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Hum-103

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Annotations on *The Lifestyle of Software Objects*

I chose to annotate page 112-113 of *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*, before which I expected a focus on objectification (especially instrumentality, a type of objectification that involves treating a living being as an object). While instrumentality was present throughout the spread, I was most intrigued by the questions that emerged during my annotations, as well as themes such as both the parallels between digients and human children and those between digient and human mannerisms.

The first paragraph of the spread contained objectification warning signs that, upon further inspection, revealed a parental relationship between Ana and Jax. At the opening of the paragraph, Ana says of Jax that “he keeps [them] entertained.” Initially, I marked this statement as an instance of instrumentality because Jax is here being used as a plaything; an entertainer. In my second round of annotations, however, I considered a human interaction that might be comparable to Ana’s objectification of her digient. Her statement that Jax keeps her “entertained” was reminiscent of a parent’s relationship to their child—in fact, parents objectify their children often. This connection changed my perspective on Ana’s relationship with Jax, as some forms of objectification are part of a healthy parenting strategy—for example, raising a young child properly requires denial of autonomy because the parent must make decisions for the child. Because Jax is roughly on the intellectual level of a child, Ana must objectify him at points (albeit, less and less) despite his status as a sentient being.

In the second paragraph, Jax exhibits characteristically human behavior, which confirms his status as an objectifiable being. Jax says “good luck” to the seraph as he leaves for his mission following his brief conversation with Ana. Jax either feels empathy—a wish of good luck to indicate care about somebody’s well-being—or he is a complex algorithm following patterns he identified in human behavior. Because digients are sentient beings, it is likely that Jax indeed experiences empathy, as do most humans on a similar intellectual level to the digients. In my second round of annotations, I reconsidered what I had noticed. At our core, humans are all “imitating” empathy because it is what we have learned will initiate positive feelings in others. Our “moral compass”—which we see as an exclusively human trait—is what drives us to want to make others feel good. I was left with questions: does Jax have that moral compass, or is he merely copying? Or are we all merely copying?

Perhaps the most pressing questions that emerged in this passage came from the strange nature of sophonce digients. These digients *want* to solve puzzles—in fact, puzzle solving is all they like to do. I was a bit disturbed that humans willingly program digients with obsession problems (which we consider disorders). I was left asking whether it is morally correct to program digients to enjoy doing work that we do not want to complete. We have machines that can do most work at this point. However, work of the mind, like complex puzzles or pattern recognition, require either complex algorithms or an advanced sentient mind, the latter of which sophonce digients have. But does this breed of digient enjoy their life? They enjoy completing these tasks, yet are socially inept and have little meaningful interaction with other sentient beings. Derek, a friend of Ana’s, describes a sophonce digient as “[not] much fun [but] useful to have around” (Chiang 112). Are sophonce digients content with their existence? What

differentiates them from human children with superior intellect, and considering the parallels between them and children, should they be “used” to do work?

Two rounds of annotations were useful in developing important questions about the morality of AI/sentient being use, primarily through the lens of objectification. While my initial annotations contained valuable stream-of-consciousness adjacent thoughts, my second round led me to question the proximity of our rapidly evolving society to this fictional one, a question that will keep me up at night.

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Works Cited

Chiang, Ted. *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*. Burton, MI, Subterranean Press, 2010.