but also humans themselves into means rather than ends, reducing human being to labour power and restricting human existence to merely work and the minimal needs to reproduce the labourer’s body for more work. Gary Francione’s analysis of animal rights law suggest that the category of “property” creates an insurmountable barrier for efforts to establish rights for animals in Western culture as “property is, as a matter of legal theory, regarded as that which cannot have interests or cannot have interests that transcend the rights of property owners to use their property” and thus there will “probably always be a gap between what the law permits people to do with animals and what any acceptable moral theory and basic decency tell us is appropriate” (14). The androids can be understood as the end point of capital’s drive



to increase surplus value as they are workers who do not need to cease the work day until they die and who have no existence or right to life outside of their capacity to work. In commodity fetishism, the social relation between producers exists as a relation between things, apart from and outside the producers, and through this substitution, “definite social relation between men themselves [...] assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (*Capital* 165).

In the novel, animals are treated as commodities rather than as part of living nature with whom humans share being. Thus, the relation becomes alienated and alienating. The unstable boundary in the novel between real and artificial animals suggests how living nature can become, like the commodity, a dead thing that only seems to have life and which dominates the human rather than being connected to humanity through social relations. The point in owning an artificial animal is both to demonstrate to your neighbours that you have the capital to own an animal, but also, in theory, to participate in an ethic of care for precious living beings. However, if empathy were as important to the experience of human culture as it is to the ideology of the human/android boundary, then owning a real animal should be a social relationship, not a commodity one.

This is not the case. Immediately following the fight with Iran about the mood organ, Deckard goes to the roof to find his artificial sheep “chomp[ing] away in simulated contentment” (8), a juxtaposition surely meant to make us question whether the sheep’s simulated contentment is any different from the optimism Deckard has just dialled for himself. When Deckard thinks of his dissatisfaction with owning the artificial sheep rather than the real one he used to have, his thoughts are about the status that each conveys as a commodity, not about a difference in relationship, affective or otherwise, that he has with the electric animal. In fact, he insists “I’ve put as much time and attention into caring for it as I did when it was real” (12). He is demoralized not because he misses his particular sheep, but rather because of the effort of having to pretend the sheep is real. Deckard’s alienation from his species being and a social relationship with nature is suggested by his resentment toward the commodity animal: “He thought, too, about his need for a real animal; within him an actual hatred once more manifested itself toward his electric sheep, which he had to tend, had to care about, as if it lived. The tyranny of an object, he thought” (42).

The structure of the relationship that humans have with nature within capitalist production produces this alienation and objectification. Only in the context of species being is full human subjectivity and real empathetic connection to animals possible. Animals as commodities are still ends, whatever the rhetoric of empathy. In *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*, Paul Burkett argues that “capital requires nature

only in the form of 'separate' material conditions for its appropriation of labor power's use value, not in the form of an organic social and material unity between the producers and their natural conditions of existence" (62). Capitalism can conceive of nature only as use values that can generate surplus value, not leaving any space for use values that address human needs unrelated to the production of capital or the reproduction of humans as labour power alone. The scarcity of animals within the novel and their status as precious commodities draws attention to some of the limitations of this capitalist model of relating to nature. The remaining animals are all treated as pets, a social relationship, rather than through the more pragmatic models we currently have of relating to many animal species (as food, clothing, protection, labour power). The gap between pets (all animals in the novel) and the many ways humans typically interact with animals (present in the novel as the examples in the V-K test) point to our already alienated relationship with animals and nature.

Deckard's struggle to have a non-commodity relationship with animals and others within the novel reveals the damage that capitalist modes of relation have done to his subjectivity, but also point, given Deckard's ability to change, to a potential way out of such damaging social structures. At the beginning of the novel, Deckard continually thinks of animals in terms of their prices in *Sidney's* catalogue, and he explicitly links the death of androids to his ability to attain this capital when he calculates with uncanny prescience the circumstances (which form the plot of the novel) that would lead to him being assigned a sufficient number of android bounties to afford a real animal. However, by the time he has retired this number of androids, his understanding of his job and of empathy has changed, and the mathematics of exchange do not work out quite as Deckard had intended.

When Luba dies, Deckard shows his humanity by interacting with her on a level that is other than that of a commodity. Even though she is an android and must be retired, he still buys her a book of pictures from the art gallery gift shop. Deckard's humanity is expressed through his unwillingness to reduce Luba to simply a commodity or to allow his interactions with her to be on the level of commodity exchange. He buys the book, with his own money, despite the fact that she will be able to enjoy it for only a brief period before her death. When she is killed, he "systematically burn[s] into blurred ash the book of pictures" (134), ignoring any attempt to reuse it or recover its cost. Resch objects to Deckard's illogical actions, but Deckard refuses to reduce his interaction with Luba or the book itself to exchange value. Instead he insists on a social relationship (gift) and use value (the pleasure it gave Luba before her death, the pleasure he gets from giving a gift). Although earlier in the day he was measuring the deaths of androids only in terms of dollars and the number of dead

androids he required in order to afford an animal, now values other than economic enter into his thoughts.

Deckard turns to animals, hoping to find some sort of compensation for the change he is undergoing. He realizes that he can no longer function as a bounty hunter, as he can no longer sustain belief in the boundary between humans and androids. Thinking of his feelings for Luba as compared to Resch, he observes “I rode down with two creatures, one human, the other android . . . and my feelings were the reverse of those intended. Of those I’m accustomed to feel—am required to feel” (143). Realizing the risk in beginning to sympathize with androids, Deckard immediately goes out and buys a goat in order to “get my confidence, my faith in myself and my abilities, back” (170). He tells Iran, “Something went wrong today; something about retiring them. It wouldn’t have been possible for me to go on without getting an animal” (171). Deckard turns to animals in an attempt to embrace the emotional and instinctive part of himself, yet still direct his empathy toward appropriate objects. However, this plan will fail for two reasons: because trying to rationally control empathy misses the point and only reinforces the Cartesian, calculating self and because Deckard does not know how to interact with animals as anything other than commodities.

Deckard was closer to “getting his faith back” when he chose a social rather than commodity relationship with Luba, and until he learns to interact with animals as something other than commodities, animals will not be able to heal him. He needs to overcome the idea of human self as separate from nature and master over it and the triumph of commodity logic as human’s relationship to the world. Deckard’s reluctance to enter into fusion and share his joy about having purchased an animal shows that he has not yet learned this lesson. He is still thinking in terms of the logic of exchange and scarcity, in which joy circulates in a zero sum game. Iran encourages him to use the empathy box, but he resists, arguing, “They’ll have our joy [. . .] but we’ll lose. We’ll exchange what we feel for what they feel. Our joy will be lost” (174). Iran tells him this is the wrong way to think about the sort of exchange that the empathy box represents, which allows one’s joy to be shared without being diminished: “We won’t really lose what we feel, not if we keep it clearly in mind. You never really have gotten the hang of fusion, have you, Rick?” (174).

Deckard’s career as a bounty hunter, a profession which emphasises even more the Cartesian mind/body split in its separation of cognition and affect, prevents him from comprehending fusion. His sense that animals offer the source of his salvation is correct, but he needs to learn to interact with animals on the level represented by Mercer, who “had loved all life, especially the animals, had in fact been able for a time to bring dead animals back as they had been” (24). It is only through learning to be

like Mercer, learning a new logic of self, that Deckard can hope to regain any sense of confidence other than that programmed by the mood organ. When he is called to retire the three final androids in his weakened state, Deckard decides his situation is worse than Mercer's because "at least he [Mercer] isn't required to violate his own identity" (178). Mercer appears to show him he is not alone and tells him, "You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity" (179). Although Deckard does not yet understand this, Mercer's comment suggests that so long as Deckard continues to be dominated by the logic of commodity fetishism, he will have to violate his own identity, his species being. It is only when he finds a way to reconnect to nature that he will be able to overcome his alienation and be a full human being.

Marx argues that "production does not simply produce man as a commodity, the *human commodity*, man in the role of *commodity*; it produces him in keeping with this role as a *mentally* and physically *dehumanized* being" (*Manuscripts* 121). By "dehumanized," Marx means specifically being turned away from species being, from what is unique about human existence. Species being is a relationship with nature that is non-alienated, a consciousness of oneself as part of a species and the sensuous world. The humans in the novel cannot be effectively distinguished from the androids precisely because their humanity, their species being, has been alienated through a disruption of their relationship to nature; the animals thus provide the key to healing this alienation, but only if humans can develop the proper attitude toward them, a non-commodity form, not-exchange-value ethic of care, such as Deckard finally arrives at.

After killing the remaining androids, Deckard goes out to the desert by himself and it is here that he begins to form a different relationship to the world. He finds a toad and muses, "so this is what Mercer sees. [ . . . ] Life which we can no longer distinguish; life carefully buried up to its forehead in the carcass of a dead world" (238). Deckard is able to express the essence of Mercerism—finding life that is not "distinguish[ed]" ("from non life" or "from unworthy life" seem to be the missing term)—but he has not yet fully understood his vision. At this point, Deckard still believes the toad is real and hence a miracle. When he takes it home, Iran quickly discovers that it is electrical. Although Deckard is disappointed by this, he eventually tells her "it doesn't matter. The electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (241). This realization is both a victory and a defeat for Deckard. On the one hand, it is his recognition that one cannot stop the forces of death and decay that organic life is victim to, that "all he can do is move along with life, going where it goes, to death" (242). On the other, it is both an acceptance of death as a part of life rather than life's end and the first time Deckard has been able to see what Mercer sees, life in what had seemed a

dead world. More importantly, it is a world to which he is connected and a world that might be restored to life if the alienated relationship to nature is replaced with one more nurturing of human species being and of nature itself.

What matters is not whether the animals are “real” or “simulated,” but rather how we ethically treat the other, what use we make of any differences that are found. When the androids reveal Mercerism to be an illusion rather than a real vision, they expect the entire practice of empathy boxes to disappear, but they base this analysis on a rational rather than affective assessment of the situation. In a vision, Mercer tells Isidore that he is unable to perceive the fakeness of the set because “You’re too close. [...] You have to be a long way off, the way the androids are. They have a better perspective” (214). This distant perspective, this gap between self and world, between cognition and affect, is being alienated from the sensual world rather than a part of it. A less distant relationship with nature comes from embracing our connections with animals. The various ways that animals have figured in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* do not suggest that we should abandon the idea that there is a difference between humans and other animals, but rather that we need to think carefully about the social relation with nature that we construct across these differences.

Deckard’s crisis occurs because he finds he is no longer able to maintain the proper dissociative attitude toward his job, killing androids. Marx argues that labour becomes a loss of self for the worker when labour is alienated, which causes the worker to feel “himself freely active in his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal” (*Economic* 111). Just as the novel warns us of the risk of becoming android, it also points to the risk of becoming only animal-like in our existence, of failing to nurture aspects of human happiness and fulfillment that exceed the relationship of commodity exchange. This emphasis on human uniqueness is not a devaluation of the worth of nature and of animals themselves, but rather suggests that to the extent that we fail to value such things as part of our own species being, we fail to value ourselves. Just as human emancipation requires that we rethink social relationships related to labour and production, it also requires that we consider our social relationships with animals and with nature. There are alternatives to capitalist production in order to extract use values from nature, different ways in which labour might be socially organized to create less exploitative relationships among people. There are also different ways that we can conceive of the relationship between humans and the rest of nature, different and less exploitative ways to organize our social relations with animals that do not require the religious fetishism of Mercerism

and the cult of animal care presented in the novel, but which equally should not return to the callous exploitation of factory farming, inhumane slaughterhouses, careless experimentation, and animals manufactured for research.

In the novel's final scene, Iran orders electric flies for the electric toad, a sign of love for her husband who is "devoted to it" (244), beyond reason, beyond rationality, beyond reciprocity. Species being is *social being*, a direct connection rather than an exchange through commodities. Instead of using the Mercer empathy box to avoid being alone, in this act of care for the electric toad (even though it has no economic status as it is not 'real') Iran and Deckard begin to find a way out of commodity fetishism. They are learning to treat the toad with kindness rather than as a possession because it is the social relationship—not the ontological status of the toad—that counts. Marx argues: "Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.—in short, when it is used by us" (*Manuscripts* 139). Deckard makes his first steps toward escaping this logic and embracing social relationships when he buys Luba the book. The end of the novel suggests he might continue in his care for his useless toad.

At the same time, however, Deckard and Iran remain in a world dominated by the commodity form and capitalist social relations. Even their attempts to find a way out can be expressed only through the exchange of things: in buying the flies Iran offers Deckard an object given as love instead of the direct expression of love. Marx discusses the damage that is done to human species being when money is able to take the place of human attributes in interpersonal relationships. It is the logic of exchange that money implies, its ability to make equivalent things that are distinct, which destroys human species being. "Assume *man* to be *man*," Marx writes, "and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc." (*Manuscripts* 169). Iran wants to exchange love for love, but she is trapped in a world that allows her to offer only electric flies for an electric toad, the paltry life of electric things.

Nonetheless, in the discovery that the electric things do have a sort of life, Deckard and Iran make some steps toward recovering their species being. So long as they remain trapped in a world dominated by commodity logic, their lives will remain tainted by something of this logic. At the same time, however, the care offered to the electric toad also exceeds this logic and embraces something of human species being, a connection that is not about exchanging care for value, a relationship different than that Deckard had with his electric sheep. The novel's anxiety about the unstable boundary between humans and androids can thus best be understood as an expression

of anxiety about the distorted life of humans under capitalism, a life alienated from our species being. In “Man, Android and Machine,” Dick specifically identifies that the difference between androids and humans as a boundary applied “not to origin or to any ontology but to a way of being in the world” (212). The central role of animals in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and the issues of species being that they raise show the need to struggle for a different way of being in the world. This way resists commodification in our relations with one another and with nature to produce a better future, one in which humans might be fully human once again by repairing our social relations with animals and nature.

#### NOTES

1/ See Kevin MacNamara, “*Blade Runner’s* Post-Individual Worldspace,” *Contemporary Literature* 38.3 (1997): 422–46; Patricia Warrick, *Mind in Motion: The Fiction of Philip K. Dick* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987); Darko Suvin, “P.K. Dick’s Opus: Artifice as Refuge and World View,” *Science Fiction Studies* 5.2 (March 1975): 8–22; Carl Freedman, “Late Modernity and Paranoia: The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick,” *The Incomplete Projects: Marxism, Modernity and the Politics of Culture* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2002), 147–60; Mark Bould, “Preserving Machines: Recentering the Decentered Subject in *Blade Runner* and *Johnny Mnemonic*,” *Writing and Cinema*, Ed. Jonathan Bignell (Harlow: Longman, 1999), 164–78; Jill Galvan, “Entering the Posthuman Collective in Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*” *Science Fiction Studies* 24 (1997): 10–28.

2/ See Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000); N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Information* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999); Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006); Ann Weinstone, *Avatar Bodies: A Tantra for Posthumanism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003).

3/ See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*; Gary Francione, *Animals, Property, and the Law*; Joan Dunayer, *Speciesism* (Derwood, MD: Ryce Publishing, 2004); and Steven Wise, *Rattling the Cage: Toward Legal Rights for Animals* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2000).

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