

Why did Rachael need implanted memories?

—A reflection on the role of memory in a human life

in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*¹

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‘They may be nothing more than scraps of paper, but they capture something profound. Light and wind and air, the tenderness or joy of the photographer, the bashfulness or pleasure of the subject’. —Yoko Ogawa, *The Memory Police*

1. Introduction

From John Locke (1690) to Derek Parfit (1984), there is a long series of philosophical argument on personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a person at a different place and time. As Locke proposed, the criterion of personal identity has been considered as the sameness of consciousness and the continuity of experiential memory. It is because, not only a continuity of a physical organism — a body, but also

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continuities of the same mental states would be required as a criterion of the same person. In addition, a purely mental subsistence like a soul, as Decartes once believed, could not be accepted by modern philosophers. The arguments moved from metaphysical to empirical ones.

In this paper, I will argue the importance of personal experiential memory to living — even in a case where personal *identity* does not obtain — as a *person* and its role as a source of deep self-understanding. Arguing thus, I use an example of Rachael in Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner*, because I think that her experiences would clarify some issues concerning my argument.

2. Overview of the film

2-1. Synopsis

Blade Runner (1982)³ is a monumental work as a classic science-fiction cult film. It vividly provokes our imagination and stimulates our emotion, at the same time providing us with a number of philosophical questions: the distinction between artificial and human intelligence, the concept of the person and personal identity, and issues about God, time, life and death.⁴ In this paper, using Rachael in this film as an example, I will advance an argument for narrative identity, personal memory, and their importance in a human life.

First of all, I shall provide an outline of the film. It is based on Phillip K. Dick's novel titled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), which depicts a dystopian future world in which acid rain is falling ceaselessly. In this world, synthetic humans called 'replicants' are manufactured by the Tyrell Corporation.

³ My argument is based on the final cut (2007). The theatrical release in 1982 and the final cut differ in one crucial point; was Rachael designed for four-year longevity like all other replicants or not? However, I think that the difference does not affect my main argument and it can be disregarded. For more details of other differences in each version, see Sammon (2017).

⁴ See also Rowlands (2003), chap.9, Shanahan (2014), and Caplan and Davies (2015).

A replicant is a being virtually identical to a human but created through bioengineering. They have not only flesh and blood but may also have higher intellectual and physical abilities than human beings —this depends on their purpose; replicants are created as a ‘loader’, a ‘combat’ or a ‘pleasure’ model. On the other hand, they are mentally immature, because they have only short-term experiences. However, the designers anticipated that after a few years, they might develop their own emotional responses: hate, love, fear, anger, envy, and so on. As a safety device for such emotional responses and rebellions against humans, they are designed to have just a four-year life span.

Replicants are used as slave laborers on off-world colonies, referred to by the derogatory term ‘skin job’, and are forbidden return to the Earth. Nevertheless, they continue to provide resistance to humans, and try to sneak onto the Earth; the special police squad called blade runner is ordered to detect and kill them. They have considerable skill in detecting replicants by using the ‘Voigt-Kampff’ test, which is designed to distinguish them from humans based on their physiological patterns of response to questions that stimulate emotions.⁵ Rick Deckard is a retired blade runner but has been reappointed to execute four Nexus 6 model replicants, who rebel against humans and are assumed to have snuck into Los Angeles in November 2019.

2-2. Who is Rachael?

⁵ ‘Yet the human capacity that the replicants are thought necessarily to be lacking, at least according to the humans in the film, is a capacity often thought necessary for morality, namely, *empathy*, the ability to imagine oneself in someone else’s situation, to desire that individual’s well-being for their own sake, and perhaps even a willingness to share that person’s suffering. The Voight-Kampff test works by detecting minute changes in the subject’s iris fluctuation, capillary dilation, and blush response elicited by subject’s emotional responses to a series of carefully designed questions that involve human or animal suffering’ (Shanahan 2014, pp. 35-36).

Rachael is a young woman working in Tyrell Corporation. Dr. Tyrell asks to Deckard to try using the Voigt-Kampff test on her. Asking her a hundred or more questions, he has realized that she is a replicant. Indeed, she is one of the Nexus 6 models. However, Rachael believes that she is a real human, because she was implanted with memories of Tyrell's niece. Tyrell explains his aim of memory implanting as follows:

‘More human than human’ is our motto. Rachael is an experiment. We began to recognize in them ...a strange obsession. After all, they are emotionally inexperienced with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them a past a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, we can consequently control them better.

Deckard replies to him, ‘Memories. You are talking about memories!’

Indeed, in this film, it is impressive that not only Rachael but all other replicants also seem to have an obsession with keeping their own memories. Rachael visits Deckard's apartment house later, shows him a photo of ‘her with her mother’ and insists that this is a proof of her own experiences. The replicant Leon also kept his photos. Roy Batty, a leader of the replicants, calmly talks of his own memories to Deckard in the final moments of his life;

I have... seen things... you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams... glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All those... moments will be lost... in time... like tears... in the rain...

Certainly, from my viewpoint, the main theme of this film is how important our memory is for our personal lives. Rachael needed implanted memories to live her own life, but so to live, it is required that they are the authentic ones. Therefore, when she learned they were not factual, she was so confused as to begin to weep. I believe that

not only replicants, but all humans need their own memories.⁶ I examine the reasons for this in the next section. I argue that we need them to understand ourselves, to examine and to justify our own past choices, to guide us in our future decision-making, and to elaborate the shape of our lives.

3. Discussion

3-1. The psychological criterion of personal Identity

3-1-1. Lockean view

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II, Chapter 27, ‘Of Identity and Diversity’)⁷, Locke distinguished three criteria of identity. First, identity of substances. The identity of body (material) consists the same particles of matter⁸. If any particle is not added or removed from the material, it is the same. Second, in the case of living organisms such as trees and animals, we cannot use this criterion, because their particles are continuously changing. Then, Locke argued that ‘That being then one plant which has such and such an organization in parts in one coherent body, partaking of common life’ (Locke 1690, p.36). The identity of the human body is applied the same criterion. Even if a woman cut her hair, or she lost a finger or a kidney, and her body changed from a little girl to a 80 years old woman, if she is keeping the same organism, then she is the same human being from her birth to death. Third, Locke distinguished a person from just a human body. According to Locke, a person is ‘a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places’(Locke 1690, p.39). And he thought that the criterion of personal identity is the sameness of consciousness, because consciousness is inseparable from thinking. Someone doubted this criterion, because a consciousness is only a moment. Then, Locke developed that ‘as far as this consciousness can be expanded backward to any past action or thought, so far reaches

⁶ Deckard himself collected old photos.

⁷ This chapter added in the second edition (1694).

⁸ Locke supposed corpuscularism.

the identity of that person: it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with his present one that now reflect on it, that that action was done' (Locke 1690, pp. 39-40). Thus, if one could remember past actions, the present person is seen as the identical person as a past one.

3-1-2. Parfit's puzzling argument

Parfit dramatically changed the argument. There were some critics of Lockean criterion, in terms of oblivion of memories. A most famous example is 'the paradox of a brave general' case proposed by Thomas Ried (Ried 1785, pp. 114-115). The personal identity is a relation of passing ratio; if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$. Now, suppose a man who had been flogged at a school when he was a boy. He became an officer and he took a battle flag from the enemy in his first campaign. Later, he was made a general. Although he can remember the experience of his first campaign, forgot the experience at the school. In this case, passing ratio is not true. Parfit distinguishes two relations (he called 'relation R') to solve this type of difficulty (Parfit 1984, p. 206). First, psychological connectedness is the holding of particular direct psychological connections (it means experiential memories). The second relation is psychological continuity, that is, holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness. In 'the brave general case', even if he completely forgot a memory when he had been flogged, if he holds other memories when he was a boy, psychological continuity is holding, so we can say that he was a same person.

Next, Parfit develops a bold claim; *personal identity is not what matters* (Parfit 1984, p. 255). He shows this through the following thought experiment:

My division. My body is fatally injured, as are the brains of my two brothers. My brain is divided, and each half is successfully transplanted into the body of one of my brothers. Each of the resulting people believes that he is me, seems to remember living my life, has my character, and is in every other way

psychologically continuous with me. And he has a body that is very like mine (Parfit 1984, pp. 254-255).

In this case, evidently the relation of identity cannot hold because it is one-to-one relation. However, his relation R is maintained in his two brother's bodies. After proposes a number of puzzling cases, Parfit claims that '*what fundamentally matters is relation R, in any cause*' (Parfit 1984, p.287).

According to Parfit's argument, we can say that Rachael is a survivor of Tyrell's niece, but she would not accept it. Against the Parfitian view, Rachael thinks that she is clearly not the same person as Tyrell's niece because her implanted memories are just quasi-memories. In addition, if Tyrell's niece is still living, we also cannot identify that Rachael is a survivor of Tyrell's niece, because her case differs from Parfit's 'my division' case in some points. Provably the bodies of Racheal and the present Tyrell's niece would not be similar, and the niece's memory is an authentic one. If so, how can she live her life after knowing the sad truth? Answering this question, I should explain further why memory is so important to us. Therefore, I continue my inquiry.

3-2. Narrative interpretation of a human life

I begin to propose my 'narrative interpretation of a human life'. Since the 1980s, a number of philosophers have argued that a human life can be seen as a narrative (MacIntyre 1981, Ricoeur 1983-1985, 1990, Velleman 2003, Currie 2007). First, I explain major features of a narrative. In subsequent sections, I explore my interpretation and reply to some criticisms of it.

In the first place, the question 'what is a narrative?' should be made clear. Needless to say, a mere sequence of past, present and future events cannot be called a narrative in itself. Velleman distinguishes between plot and narrative (Velleman 2003, p. 15). Although they all give us explanations of actions, there are some differences. According to Aristotle, a plot (*muthos*) is 'the organization of the events' (Aristotle, p. 37), for example, 'The king died and then the queen died of grief'. It shows us a frame

of a story. Velleman thinks that a plot acts as a causal link between an event and other successive events. On the other hand, a narrative differs from mere explanations which describe a series of events based on causality, coherency and rationality. It has richer features.

First, a narrative should, essentially, be a recounted one. It is said that ‘man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal’ (MacIntyre 1981, p. 216). I told, tell and will tell my whole life as a narrative. Therefore, we can see a narrative as a self-constructed autobiography of the person. I think that a narrative requires the concept of acceptability from inside of one’s life, namely from the first-person’s perspective. Probably there can be plural explanations for one’s past experience, so one should accept one of them as the best explanation. It is important here that this process of acceptance includes her value judgement. I propose an example of myself. From when I was a child, I did not like many princesses—*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, etc.—in picture books. However, there was an exception; *The Wild Swans* by H. C. Andersen, though in some decades I never tried to consider seriously what the difference of the princess, named Elisa, was from others. However, I have been kept this preference. Recently, suddenly I found the reason. Other princesses were only passive and just waited for the arrival of a prince who could save them. On the contrary, Elisa was given a hard task by a good witch; to help eleven brothers who had changed into swans by an evil queen, she should knit eleven jackets by nettles, and she was forbidden to utter a word until she completed it. Because the king who fell in love and married her did not help her, she continues her task until she brings it to the stake. Her spontaneous, sustained effort, stoicism, independence, and affection to brothers coincide to my sense of values. This subtle discovery does not only explain values that I embrace, but also explains a fact that I have been the very same person since I was an infant. Thus, I accepted it and woven it into my own narrative. On this point, narratives differ from other types of explanations.

Second, a narrative confers intelligibility or understandability on actions.⁹ Not only does it give us explanations of an action, but it also makes our actions intelligible (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 206-216, Velleman 2003, pp. 1-4). For example, the question ‘*What* are you doing?’ could have many answers. The simplest reply would be ‘I am writing a sentence’ or ‘I am thinking in English’, but I can reply in wider contexts, such as ‘I am tackling a philosophical question that I have been considering for a long time’. Second, if someone changes the question to ‘*Why* are you doing this?’, I will reply ‘Because I have been interested in philosophical questions’ or ‘Thinking about philosophical questions is an important part of my life as a philosopher’, and so on. By virtue of these answers, I can give reasons¹⁰ for my actions and, at the same time, my reason-statements construct a part of my narrative. These reasons would serve to justify certain actions. I do not restrict them to intentional actions, because non-intentional or even unconscious actions can also be retrospectively intelligible after reflecting on ‘why I did such an action’.

The third and most important feature of a narrative is that it provides us a unity of character and, at the same time, the unity of a life. Since Aristotle, it has been said that a narrative needs a unity. Moreover, in order to give a unity to a narrative, the character must have a unity. MacIntyre explains his concept of a self ‘whose unity resided in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative [moving from] beginning to middle to end’ (MacIntyre 1981, p. 205). Ricoeur further developed this

⁹ In other words, narratives give us frameworks which make events intelligible to others (Currie 2007, pp. 17-18). Ricoeur explained that ‘we find narrative understanding in living experience consists in the very structure of human action and suffering... We understand what action and passion are through our competence to use, [in] a meaningful way, the entire network of expressions and concepts offered to us by natural languages in order to distinguish between *actions* and mere physical *movement*, and psychological *behaviour*’ (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 28).

¹⁰ My concept of reason for action is based on Williams’s internal interpretation. See Williams 1981.

line of thought. He radically explored an intertwined relationship between time and narrative, and finally reached a concept of narrative identity¹¹. Forming a narrative is refiguring particular events as a finely shaped autobiography. In this sense, a real life can equate to a fictional narrative, and every person is a story-teller (or an author) of their own narratives.

As I mentioned earlier, past non-intentional or unconscious actions may be explained in terms of reasons. It is a heuristic process. By reflecting on my past actions and thoughts and feelings, I could find my unconscious desires or hidden intentions and identify them as mine. After these reflections and identification, my character would be more unified and integrated, and my future actions would be more coherent.

I think that these three features are not independent, but correlate with each other; to form a narrative, one's actions should be intelligible, constant ones, as such actions would construct the unity of a character, hence the unity of a life.

3-3. Why are memories important in a narrative?

Next, I examine the role of memory to construct a person's narrative. I can cultivate self-understanding through identifying that the past actions were genuinely mine, which raised from the past my deliberations and decisions. This understanding gives me a sense that I am a continuing existence, namely a concept of identity of self. It is

¹¹ 'The fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call their narrative identity. Here 'identity' is taken in the sense of a practical category. To state the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the question 'Who did this?' 'Who is the agent, the author?' We first answer this question by naming someone, that is, by designating them with a proper name, but what is the basis for the permanence of this proper name? What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches them into from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative. ... And the identity of this 'who' therefore itself must be a narrative identity' (Ricoeur 1985, vol. 3, p. 246).

easy to imagine someone who suddenly loses all or at least a large part of her memories. Naturally, she would face to a serious identity crisis.

Although MacIntyre criticised this type of argument when made by the empiricists (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 216-217), I do not agree with him on this point. As Ricoeur suggested (Ricoeur 1990, p. 2), the terms ‘self’ and ‘identity’ have double meanings because of their use in Latin; on the one hand, according to his distinction, *idem* means sameness (means numerical identity since Locke), and *ipse* means selfhood (means self-reflective self). Taking into account his suggestion, I think of memories as a source of self-knowledge or materials of self-understanding, because for achieving appropriate self-understanding, we should refer to empirical evidence. As human beings exist as essentially fallible, we cannot avoid that all memories are understood subjectively, that it is sometimes possible for us to mistakenly remember our own past experiences or fail to understand ourselves. Photographs and documents are not only the evidence of our past but also the triggers to recalling them.

When I see photographs, I can remember my past experiences, and I re-recognise that these were truly mine. Sometimes they might be helpful to correct distortions of my memories. With the passage of time, some memories would fade away, but others still retain vivid impressions, especially those that determined my later life, and would never fade away. Perhaps the memories that I have forgotten might be refreshed, just as with Proust’s famous Madeleine case and my *The Wild Swans* case (in other cases, some memories would never be remembered, because they are not needed anymore.) This is a reason that Rachael and other replicants are eager to have their own memories.

In addition, when we see photographs with others such as our family members and friends, we remember past happy experiences. Remembering that, we can believe that we are loved by others, and confirm self-esteem. All photographs that replicants kept are with others. They would want to have this kind of belief or feeling.

These memories should be authentic at the time, even though they cannot completely avoid errors¹². This condition explains why Rachael is confused when she realises that her memories are implanted, and not her own. Suppose that, until she was examined by the Voigt-Kampff test, she never doubted the authenticity of her memories, and truly believed that they were hers. Since she learned that this belief was false, she completely lost the foundation of her entire beliefs about herself. If her personal history was not hers, then, who is she? This question may cause another existential question, namely, why does she exist now? I will return to these questions in the next part.

4. Conclusion: *who* is Rachael?

Finally, let us consider the example of Rachael again and examine her outer and inner change through the whole film story. When she first appears on the screen, she looks quite artificial because of her jacket with thick shoulder pads, her mannequin-like hair style and make-up. However, after she played the piano in Deckard's room, she reaches a turning point. She takes off the jacket, unwinds her hair and plays a melody. It seems to me that she has become a living human being from this time. Probably pondering the severe fact that she is a replicant, she quietly says to Deckard that ‘I didn't know if I could play. I remember lessons. I don't know if it's me ... or Tyrell's niece’.

And Deckard replies that ‘*You* play beautifully’¹³. She gazes at his face and he kisses her cheek. Nevertheless, in the next instant, she loses her calm, and tries to escape from him. However, Deckard stops her, kisses to her again, and asks ‘Say kiss me’. She

¹² I wanted to argue for a philosophical problem concerning self-deception, but that it for another occasion.

¹³ Deckard himself changes his view about Rachael. ‘At the moment, it does not matter whether it was Rachael or Tyrell’s niece that took piano lessons. Deckard affirms that the person sitting next to him at that moment is playing beautifully’ (Shanahan 2014, p. 78).

replies while weeping ‘I can't rely on my memory...’, but Deckard repeats that ‘Say kiss me’. At the time, Rachael clearly faces to her identity crisis. It is because, although she perceives a fact that she is attracted to him, she is not sure if this emotion is really her own or Tyrell's niece's¹⁴. But she replies ‘Kiss me’. Deckard says further ‘I want you’, and Rachael replies ‘I want you’.

She is no longer repeating his words like a parrot, because she adds her own words that ‘I want you. Put your hands on me’. At the moment, she accepts that her affection is truly sprung up from herself, and at the same time, she is not merely a replicant implanted with an other's memories at all, and she becomes a genuine person. Shanahan wrote that ‘Rachael begins to accept herself as the person she is, regardless of how she came to be this person. She cannot change her status as a replicant, but she can appropriate her feelings and experiences as her own and on this basis decide which identity she embrace. In that sense, she *creates* her identity as a person’ (Shanahan 2014, p. 78). I agree with his interpretation; she should re-create her new identity and narrative of her own life from the moment. She can remember some past experiences from inside; she learned to play a piano when she was a girl, in a summer she watched a spider outside her room which had an orange body and green legs, built a web, and so on. Remember that she is an experimental model, different from other replicants. It means that only she has personal memories since her childhood. Even if her past *experiences* were false, they are no longer important for her, because her *memories* are true ones. And now, she knows that her affection for Deckard is authentic, and she tries to start a new life. Thus, she should re-create not only her identity, but also re-constructs her own narrative as such. I think that a narrative is not a definitive, but has a nature of open-endedness until the very moment of a person's death.

In doing so, she starts living her *own* life. And at that time, through self-examination, she achieves her full self-understanding. I suggest that such a process of self-examination and self-understanding gives us a concept of a meaningful human life. In my view, the meaning of a life is not objectively given, rather, it is discovered

¹⁴ See also Reeve 2015 and Shanahan 2014, ch.4.

from the first-person perspective. It is because each person has different feelings, desires, emotions and values. Therefore, it is only myself that can answer the question ‘What purpose am I living?’. Through reflections and deliberations, we will examine our lives and find an answer as Rachael did.¹⁵

At the very end of the film, Deckard comes back to sleeping Rachael and asks ‘Do you love me?’. She wakes up and replies ‘I love you’, he asks again ‘Do you trust me?’ and she replies ‘I trust you’ with a firm voice. I believe that, after her struggle, Rachael voluntarily accepts herself as herself and finds a meaning in her own life.

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¹⁵ Ricoeur suggests; ‘This connection between self-constancy and narrative identity confirms one of my oldest convictions, namely, that the self-knowledge is not the egotistical and narcissistic ego whose hypocrisy and naiveté the hermeneutics of suspicion have denounced, along with its aspects of an ideological superstructure and infantile and neurotic archaism. The self of self-knowledge is the fruit of an examined life, to recall Socrates’s phrase in the *Apology*. And an examined life is, in large part, one purged, one clarified by the cathartic effect of the narrative, be they historical or fictional, conveyed by our culture’(Ricoeur 1985, vol.3, p. 247).

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