Duty and Love

In this essay, I will explore the ethical decisions made in Phillip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and in its radical film translation *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott. The normative ethics that is mostly seen in both the novel and film is deontology. A deontologist is someone who is obligated to abide by the rules with specific duties and principles. Rules and duties guide the deontologist’s choices in what to do in a situation of stress. Rick Deckard, the main protagonist in both the novel and film, finds himself struggling to make the right choices that are required for his job as a blade runner, that is, a police officer who kills androids who have escaped to earth. Deckard is empathic to several characters, but mostly toward women. In the novel, Deckard is married to Iran, a woman who seems depressed and cold, yet at times she is caring. Additionally, he has conflicting desires for Rachel and for Luba Luft. In the film, however, Deckard is single, and has a strange relationship with Rachel. There is no Luba Luft, but there is Pris and Zhora. His duties are split: in the novel, he has a duty to his wife and to his job to kill androids who look like humans, and in the movie, he mainly has a duty to his boss and to kill androids.

Deckard kills Luba and Pris in the novel and he kills Zhora and Pris in the film. While these seem to indicate a parallel construction, the novel presents a much more empathic and dutiful Deckard. Comparing Deckard’s killing of these two pairs reveals that the novel and film send two different messages about duty and love. The novel shows love is possible and conflicted, but the film shows love is impossible and not desireable. Further, the novel shows duty and love cannot go together, and in the film, duty is more important than anything else. First, I will explore Deckard’s killing of Luba and Zhora, then I will explore his killing of both Pris’s. Lastly, I will explore his duty and love toward these four women. In the end, by looking at scenes of death, we can see that love and empathy tear Deckard from his Deontologist roots.