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Enduring Questions

Abstract: More Human than Human: Exploring the ideas of moral/ethical obligation to human-like entities

The main idea of the proposed paper is that of the responsibility of the creator to the created. The issue concerning said idea is whether or not the creator does indeed have certain obligations to that which he or she has, whether intentionally or not, created. The three works to be used for the exploration this issue are to be Watchmen, Frankenstein, and “Blade Runner”.

These three works were selected because each contains at least one character who is decidedly not human, but is not so different as to be completely and utterly unrelatable. Dr. Manhattan (Watchmen) was once a man, but after an accident only made possible by mankind, he became a god-like being. Frankenstein’s monster, who for ease of righting will be referred to as Frank, was created by Frankenstein in a fit of obsession only to be abandoned. Rachel (Blade Runner) was a replicant who looks, acts, and even believed she was a human until Deckard tells her she’s not. All three are beings who are strictly in-human, but have enough human qualities to raise concerns of what is ethical or moral regarding their treatment.

For the argument for creators having certain responsibilities, the humanness of the characters will be examined in greater detail. For example, Frank may be stitched together from the parts of how many dead bodies, but he still feels sadness, loneliness, and anger. How does one who experiences these emotions not warrant care from the man who created him. In addition, an examination of the each characters unique situation will attempt to show how mankind forces the characters into states of emotional distress and force them to do terrible things. For example, Dr. Manhattan is used by the US to deter Soviet aggression while simultaneously ending American wars. He is treated more as a weapon than a person. Yet, when he decides to go to Mars, no one can quite understand why he does it. The idea is that more ethical/moral treatment could have led to more agreeable outcomes for the human characters involved.

The counter-argument will argue people like Dr. Manhattan or Frank, if they can be called people, have gone beyond human moral/ethical concerns. Dr. Manhattan could turn the Earth into a giant spinning bowl of pudding; how does one punish a being like that? How does one appease that which needs no food, no shelter, no materials of any sort, who does not have need of anything a normal human would have need for in order to survive? What about Rachel? She isn’t even organic, just synthetic flesh over a machine body. She has bits of code dictating her responses and emotions. How can one treat her humanely if she isn’t human? This question can be addressed to any of the characters already mentioned. Another argument is that the treatment they are receiving is already consistent with how humans treat other humans, so they actually deserve no further care/consideration than what they already are receiving. For example, Frank never hesitates to mention he’s hideous and nobody loves him. Plenty of naturally born humans are hideous and go unloved, yet we would still prosecute them if they killed people. Why should he be excused of his actions when if he was a just a hideously deformed man he would be treated the same way?