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>> Raphael Bostic: Hello everyone, welcome to the latest edition of the Bedrosian Center Book Club. My name is Raphael Bostic. I'm the director of the USC Price School Bedrosian Center on Governments and the Public Enterprise. And we are here to talk about another book. This month it's Philip Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. I'm joined by three colleagues who are going to talk with me about this book for the next hour. We have Donnajean Ward. Hi, Donnajean.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Hello everyone.

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[00:00:59]
>> Colin Marshall: Nice to be here.

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>> Raphael Bostic: And we have Aubrey Hicks. Aubrey, welcome back.

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>> Aubrey Hicks: Thanks.

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>> Raphael Bostic: We have two newbies here, so hopefully this will be a fun experience and you'll want to come back. So I wanted to start with just a basic overview, have someone walk us through what the book is, how does it play out? And the new can get into some of the details.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Aubrey?
Aubrey Hicks: Okay. So *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, many of you know the story from the movie that was made out of it called Blade Runner. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* is about a police officer who retires androids. And he’s got a set of six tough ones to do in one day.

Raphael Bostic: And the book basically walks us through that. Now, I should say this is the second in a series for us. This is our dystopian series. And last month we did *On Such a Full Sea*. This month we’re doing *Do Androids Dream*. And the dystopian element is we’re kind of post world warish. Actually, not kind of. We are post world war. And humanity has basically be scattered about. So most of it is no longer on earth. But they’ve moved to the outer colonies.

Donnajean Ward: To Mars.

Raphael Bostic: A bunch of them to Mars, but it seems like they are doing other colonies as well. And the only ones left are damaged in some way. And so that’s the setting. What has happened is that as part of this we have the development of androids to help humans live their lives. And the reason we need to retire androids is that some of them decide they don’t want to work for people. They’d rather live on their own. So the eliminate their people and then try to live on their own. So they get tracked down. And so we follow through six androids who are being sought after. And it’s actually quite interesting. So what was your take on the book? Did it get you to think about things? Did you like it? Where did this book take you?

Donnajean Ward: So this is Donnajean. I enjoyed it. I had some issues with different parts of it. But generally I thought it was a good story. Obviously I knew the story because I had seen Blade Runner many years ago. And it was interesting to read the source material. But I had questions when it was all said and done.

Raphael Bostic: Well we all had questions. I want to come back and ask you to raise some of those questions in a moment. Colin, what was your take on the book?

Colin Marshall: Well as Aubrey and Donnajean both said, this is the source material for Blade Runner, so the book is from 1968 and the movie is from ’82. So it took a little while to reach the screen in quite a different form. But actually I guess I’m here because I did a video essay on Blade Runner for a series called Los Angeles, the City in Cinema I do on
representations of Los Angeles in film. And I would say there is no better known one, no better known representation of Los Angeles, especially future Los Angeles than Blade Runner. And anybody who reads this book is going to be comparing it to the movie I think inevitably. It's a rare reader of this book who hasn't seen Blade Runner. I mean, I saw Blade Runner first. I read this book a few years ago, and then came back to it again. But still, a lot of these images--when you think of Rick Deckard, you're probably thinking of Harrison Ford. And you get a little bit of a problem, because not everything is the same. Some things are quite different. Setting-wise, it's a different city. It's San Francisco, not Los Angeles. And some of the androids have different names.

Some of them have the same, but they're different characters. So extracting one from the other is kind of my main task reading this book. But that in itself was a fun exercise, so for that I'm grateful. And it's a good book on its own merits. Or it's a fascinating book I should say. We'll talk about Philip K. Dick I'm sure. His relationship to goodness in literature is sort of fraught. I enjoyed it

Raphael Bostic: Well I have to confess I may be one of the people-- I've never seen the movie Blade Runner.

Colin Marshall: Well that's perfect.

Raphael Bostic: So it was actually very good to read the book first. Because from what I can tell, I've talked to other people as I was going through the book. "I got here," and they were like, "Well what about the snakes?" I was like, "There are no snakes." And so it was very interesting to realize that my experience with the book is actually qualitatively different than what most people's is going to be. Because they have actually seen a different version of this story, which is quite interesting. Aubrey, we asked you to do the summary because you've declared your love for this book. What is it that makes the book routinely memorable for you?

Aubrey Hicks: You know, I think the thing with Philip K. Dick is that he asked what is reality, what is illusion and what is faith? He asked what it is to be human. And this is a movie that I saw maybe even before high school.

Colin Marshall: Which version did you first? Do you remember?

Aubrey Hicks: It was the version that was released, not the director's cut.
>> Colin Marshall: The theatrical narration and all that. The bad version.

>> Aubrey Hicks: The bad version.

>> Colin Marshall: Wow. Still liked it?

>> Aubrey Hicks: Still liked it. And then I read the book and I've reread the book several times. I've re-watched the movie several times. I like the questions that he asks. I think they're important. And I think the reason I thought about using this for this podcast is I think asking the questions about what it means to be human and what it means to be a person in society is important to what we do here at the center.

>> Raphael Bostic: Well I agree with that. And you know, as you read the book, or as I read the book, this question of what's the point of all this kept coming up again and again. And in the book Dick blurs the lines of distinction between normal humans and abnormal humans. And then humans and androids. There's this continuum and somehow, in some way we arbitrarily draw a line.

>> Donnajean Ward: Animals.

>> Raphael Bostic: There aren't any.

>> Donnajean Ward: No, but animals are revered. And in fact having and caring for animals sort of seems to be a talisman for your capacity to be empathetic and human. The andies don't care about animals. Humans care about animals. I thought that was sort of interesting. But I thought that was another distinction that he drew. Even in the tests that they do, a lot of it had to do with how you reacted to either the death or the mutilation or the misuse of an animal, to kind of decide whether someone was a human or an android.

>> Raphael Bostic: But do you think-- that's true.

>> Donnajean Ward: In the book.
Raphael Bostic: But do you think that's because people have a natural empathy for animals, or because in that era, post-apocalyptic, there weren't any and so they were the rare and the valuable.

Donnajean Ward: Yes. I think yes and yes. I think that both. It was a status symbol. When he talked about the animals, it was always as if they were a luxury car. You had your book with the value in it. There was a showroom. You could put a down payment on it. There was even the whole thing about, "I'm going to have to go talk to my manager."

Aubrey Hicks: You could trade in.

Donnajean Ward: You can trade in. You've got an old animal to trade in.

Colin Marshall: They've got a Kelley Blue Book for animals, called something else, but they've got it.

Donnajean Ward: Exactly. So I think he was doing both. I think it was interesting that in the test of the androids to see if they were human or not, there were a lot of questions about animals or insects and that was sort of the tell. But also the fact that they were rare showed how we monetize everything. It wasn't just about having a pet and taking care of a pet showed your empathy. It also showed your status in society. That's why they had the fake animals, because you wanted to save face. So you had your electric cat or your electric sheep. And I think that's where the electric sheep from the title comes from.

Colin Marshall: It's a striking thing for people who watched Blade Runner because they'll hear the title of this book and they'll think it's just a joke. A corny one about if androids dream. It's probably electric sheep. But it's such a central part of the book. And that's a completely abstinent labor where no one owns animals there. They still have the test for empathy involving animals, but it's such a just kind of there presence. With this one, it's funny reading about this guy who has the sheep on his roof, decorative. The bounty hunter of androids has a sheep on the roof and it's such a contrast with what I think of as a sort of future dystopian scenario. People want to keep sheep. But then I realized, well, you know, what is the sort of standard American suburban house but an nth-generation simulacrum of a farm house? A car is sort of your wagon. I guess it's natural to continue. Humans seem to have this agrarian sort of--
need to feel like we're somehow still agrarian and we keep the trace of that even in this post-nuclear war in San Francisco with a sheep on the roof.

Which is interesting to me.

>> Raphael Bostic: You could almost think of the sheep as the equivalent of your dog running down the driveway chasing the car away and greeting you in the morning, greeting you when you come home from work. It was very interesting and thought-provoking. So what was your take on just the structure and the framework? So this notion of the separation of humanity into those who left. And basically the way the apocalypse happened, a bad thing happens. And the dust from that bad thing basically intoxicates the rest of the world. And basically makes it not livable. So people try to escape as fast as possible, before the air gets bad and destroys them.

But some are not fortunate enough to be rescued in time. So before you leave the planet you get tested. And if you don't pass a test, you don't leave the planet. And so that's one dimension. And then there's another dimension of test about aptitude. And if you're not smart enough, you don't leave the planet. And it's the two of those.

>> Donnajean Ward: And there's a third: if you can't afford to immigrate, you don't leave the planet. I can't remember where, but it's like certain people who couldn't afford to immigrate. And they don't talk about it. Because why is it Deckard and his wife? It's not aptitude.

>> Raphael Bostic: It was interesting because I didn't read that as a forewarning. I read it as there were some people that just didn't want to leave.

>> Donnajean Ward: Right, there is that too.

>> Raphael Bostic: And they decided that even with this framework, we are of this planet and we are going to stay on this planet. What's very interesting about-- and it's very similar to last week's-- that group of people are the nonconformists. They have a choice and they choose to go a different way. And there aren't a lot of them, but they have an opportunity to cut a new path that is different, remarkable and noteworthy. And Deckard is very much in that. He and his wife are very much in that way. But it comes with costs. And much of the book has allusions to the costs that Deckard experiences from the decision to stay on this planet.

>> Donnajean Ward: There's a lot of economic pressure on him. He wants to own a real animal, but he can't really afford it. When he breaks down and uses some of his bounty hunter
money to get the sheep, they're looking over the terms and he's worried about being able to make the payments. I thought that was interesting too, that there was a lot of economic. And again, I also read On Such A Full Sea and I feel like there were the same issues. There are a lot of categories here. You're human or you're an android. You have money or you don't have money. You have full cognitive functioning, or you miss the cutoff. And it also seemed, a thing that felt interesting is like, it's an ongoing danger.

The men wear lead codpieces to sort of preserve their ability to reproduce without damaged or somehow...

>> Colin Marshall: To reproduce at all.

>> Donnajean Ward: Right, to reproduce at all, or to reproduce people who could pass the sort of cognitive test. So I thought he's sort of talking about-- when you talk about what is human, you've got all of these sort of things going on. You view people who have less intellectual functioning as less human.

>> Aubrey Hicks: Yes, but at the same time there's a lot of irony in that. Because, what does it mean to be human? It means to be able to empathize. And the character that has the most empathy in the whole novel is a chicken-head, Isidore. He empathizes for everything. A cat is dying. He thinks it's electrical. He thinks it's an android and he really cares. He tries to fix it. He cares about the spider.

>> Raphael Bostic: You all passed the empathy test then.

>> Colin Marshall: The book had a test embedded.

>> Raphael Bostic: Exactly right. Exactly right. What did you think?

>> Colin Marshall: About which specific element here?

>> Raphael Bostic: About this notion of normality, humanity. Maybe Donnajean hinted at this indictment of consumerism. Because the one thing that was very interesting in all this, rent was free. The condition of the world was you didn't actually need money for much of the basics. You were using your money for discretionary things.

Raphael Bostic: Did you feel-- what do you think Dick was trying to say?

Colin Marshall: With the categorization of people in terms of you've got your regular people and your specials who are damaged somehow. And you've got your people who could pass the IQ test. I mean, this is sort of a standard feature of dystopia. The categorizations between people become stark. Whether you have some vast governmental body sorting people or whether you have a new kind of people like the androids, that seems to be a future in other Philip K. Dick books as well as other say big dystopian films. I am hard-pressed to think of one that doesn't involve some. The government decided who is what now and is just putting them in their place, whether it's off-world, you get to live on Mars or you don't. They run together. It's always a feature. I don't know if it's something you all notice about dystopian stories, or am I missing something, some break in this pattern?

Raphael Bostic: But it's interesting for me, because I'm not a big reader of dystopian novels.

Colin Marshall: You have to see Blade Runner sometime.

Raphael Bostic: I'm going to go see it now. I wanted to wait until after the conversation. Do you think that it's different today? So this categorization--

Donnajean Ward: You mean in our society or in writing?

Raphael Bostic: In our society, like how we live. So we talk about these things as if it's some future world. Is it a future world? Was it even a future world in 1968 when this book was written?

Donnajean Ward: Yeah, the different that sticks out to me is that it's made explicit in the book. You could argue we live in a dystopia of this kind, it's just nobody is talking about these divisions. In these future world, the author, whether it's Philip K. Dick or whoever, sort of has to make things more explicit. We have a world where generally people know who's a special and who is a regular person. And androids sometimes don't know they're androids, which is actually
a fascination part of this book as well that it's not so focused on in the movie. But things are made official that we perhaps talk about less in real life. That's a dystopian thing, the inequality of a dystopia. You talk about that stuff.

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>> Donnajean Ward: And I think in all of these sort of dystopian novels, contemporary ones, the YA ones and this book too, for me I find that a lot of it is sort of analogous to racial categorization and things like that. It sort of like becomes a shorthand for that or just another way to talk about that. I actually re-watched the movie for the first time since I saw it in the movies back in the '80's. And I was sort of struck by Rutger Hauer has this conversation and ends by saying, "This is what it means to be a slave." And so I think that's, in my mind, that sort of analogy of the racial to who's human, who deserves empathy.

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>> Raphael Bostic: Conversations about it these days that I could pick up on tend to draw the analogy with immigrant labor as well. We ask the question over and over again, how different is it engineering and android and sending it on a foreign Mars colony, versus using the labor of an immigrant about to come here illegally from south of the border? I mean, no one ever agrees on that. Is it a valid comparison, do you all think, between that sort of immigrant labor we have that we I guess in some sense depend on, the android labor that these colonies depend on?

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>> Donnajean Ward: I think so.

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>> Colin Marshall: To me, the answer is yes. And it's interesting that Donnajean, you were reading it and you saw race. I read this and I saw class. I saw there were some activities that were viewed as higher. Other activities were viewed as lower. You can do a race overlay on it. You can also do a class overlay on that. And in this book I felt like there were probably four classes of organism. The animals I didn't focus on as much as more than trophy type stuff. They were for me just a vehicle for people to have something shiny that they can look to and say, "I have some worth." But you have the normals. Then you have the normals who don't leave. So you have normals off-planet and then you have the normals on-planet.

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Then you have the specials. I'm not sure how the chicken-heads actually go.

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>> Raphael Bostic: There's also ant-heads, right? You have to clarify every term Philip K. Dick uses.

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>> Colin Marshall: And then there's androids as the lowest. The irony is that in some ways androids were the most sophisticated. And this is maybe where this immigrant or race thing--
because of their origin they're viewed to a whole different position. And so you could call this an immigrant story. You could call this an ethnic minority story. You could call it just a poor person story. And I think it works in all of those instances. And then it becomes super interesting. I want to get your reaction to this. There’s a lot of android dialogue in this book, right? And much of the android dialogue is why. Why do you persecute us like this? Why do you view us as less than? That has echoes of everything we see today, right?

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It has echoes of what's going on in South Carolina with the Confederate Flag. It's almost, what does it take for people to understand the ways in which they are saying less than? And the book was trying to make us face that. I mean, I felt that. I don't know if you guys felt the same way.

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>> Donnajean Ward: I think that's where Mercer comes in. I had a little bit-- Aubrey and I talked about this offline a little bit. The thing about what is Mercerism?

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>> Raphael Bostic: So what is Mercerism? For those who are listening who haven't read the book, what is it?

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>> Donnajean Ward: When I went through it a second time, he describes it. I mean, Mercerism in the book, he describes it. It's a theology. And so for those who haven't read the book, Mercer is this old-- there's an empathy box and you can sort of have this experience of going up a hill with this elderly man named Mercer. He has a first name too.

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>> Wilbur.

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>> Wilbur Mercer. And Wilbur Mercer climbs this hill over and over again, and the further up he gets, suddenly he gets pelted by rocks. And you, holding onto your empathy box, are climbing this hill along with Mercer and along with anybody else who was at the empathy box that day. And as rocks hit Mercer, you experience that pain, to the extent that you can even be bloody at home. And this is something that everyone is encouraged to participate in and to experience, the sort of being with Mercer. It struck me as I was listening to Aubrey. I wonder if Philip K. Dick was Catholic, because the whole thing about Mercer just struck me as similar to doing the stations of the cross, the notion that you walk into the path with Jesus while he is being abused up to the crucifixion.

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Or just the lives of saints. It's like all of these different horrible things that have happened to them. You read about it and you study on it to understand that we're all in the same pain kind of
thing. And I think in the book it was again this sort of notion of empathy, having empathy for other beings, is one of the marks of being a human.

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>> Colin Marshall: Androids can't use the empathy box.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Androids can't use the empathy box, right.

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>> Colin Marshall: That was the one thing. "We're different. Look, we can use this."

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>> Donnajean Ward: Exactly. And so that was kind of an interesting aspect. And then of course Mercerism is debunked by an android who has this great show, Buster Friendly.

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>> Raphael Bostic: He's more central to the culture than even Mercer is.

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>> Donnajean Ward: And everybody watches Buster Friendly.

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>> Raphael Bostic: He stays on for weeks at a time, because he's an android.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Because he's an android, which no one figures out. He's on continuously for hours a day.

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>> Raphael Bostic: This is the kind of satire the mid-'60's did really well and we don't see anymore.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Exactly, which I thought was really funny. But I think it's a big part of the book. It's absent in the movie. But I think that's the thing that comes over and over and over again in this book, is that empathy. I think there's a lot to it, but I think there was something, I don't know, for me sort of missing about the notion that that's the one connecting thing.

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>> Raphael Bostic: But the thing is, I actually don't think it was the one connecting thing. It's interesting to listen to you, because the Mercerism stuff completely lost me. I think I told someone, "I didn't get what just happened." Because it was complicated. It was maybe deeper
than I am. But I'm getting there. I'm coming out of the abyss. But in the book, and I'm going to say this the long way. I think Buster Friendly in particular is another thing that connects us all, or connects everyone in that society. Every person had a TV. Whenever you turn that thing on, you were seeing Buster Friendly. So everyone had the same experience. Everyone saw the same guests. They knew the same dialogue. And you know what? We do that today. We are in the exact same space.

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And it is sort of a media connection. And then a sort of religious, spiritual connection. But they equally connect theirs, but they're viewed in very different ways. So people just turn on Buster Friendly. It's on all the time. How many scenes in this book did you walk in and Buster Friendly was on?

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>> Colin Marshall: There were a few. Let me ask you this about that. This book is from '68 and that was probably a more accurate satire of the media landscape in 1960. Now everybody talks about-- how to say this the least boring way? There's no three channels anymore. Everybody is in their own world of podcasts or videos or YouTube or whatever. Fragmentation I guess they call it. But relevantly, just the other day, just Monday, there was-- I'm sure you all caught wind of this in one way or another on Monday. Marc Maron's podcast WTF, probably the best-known podcast, had Obama on. And I think I'll call it historic, especially for podcasts, the president being on a podcast. And I tuned in because I wanted to hear it. I like his show. I wanted to hear Obama being talked to as well. I just thought, "Hey, this feels like something we are all going to hear." And for that reason alone. There has been nothing in my lifetime, other than like 9/11, that we all have tuned into.

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>> Raphael Bostic: I don't think that's true.

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>> Colin Marshall: Okay, prove me wrong, please.

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>> Raphael Bostic: Did you hear about the NAACP woman in Washington who was a white woman?

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>> Colin Marshall: I've heard about it. But I haven't read an article about it.

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>> Raphael Bostic: But how deep do you need to know something to be connected to it?
>> Colin Marshall: That's a good question.

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>> Raphael Bostic: I actually think there are a whole host of these things. You talked about the fragmentation because everybody knows who Kim Kardashian is. Everybody. And I personally have never seen her on a TV show. But I know a lot of details about her. So the fragmentation has not actually prevented there being these general areas of knowledge. What's interesting I think is that the dimensions in which that knowledge happens may be migrating. So it's no longer Walter Cronkite telling everybody. And it may not be a hard news story. It could be any host of things happen. We all know Donald Trump fires people.

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>> Colin Marshall: You're right, we all know these things. I felt different about the Obama WTF because I knew I was hearing the same thing. I don't just know he was on the show. I was hearing it. And other people were too.

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>> Raphael Bostic: But why does that matter, though?

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>> Colin Marshall: I don't know. It was just cool.

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>> Raphael Bostic: I agree that it's cool.

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>> Raphael Bostic: Right, so it's interesting to try to distinguish. Because I do think we, and I think this is in the book and implied in the book, we want to elevate some collective things and not others. But those others I think still exist.

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>> Raphael Bostic: Because you turn off Buster Friendly and go to the empathy box, back-to-back. You are having this collective experience, but you don't really acknowledge one as special and you acknowledge something else. It's really interesting. And the thing that I struggle with is which is more influential?
Colin Marshall: In terms of in the book, Buster Friendly, or the Buster Friendly of the world or the empathy box experience?

Raphael Bostic: Yes. In the book, but also in our lives.

Donnajean Ward: Well I think he kind of comes down on that in the end. Because Buster Friendly debunks Mercer, debunks Mercerism, shows that it's fraud. It's an actor, some old guy.

Raphael Bostic: They say it won't matter then.

Donnajean Ward: But the person who had been the most resistant or whatever to the empathy box, Deckard, has this spiritual experience with Mercerism after it's debunked. So to me, that's why I was saying Philip K. Dick seems to come down on the side of Mercer.

Raphael Bostic: It's interesting you say that. I know how it ended, but I don't think that Philip Dick was saying that Mercer wins. I think Philip Dick is saying connectivity wins and you get to acknowledge whatever connectivity you want.

Donnajean Ward: Really? I thought he was really pretty clear.

Raphael Bostic: What's that line he asks, "If everything everyone has ever said is true?"

Donnajean Ward: Everything everybody has ever said is true.

Raphael Bostic: "Everything everybody has ever said is true," is a line. Deckard, I believe it's Deckard's line. The whole thing is very interesting. And that's why the ending was quite confusing. I was left unsettled and unclear as to what the message was. So when I went to Aubrey I didn't get it. This conversation has actually been quite illuminating. I wanted to sort of turn the conversation for now to the question of governance and government. So what is the government here? What is the governance structure? How does it work in terms of Dick's depiction of humanity?
>> Colin Marshall: What representations do we see of the government? Do we see much more than the police?

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>> Aubrey Hicks: Well, I mean isn't Mercerism sort of state-sanctioned? They want everyone to get an empathy box.

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>> Donnajean Ward: He doesn't explicitly say. Buster Friendly, right? I'm assuming he's on state-sponsored television. There's a constant. I don't know if this is commercial or government, but to have people immigrate. Immigrate or denigrate. Why bother with your clunky codpiece when you can just immigrate? There was a lot of genital and sexual stuff in the book that's sort of a little odd. Of its time and of the genre. But you don't really see. There's no President So-and-So. There is some talk of the UN, but that seems to be after the sort of mini-apocalypse that decided to get together.
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It's not spelled out. There's just some mention that everyone sort of immigrated. So I think you're right. Absinthe is sort of the police, that sort of local. We don't get a sense of-- there is certainly the law that they talk about, the lawless. The area where the specials live in sort of these empty apartment buildings, which seems to have just been like whatever.

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>> Raphael Bostic: A squatting situation.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Right, just sort of squatting.

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>> Raphael Bostic: The mob we see is mostly related to android issues, which makes sense in terms of the plot.

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>> Donnajean Ward: And even the fact that sort of the androids could set up their own sort of shadow police departments, really kind of says pretty lax.

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>> Colin Marshall: It's interesting, because I actually think differently. I think the government was implicitly involved in everything. And everything was designed for pacification and making things as simple as possible for humanity's sake. And think about things, right? And the part of the book-- so they facilitate everyone off-world. They facilitate everyone getting an android. They basically say, "We're going to make sure that no androids that cause any trouble survive. And we're going to make sure that no sick, diseased or stupid people ever have to engage with you again. And we're going to entertain you all the time with Buster Friendly or whatever we're
going to do." An interesting question I'm going to throw out and then I'm going to keep talking is, do you think the government knew that Buster Friendly was an android?

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>> Donnajean Ward: Yes.

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>> Colin Marshall: Which is a powerful statement. So to me that is a strong statement about the government in that the government is actively manipulation the masses to perpetuate it.

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>> Aubrey Hicks: Here's what you need to be afraid of.

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>> Donnajean Ward: Friendly is not telling you what to be afraid of.

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>> Colin Marshall: But that they allow Buster Friendly to be on 24 hours a day, is a statement about their view of what he can do for them and their fear of him, which is zero.

[00:38:15]
>> Donnajean Ward: And there's another thing that we haven't talked about in addition to Buster Friendly and the empathy box. There's also the thing where you dial the mood. The mood thing, where it has the mood organ where it wakes you up in the morning with whatever mood you were going to dial and how you want to feel that day, how you want to wake up. If you're feeling depressed you go and dial yourself a happy time, or you can get together.

[00:38:40]
>> Raphael Bostic: You can dial indiscriminately watching television. "I want to be able to watch this with no regard to what's on." And the spousal arguments are about which mood they should dial too, related to the argument. It kind of loops back in on itself. I think everybody is entertained by Deckard and his wife. And another surprise for Blade Runner fans, he has a wife in the movie, an actual wife. He's not just sort of a lone wolf. In its short length, there is a lot to talk about here that we've so far got to and things that we probably won't get to. The mood organ especially.

[00:39:16]
>> Donnajean Ward: Yeah, the mood organ. So I think the notion that the government and industry are sort of placating the masses. Television-- even our television even now in terms of broadcast television licensed by the government. I think people say it's policed by terms of content. So I think there are some parallels there. Certainly it was much more policed in the era that he is writing the book. So I think you're right: that is sort of a proxy for the government.
Raphael Bostic: Well, I also think that Deckard's visit up to Seattle to the android manufacturer is quite interesting. Two things were interesting. One was that even in this post-apocalyptic world, corporate espionage and corporate underhanded behavior still are hard at play. But the second is that there was actual regulation. And the government was trying to manage innovation in a way that didn't disrupt society. And that is another thing that we grapple with today. When you think about how do we regulate the internet, what should we do with drones? There are a whole host of policy areas where government is trying to adapt to the latest development in ways that allow society to not come apart. Or at least allow them to continue to control the flow of society. I'll say both ways and you can decide which way you're more amenable to.

Colin Marshall: Thinking in this direction makes you a very suitable Philip K. Dick reader. I don't know if you've read any of his books before. Is this the first one?

Raphael Bostic: This is the first one.

Colin Marshall: Well, Aubrey, you've read a few I take it. So the sense of someone is controlling it all. I think Philip K. Dick was into that. And you mentioned before, asking if he was a Catholic, Donnajean. I think he had a fraught religious life. He claims to have met God on at least one occasion. He had his own systems. But I don't know, as a fellow Philip K. Dick reader, Aubrey, is he sort of a conspiracy-minded guy? Are these books good for people who are inclined to believe there is a hand pulling the lever? Or are they not good for those people?

Aubrey Hicks: Or will they push people over?

Colin Marshall: Which one?

Aubrey Hicks: Yeah, it pushes people who believe in conspiracies. I think he definitely-- I mean, Minority Report. He asks those questions a lot. I don't know that he answers them.

Raphael Bostic: He doesn't answer them. I do feel like this book was actually less conspiratory only in the sense that it happened at a level that didn't threaten society at large. So we didn't actually face a conspiracy. This was just six androids in the San Francisco Bay area on one day. If he didn't get them, someone else is going to go out and eventually get them.
>> Colin Marshall: There's a lot of bounty hunters.

>> Raphael Bostic: So the conspiracy concept was kind of the context for how everything happened, which was very interesting.

>> Aubrey Hicks: I think it really parallels what we talked about in our last podcast with On Such A Full Sea and the power that corporations had and the peer pressure as governance, sort of self-governance. Like the buying of the animals, that was Mercer, but it was also, "That's how I'm going to show up my neighbor, so I have to have a real animal."

>> Raphael Bostic: Keeping up with the Joneses.

>> Aubrey Hicks: And how that really does control everyone wanting to be the same as their neighbors or better.

>> Raphael Bostic: I wanted to turn to Blade Runner. We have a Blade Runner expert here.

>> Colin Marshall: That video did start a slight side career talking about Blade Runner for me. The occasional Blade Runner smidge comes through. I didn't work on the movie. I was born in 1984. But anyway, continue.

>> Raphael Bostic: Do you feel like, with the book versus the movie, do you have a thought that people leave the movie with the same questions and messages as you'd get from the book? Or are there some aspects that aren't hit as hard?

>> Colin Marshall: It's a good question because the film—there's this quote that I like from I believe the film critic Pauline Kael. And somebody asked her, confused by the movie Blade Runner, "What's going on here?" To which she allegedly responded, "It's the here that's going on." It's the setting, it's this vision of Los Angeles that is made out of these elaborate models and repurposed buildings like the Bradbury building. The Bradbury building in Blade Runner is the suburban building where Isidore lives. It plays the same function as in Electric Sheep. But there's Union Station that becomes police headquarters. That's graphed together with these elaborate sets. They take Los Angeles back to the third world in a way by filling it with this sort
of Babel of languages and sort of street markets and things like that and animals. There's more
animals, animals being led through the streets. But then it gives Los Angeles these stark
monoliths as well. And factories that flames shoot out of.

[00:45:22]
It's become such a byword for dystopia, dystopian setting. You know, I watch Blade Runner
now and think, "It's not bad." I would rather live in the Los Angeles of Blade Runner than the
actual Los Angeles of 1982. There's stuff everywhere, there's life everywhere. Sure, there's
off-world colonies and there's the occasional killer android, but the setting is so original and
holds up so well. Actually, Donna, didn't you watch the movie recently after seeing it
theatrically? So 30-odd years. It holds up, right? Am I wrong?

[00:45:55]
>> Donnajean Ward: It holds up. I was surprised.

[00:45:58]
>> Colin Marshall: Because of the setting.

[00:45:59]
>> Donnajean Ward: Exactly. It's gorgeous. It's a gorgeous looking movie. But it's exactly
what you said: I felt like he got Los Angeles. It really is in so many ways a love letter to Los
Angeles because it's so much more true to Los Angeles. I think about Her, the movie Her. The
future Los Angeles that is envisioned. But it was like, how are you envisioning this as Los
Angeles?

[00:46:29]
>> Raphael Bostic: How did it get so bland?

[00:46:31]
>> Donnajean Ward: Where did all these white people come from? There are more white
people than there are now. It was just weird. Whereas the Los Angeles in Blade Runner the
movie, the fact that they speak this polyglot that everybody you see on the street. There are all
these different kinds of people. They talk about the language. It's a mix of Japanese and
Spanish and all these sort of different languages. That really is Los Angeles. It's more
believable. And like you said, the life is on the street, not behind doors. What I remember
about seeing the movie in the theater, I was in high school.

[00:47:14]
>> Raphael Bostic: Don't date yourself. This is forever now.

[00:47:17]
>> Donnajean Ward: It was a rerun. If you get that reference, then you know what I'm talking
about.
Aubrey Hicks: I don't know the reference.

Raphael Bostic: I don't know what you're talking about.

Donnajean Ward: Never mind. I totally lost my train of thought.

Raphael Bostic: You were talking about how this is the essence of Los Angeles.

Donnajean Ward: So the first time I saw it, the thing that was revelatory about Blade Runner seeing it in the '80's was this is the first time the future wasn't clean and sterile. And there were these people that you see around you where actually in the future there were more of them.

Colin Marshall: Things were old. You recognized certain things. I don't know if you were in Los Angeles then.

Donnajean Ward: No, I wasn't. But things were old. But people continued to live. Life continues on even in this. It wasn't like this deserted place. It was teeming. And that was a vision of the future that I think, despite it being dystopian, was very sort of lively and life affirming.

Raphael Bostic: Then the term Blade Runner-ization got currency in urban planning. It's like, "Why is it taking so long?"

Donnajean Ward: I was just going to say the only thing they got wrong is it was raining all the time.

Raphael Bostic: I think people would accept that these days.
By comparison, Electric Sheep doesn't really have much of a setting. It's San Francisco. Philip K. Dick set books wherever he happened to live. One of my favorites of his is a novel called A Scanner Darkly, and it's set in Orange County. Intriguingly set there, but just because he lived in Santa Ana. And San Francisco is not I would say well-drawn. This could be anywhere. Blade Runner could not be anywhere.

>> Colin Marshall: I think that's why they moved the movie to LA. Because the book just needed there to be buildings. And there were no uniquely San Francisco buildings that were required for the book to play out the way it did. You needed a police station, you needed an abandoned apartment building. You needed an apartment building that had more people in it that could have a sheep on the roof. And you need an opera house. Those were basically the only things you needed, and they happened in a lot of places. So it's very interesting that the movie turns on a depiction of place. Which is totally absent from the book. It's actually very interesting. And it seems, having not seen the movie, which I will do shortly, it seems that some of the place is the substitute for animals and some of the others.

The Mercerism, all those sorts of things. But it still speaks to the same notion of this is how we live. And these are the things that are the essentially components of our life. That is quite interesting.

>> Raphael Bostic: There's also the question of, is Deckard a replicant in himself, which is huge in the movie but not really in the book.

>> Donnajean Ward: A little bit.

>> Colin Marshall: A little bit, but was it an important matter to any of you reading this book? If you come to it after the movie, you think that's going to be the central question, whether Deckard is a replicant. Because it's made so much of in the conversation about the movie. But here, there is a lot of questions about how is-- they don't say replicant. They say andie. But Deckard himself is not really the central player in that issue.

>> Raphael Bostic: No. What's interesting in that is that in the book we know he's not an android. But the androids are trying. It's a sign of the androids' cleverness. And to me it was a sign that the androids are clever enough to know how to play with your mind and make you unsure in an environment where you need to be very sure. And so that device wasn't really important for the book. If you're watching it, that's an interesting extra angle you have to be mindful of as you're watching the movie. It can make it much more interesting. I wanted to say...
two more things before we have to wrap this up. The first is we talked a lot about place. But in the way that Dick describes urban places, they're empty. They're isolated. They're almost antisocial. What's your take on that? What statement do you think he was trying to make in that context?

[00:52:10]

Colin Marshall: It struck me as a 1968 vision of cities, and a 1968 America vision of cities. Having not been around then, I do wonder. You hear about how American cities were from the mid-'60's to even the mid-'80's or '90's. And that's like, "How did they get like that? How did the mean get to be cities are a place where it's somehow both empty and filled with crime?" There's this sense of in real life cities have become dystopian.

[00:53:01]

Aubrey Hicks: They continued to move to the suburbs.

[00:53:03]

Colin Marshall: It wouldn't be off the planet, but certainly. I do a lot of reading on that very subject, as people do here in this building. And it's like Philip K. Dick's vision of this sort of blasted city seems to be what people are describing when they're describing the real cities of the late 1960's. So it feels like almost not an exaggeration compared to the nonfiction accounts I read of places like not necessarily San Francisco, although it has had its problems, but St. Louis or later Detroit or something like that. It's like I think of that era as an era where the life drained out of cities and here we have a city where the life is drained out. So in some sense every science fiction work is kind of about the era it was written in. That element to me seems to be about the mid-'60's, but I'm not at all sure about that.

[00:53:55]

Aubrey Hicks: It also seems like a way to talk about how technology can connect. Which, thinking of when he was writing seems very prophetic in how it connects. So these people are sort of-- I don't think Deckard's wife interacts with anyone else ever, except him. But she's got this empathy box with which she connects with people, and she watches TV. And now we've all got our empathy boxes.

[00:54:29]

Raphael Bostic: She was holding her iPhone.

[00:54:33]

Aubrey Hicks: I think everyone can confer that. I think in some ways the emptiness in his landscape is really about sort of technology. And it's another way of talking about the ideas that he's talking about with the androids. It's all part of the same sort of question, what is reality? Is this online connect you have, even before online connections, less real than the connection that you have in person?
>> Donnajean Ward: I would say that he doesn't think it's as real as what you have in person. But I have to say, the thing about the book versus the movie, I think it is sort of anti-urban. This is just a bad place to be. And the thing about the movie that I love so much is that it is so full of life.

>> Raphael Bostic: I didn't read the book that way. I actually read the book as it looks empty, but there are all sorts of very interesting things going on there.

>> Donnajean Ward: What was interesting?

>> Raphael Bostic: I thought Deckard was interesting. I thought the androids trying to live in the midst of things were interesting. I thought you have an opera house, you have tremendous arts with talented people going on in these places. You have a shadow police force that is doing other things, which is quite interesting. But it's kind of funny because you've got me coming full circle on this. The end of the book where Iran, who is Deckard's wife, the last chapter is really about her. And it's about how although we think that she is living this hollow, empty life, she actually has real emotions like everyone else. She cares, she worries. She's engaged. She is excited and thrilled when he gets home because she's afraid he's going to be killed by these androids. And what we saw was true humanity that was deep.

And it was to her essence. And once that part of her was satisfied, then she could go back to all the other stuff. But that humanity was there and it's always there. And to me, that was not an anti-urban message. It was rather, you all think the urban place is crazy and all those people are nuts, but they're not.

>> Colin Marshall: We kept getting this line, "Go where the people are. I'm going to go where there are people." So there's that at the end for sure, so that's hardly anti-urban: to go where there are people.

>> Donnajean Ward: I think it was more a commentary on again the sort of humanness versus the nonhuman. Because the android who murders his sheep, the goat, the thing has sort of revealed itself to be sort of subhuman. But like Iran, you would think that would fall apart, but she seems so attached to the idea of having this life animal that was going to show the status. But she shows herself to be much more empathetic to her husband and sort of getting the fake ply so he could tend to the toad. And so I don't know, it seems like he came back on this thing
of what it means to be human. You can replicate it, but you can't really be it. I thought it was a little...

[00:58:27]
>> Raphael Bostic: You read that far more deeply than I did.

[00:58:30]
>> Donnajean Ward: I read it twice.

[00:58:31]
>> Raphael Bostic: I don't want to belabor this, but I saw his characterization of Iran for the first two-thirds of the book, was as this hapless, helpless person who was a victim of her environment. And that the environment had beaten her down where she didn't have really any real reason to live. And what the last chapter said was I was seeing her exactly wrong. And to me, I think, we can ask him, I think he was saying be careful how you read the world, because you could be reading it exactly wrong. I like this on-planet/off-planet, city/suburban thing and the notion that there are all these received wisdoms about places, what goes on there and you can't do this and you shouldn't do that.

[00:59:32]
and you know what, you may be absolutely wrong. And to me that's a really powerful message to close the book. So last question, because we're just about out of time. It's the question I always end with. I was going to say a two-part, but I'm just going to go with a one-part. Who would you recommend should read this book?

[00:59:55]
>> Colin Marshall: I'll say it's one of the better starting points for Philip K. Dick books, because it's well-known. Because there's such a high-profile movie made out of it. Because in many ways it's the least weird of his high-profile novels. But also, as you say, it touches on those themes you mentioned of the slippage between your perception of reality and someone else's. Or one's perception of reality and the real reality, if there is one. That's such a big Philip K. Dick thing and you see it in book after book, be it Scanner Darkly, be it Ubik or The Man in the High Castle. I could go on and on. The man was very prolific. But of what I've read-- I haven't read all of his work-- but it's certainly the easiest intro to those themes of his. Yet it remains quite interesting and is different enough from the movie to where you don't get a lot of people saying the book was better or the movie was better. Because the movie did the thing movies should do when they're adapting a book, is went far away from it so you can't really compare them.

[01:00:56]
In the same way that Blade Runner holds up over the years, this still stands up on its own of the years and over a long period of time too. Which, for something in the late-'60's especially sci-fi, is not so easily done.
Aubrey Hicks: I would totally echo that. I think obviously if you're just new to sci-fi, this is definitely a classic and one to read. It's quick and it's thought-provoking. I would recommend it.

Colin Marshall: I mean, the prose is sometimes awful. You can say that. You've read this novel Flow My Tears the Policeman Said from the '70's. It was award-winning, a very interesting book. But my god, you can't believe it was publishable. Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, there are sentences like-- what sticks in my mind is one that starts with, "I wonder," he wondered.


Colin Marshall: Compared to some Philip K. Dick books, that's nothing. Read Flow My Tears. He'll show you some lovely prose.

Aubrey Hicks: Would you rather read this or 50 Shades of Grey?

Colin Marshall: Good point. When does that choice come up?

Raphael Bostic: We get a lot of listenership from 50 Shades of Grey. I'm just saying.

Donnajean Ward: I guess I would recommend it to a sci-fi lover who hadn't read it before. I would recommend it to somebody who loves the movie but hasn't read it before. I wouldn't recommend it to someone who likes literature, just because it was a little frustrating. I think the concept is really interesting, but I would vote movie over book.

Raphael Bostic: So having not seen the movie, I wouldn't be so hasty to do that. This conversation to me has been incredibly helpful. And I feel like I understand the book a whole lot better than I did before we started an hour ago. And I really like it a whole lot more. And so my recommendation is if you're going to read this book, be in a book club and make sure you have an opportunity to talk it over with people. Because there's a lot that needs to be bounced off. And when you hear things it will remind you of a whole host of things. So we're at the end of time. I want to personally thank you all for making this book a whole lot richer for me. We've been talking with Donnajean Ward, who is here at the Bedrosian center. Aubrey Hicks who is
also here at the Bedrosian center. And our special guest Colin Marshall who does tremendous media things.

[01:03:59]
You should all please check out his work. We'll have a link to his material on our website.
Thank you all for listening. My name is Raphael Bostic. I'm the direct of the Bedrosian center.
And until next time, happy reading. Thank you.

[01:04:16]
>> Thank you for listening to the USC Bedrosian Book Club podcast. Tune in next time for a conversation about The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander. This book will change the way you see the world, tracing how the war on drugs targeted black men and decimated communities of color throughout the US, essentially recreating a system of racial control. We'll discuss this must-read book with former Los Angeles councilwoman Jane Carrey, law professor Jody Armour, Ph. D student Daniel Williams and podcast favorite, professor David Sloan. Read The New Jim Crow along with us and listen on July 27th and let us know what you think. Tweet us @bedrosiancenter. Or check out our show page on the Bedrosian website, bedrosian.usc.edu, for links to speakers information and to some of the things we might mention during the discussion.

[01:05:21]
This podcast was produced by Aubrey Hicks, Jonathan Schwartz and I am Kristen Decombs. Thanks for listening. The USC Bedrosian Book Club podcast, recorded at the USC Sol Price school of public policy.