

Postmodern Ethics Revisited in Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me: A Baumanian Reading

Ian McEwan'in Benim Gibi Makineler Romanında Postmodern Etik: Baumancı Bir Okuma

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Geliş Tarihi/Received

05.12.2022

Kabul Tarihi/Accepted

19.12.2022

Yayın Tarihi/Publication Date

20.12.2022

Atıf/Citation: Avcu, İ. (2022). Postmodern Ethics Revisited in Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me: A Baumanian Reading. *Veche*, 1 (1), 48-58.



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Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman sums up today's postmodern era of the hyperreal and its conditions as “no reality claims to be more real than its representation” (Bauman, 2003, p. viii). He questions the requirement of new approaches and modes of thought, politics, and morality to appropriately reply to these new social conditions. To respond to the changing conditions of postmodern society, the issue of new postmodern ethics has been conducted in philosophical and cultural studies. The modernist ethical discourse which tried hard to abolish individual responsibility has been supposed to replace with subjective postmodern ethical values. Today, the diversity and disunity of moral voices are likely to silence others and provoke individual subjectivity to become “the only ultimate ethical authority” resulting in “irreparable relativism of any moral code” (Bauman, 1993, p. xxii). In this postmodern condition, “morality has been privatized; like everything else that shared this fate, ethics has become a matter of individual discretion, risk-taking, chronic uncertainty, and never-placated qualms” (Bauman, 1993, p. xxii). These circumstances lead to disbelief towards the universality of moral rules and the results of the situation are legally allowing the issues of ethical ambivalence, engendering

Abstract

The increasing use of artificial intelligence robots in today's world has caused these issues to be frequently represented in contemporary literature. In particular, the authors, who aim to focus on the subject of virtual reality, examine the re-creation of reality and the reshaping of social life in this context. In his novel *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan also deals with how artificial intelligence robots named Adam and Eve are involved in human life. This article discusses how artificial intelligence robots are examined in McEwan's novel and to what extent ethics is reconstructed from a Baumanian perspective in the context of postmodern ethics. Based on the example that artificial intelligence robots, which are included in all parts of people's private lives, rewrite their perception of reality, the issue of reconstructing ethical and moral phenomena is discussed in the light of Bauman's postmodern ethical evaluation.

Keywords: Bauman, Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me*, Postmodern Ethics.

Öz

Yapay zeka robotların günümüz dünyasında giderek artan bir şekilde kullanılması, bu meselelerin çağdaş edebiyat içerisinde de sıklıkla temsil edilmesine neden olmuştur. Özellikle sanal gerçeklik konusu üzerinde durmayı amaçlayan yazarlar, buradan hareketle gerçekliğin yeniden oluşturulması ve bu bağlamda toplumsal yaşamın yeniden şekillendirilmesini irdelerler. Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me* adlı romanında Adam ile Eve adındaki yapay zeka robotların insan yaşamının her alanına nasıl dâhil olduklarını işler. Bu makalede, yapay zeka robotların McEwan'ın romanında nasıl irdelendiği ve postmodern etik bağlamında Baumancı açıdan etiğin ne derecede yeniden oluşturulduğu meseleleri tartışılmaktadır. İnsanların özel yaşamlarına dâhil olan yapay zeka robotların gerçeklik algısını yeniden yazdıkları örneğinden hareketle, etik ve ahlak olgularının da yeniden oluşturulduğu meselesi Bauman'ın postmodern etik değerlendirmesi ışığında ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bauman, *Benim Gibi Makineler*, Ian McEwan, Postmodern Etik.

existential questions of insecurity, and ontological contingency of being. As is seen, it is highly probable to characterize today's world by overwhelmingly uncertain, frightening, and uncontrollable conditions which threaten the consistency and stability of society.

In his recent novel *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan created a world where artificial intelligence robots are involved in every moment and part of human life. In this world, artificial intelligence robots named Adam and Eve are in various interactions and all the ways of communicating with humans. The main character of the novel, Charlie, makes numerous contacts with Adam, including ethically questionable events, after he buys an artificial intelligence robot named Adam. The existence of artificial intelligence robots in all kinds of experiences and interactions, from investing and making money in the stock market to having sexual intercourse, raises some ethical questions and creates the perception that a frightening world awaits us. In addition to these, while artificial intelligence robots, who are not satisfied with the world they live in, question people's attitudes, Adams and Eves, who decide to commit suicide as a result of unfair situations, are also emphasized in the novel.

In this novel, while Ian McEwan refers to important historical events such as the Falklands War, he also examines the element of subversion of history by using prominent figures such as Alan Turing in terms of scientific development. In addition, the fact that artificial intelligence robots have become friends of people rather than toys, and that all kinds of secrets, including crimes such as rape or murder in the past, are shared with these robots, sheds light on what kind of world we may face in the future. The relationship between Charlie and Miranda and the artificial intelligence robot Adam knows no boundaries ethically and morally. Miranda's sexual relationship with Adam and the fact that she explains it to Charlie, expressing that she is just curious and that Adam is a toy, shows how these boundaries become blurred.

In this article, I aim to answer the questions of how McEwan deals with postmodern ethics in the novel to reflect the advanced developments in artificial intelligence by approaching the issue from Bauman's perspective as well as how people try to adapt their sense of morals and personal judgments to these advancements.

Postmodern Ethics Re-constructed by AI Adams and Eves

The multiplicity of the realities, changing conditions of the contemporary world, and new versions of relations in social and cultural contexts necessitate new perspectives on the issues of moral conditions and postmodern ethics. Bauman argues about the issue of postmodern ethics and explains it as allowing the 'moral self' that accepts its contingency and ambivalence. Like all the totalizing notions and philosophies, postmodern ethics reject a universal formulation of ethical code and supports the idea of multiple moral formulations. The moral self, in this respect, is constructed in two parts, independent and autonomous, stressing the postmodern moral condition or moral impulse. Employing the entrance of the third part (society) it is supposed that "we leave the realm of morality proper and enter another world, the realm of social order ruled by justice- not morality" (Marotta, 1995, pp. 144-145). In that sense, McEwan's *Machines Like Me* mainly deals with moral subjectivity and plurality, especially after Adam is involved in the daily actions of the protagonists -Charlie and Miranda- and becomes a part of their *real* lives. After Miranda and Adam's sexual relationship, Charlie gets upset and resents, and blames Miranda for being a faithless lover; however, Miranda does not regard the relationship as having an affair and likens the fact to going to bed with a dildo or a sex toy which creates another ambiguity between reality and illusion. Miranda perverts the course of justice to carry

out her real-inner justice and her scheme to entrap Gorringe is to create symmetry for the action he is not punished for.

Bauman stresses the significance of autonomy of morality as “moral responsibility precedes all decisions as it does not, and cannot care about any logic which would allow the approval of action as correct. Thus, morality can be rationalized only at the cost of self-denial and self-attrition” (Bauman, 1993, p. 248). Miranda’s moral (inner) responsibility to her friend Mariam for provoking her actions contradicts general logical and legal principles. Concerning the attempt to make life more moral, Miranda follows Bauman’s hopeful assessment because moral responsibility is there before any reassurance or proof and after any excuse or absolute.

The false sense of control out of which we can see that human beings are governed by the ambition of power and desire is closely associated with the idea that the problem with human beings is not the advanced technology but how they turn it into a kind of fetish of exceeding the limits of human’s potentials and asking for more and more all the time. Using and abusing the humanoid AIs the way they want is exemplified in the novel as follows,

My point was this: I had bought him, he was mine, I had decided to share him with Miranda, and it would be our decision, and only ours, to decide when to deactivate him. If he resisted, and especially if he caused injury as he had the night before, then he would have to be returned to the manufacturer for readjustment (McEwan, 2019, p. 130).

McEwan also brings forward the idea of the necessity of such advancements in technology and artificial intelligence which has been commonly declared in the media by either governments or companies for preparing people for an apocalyptic end/inevitable doom: “Then, out of nowhere, he said, ‘from a certain point of view, the only solution to suffering would be the complete extinction of humankind’” (McEwan, 2019, p. 67), because if people believe that this world is no longer capable of providing them with what they need, then they will start believing in and becoming convinced with the idea of decreasing the populations and look for a solution to suffering which seems to emerge due to the careless and unplanned actions of human beings. That is how it would become normal for almost everyone to see AI robots around and not otherize or exclude them.

In postmodern conditions, the plurality of moral choices and rules characterizes the social atmosphere which demonstrates that the postmodern individual is free to construct and follow his/her ethical codes. Charlie favours subjectivity clearly at the beginning of the novel justifying that “morals were real, they were true, good and bad inherited in the nature of things. Our actions must be judged on their terms” (McEwan, 2019, p. 16). Bauman justifies Charlie in a way by stating that

the modern mind is appalled by the prospect of ‘deregulation’ of human conduct, of living without a strict and comprehensive ethical code, of making a wager on human moral intuition and ability to negotiate the art and usages of living together – rather than seeking the support of the law like depersonalized rules aided by coercive powers (Bauman, 1993, p. 33).

Similarly, Miranda specifies her moral parameters and contradicts the organizational, forcing system, and social concerns. Peter Gorringe, who raped Mariam and caused her to commit suicide, first promised to kill Miranda because she slandered him, but after his friend visited him in prison, he started to believe Miranda was right confessing that

he told me about the suicide and that was a shock. Then I learned that you were her friend, that you two were very close. So, revenge. I almost admired you for it. You were brilliant in court... You were the agent of retribution. Perhaps the right word is an angel. Avenging angel (McEwan, 2019, p. 244).

He appreciates the balance between the crime he committed and the crime he was innocent of and also he was sent down for. Both Miranda's and Peter's moral conduct celebrates Bauman's description of morality which

means being-for (not merely being-aside or even being-with) the Other. To take a moral stance means to assume responsibility for the Other; to act on the assumption that the well-being of the Other is a precious thing calling for my effort to preserve and enhance it, that whatever I do or do not do affects it, and that if I have not done it, it might not have been done at all, and that even if others do or can do it this does not cancel my responsibility for doing it myself . . . And this being-for is unconditional (Bauman, 1994, pp. 18-19).

Bauman also proposes the term liquid modernity to describe today's society emphasizing never-ending variability in the way of constructing the social context of the postmodern individual as an outcome of culturally and socially heterogeneous community in the contemporary world. He argues the multifaceted role of commercialism and explains it as a type of social arrangement resulting from ordinary and permanent recycling mundane, as a manipulating influence of society, a spirit coordinating systematic reproduction, social stratification, social integration, the arrangement of individuals, and a remarkable actor of constructing individual and group self-identification tracing individual life policies. What he implies by liquid modernity or consumer society is never a sense of satisfaction, rather he stresses uncertainty or insecurity. Unlike the postmodern tendencies of Charlie and Miranda, Adam criticizes the subjective morality of Miranda and Charlie, so he uncovers their crucial actions. The new context which focuses on the "incompatibility of machine learning and machine reasoning with human morality that is a quiet but engrossing exploration of artificial intelligence" (Beck, 2020, p. 89) is the fundamental part of Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. Adam traces a line of more objective moral status from a broader perspective and he "wants Miranda to confront her action and accept what the law decides" (McEwan, 2019, p. 276), thus he implies the significance of a world dominated by the rule of law. Miranda cries for justice as well, however, her understanding of justice is far from that of Adam.

Bauman shows certain disbelief towards the technological developments that carry great risks for the future of humanity. From the beginning of the innovations of technology, its side effects, and unanticipated usage can never fully be foreseen, controlled, and eliminated. It troubles working out the essence of postmodern ethics in general, and McEwan expresses the complicated case by addressing Adam "before us sat the ultimate plaything, the dream of ages, the triumph of humanism – or its danger of death. Exciting beyond measure, but frustrating too" (McEwan, 2019, p. 4). Thus the issue of postmodern ethics is conducted by an appealing awareness of uncertainty and views of administrative structures. The contradiction of the moral self and modern self is tackled by Bauman and is of great concern in the novel's moral uncertainty. Charlie, with the help of Miranda's encouragement, destroys Adam to get rid of him and the problems he would cause. They wish to maintain their lives within the moral frame constructed by themselves regardless of any other possible truths including the one produced by the consciousness of artificial intelligence.

McEwan, who makes a moral experiment with a postmodern perspective in this novel, warns first the characters of the novel and then us, through the actions, statements, and interrogations of

Adams and Eves: that describing common behavior may not mean making a moral statement. Both the theses presented as a human is intrinsically good or human is intrinsically bad may not be true, and that humans are morally ambiguous will become much more evident, especially with the existence of artificial intelligence robots. Morality, contrary to modernist thought, is not rational and it does not comply with the schemes created on the objectives or profit and loss accounts; Which is not the case, especially when we see how Charlie enjoys making money in the stock market with Adam's help and does not question whether it's morally problematic. Morality is ultimately aporetic: most choices are made from conflicting impulses. We see from time to time in the novel that these moral impulses, when taken to the end, can lead to immoral consequences in the relations between artificial intelligence robots and humans. According to Bauman, morality has no reason, and anyone who wants to be moral must compare himself to a saint. What others do or do not do does not diminish the moral responsibility of the person, something is not done because it has to be done, and morality comes before action. McEwan offers here important implications indicating that the examples of morality and ethics that we encounter in this novel - including Adam's and Eve's questioning of the same issues - will increase with the introduction of artificial intelligence robots into our lives.

What Bauman expresses about the autonomy of morality and how he shows certain disbelief towards the technological developments that may carry huge risks for a future world can be emphasized with significant acts of the major characters in the novel. How Miranda and Adam share their most intimate moments during sex, how Charlie is somehow abusing Adam's artificial intelligence to win in the stock market and is never asking the question of where the money comes from are prioritized in the narrative to show the blurred boundaries of ethics. The never-ending variability of morals and ethics absorbed by today's society, Bauman stresses, proposes the individually constructed morals and ethics between humans and humanoid artificial intelligence robots. That is how the postmodern individual walk on the thin line of the plurality of moral choices which may end up with a disaster due to removing all the restrictions of moral, ethical, or social constructions.

AI Humanoids Penetrating into the Philosophy of Suicide

The subversive and entertaining elements in the novel force Adams and Eves to pose fundamental questions such as: What makes us human? Would you commit suicide if you know that you could live forever? "For McEwan's characters, the introduction of death acts as a philosophical trigger, engendering a tension between two poles of human thought: doubt and faith, the rational and the intuitive" (Hillard, 2010, p. 141) as Adams and Eves demonstrate with their perceptions of this world and questionings of ethics and morals. "Perhaps the greatest profession of faith in McEwan's fiction, though, is its faith in fiction itself: the novel is the only utopian space where believers of every persuasion ... can exist together without violence" (Bradley&Tate, 2010, p. 16), however, with McEwan's a few steps further in the high-tech world of ethics and morals, artificial intelligence suicides and self-destructions become gruesome enough to see how they use their brains to react against their environments and how they suffer from adapting themselves to the high-tech world. They are not human beings but every feature they have is almost the same as human characteristics, and what is more is that feeling the sense of displacement or alienation, being exposed to the prejudices of human beings as well as a lack of sense of belonging all seem reasonable to understand why they try to destroy themselves or commit suicides in their own way which might also imply the idea of how this world is overwhelming to survive even for the humanoid AI robots. It brings forward

the thought of the chaotic environment this world has and how it is full of suffering and agony, and even the artificial intelligence robots take the responsibility of ending their own lives.

Two of the Riyadh Eves living in the same household were the first to work out how to override their kill switches. Within two weeks, after some exuberant theorising, then a period of despair, they destroyed themselves. They didn't use physical methods, like jumping out of a high window. They went through the software, using roughly similar routes. They quietly ruined themselves. Beyond repair (McEwan, 2019, p. 175).

Since “none of the synthetic humans make the choice for physical self-destruction, but instead each finds a way to alter their software, killing in various ways their minds” (Książopolska, 2020, p. 11), the narrative shares possible outcomes of coping with the issues in today's world over the reactions of the AI robots about “judging whether life is or is not worth living” (Camus, 2005, p. 1). Another example of that is how it could be better to become stupid and not perceive the whirlpool of questionings about the meaning, existence, and happiness that a person can have. Does it seem better than suicide? Does it make sense to live like that or is it another way of ending your life and start not being able to use your mental abilities to understand what is going on around the world? The answers to those questions are not asked for the first time and they are obviously being contemplated by Adams and Eves in the novel because

what differentiates them over time is experience and the conclusions they draw. In Vancouver there's another case, an Adam who disrupted his own software to make himself profoundly stupid. He'll carry out simple commands but with no self-awareness, as far as anybody can tell. A failed suicide. Or a successful disengagement (McEwan, 2019, p. 175).

The grisly atmosphere that McEwan created in which the AI humanoids are surrounded by existential pains, and sufferings, and since “questions of knowledge—epistemological questions, how much one can know, how one can know anything—are frequent in McEwan's novels” (Malcolm, 2002, p. 157), questionings and how these damage Adams and Eves could be good examples for human beings to start searching for any sort of meaning in this life or at least ask the right questions about what people are occupied with. Adams and Eves seem better even at suffering and being displaced in this world than actual human beings.

And then they set about learning the lessons of despair we can't help teaching them. At worst, they suffer a form of existential pain that becomes unbearable. At best, they or their succeeding generations will be driven by their anguish and astonishment to hold up a mirror to us (McEwan, 2019, p. 181).

“For McEwan, it is empathy (where we imagine what it must have been like to be on those hijacked planes or in those burning buildings) that constitutes morality” (Bradley&Tate, 2010, p. 22), in that respect, then, certain questions can be asked: What is the purpose of humanity, or does it have any purpose at all? Which drives and desires cause them to get distracted from goodness or morals? Although big companies and governments of the developed countries seem like they have been trying to find solutions for the problems of human beings or at least pretend to be caring about dealing with those problems to make people feel they are taken care of, supported, and provided,

poverty, unemployment, housing, healthcare and care for the old, education, crime, race, gender, climate, opportunity – every old problem of social existence remained unsolved, according to all the

voices, placards, t-shirts and banners. Who could doubt them? It was a great clamour for something better (McEwan, 2019, p. 297).

Machines Like Me gives different issues an in-depth scan but never settles. Although there is so little consistency, we are encouraged to think about any obligations we may have to artificially intelligent beings. The suicides of the androids whose minds are powered by the fictional Turing's algorithms are undoubtedly allusions to the actual Alan Turing's suicide as well as the philosophical questions about suicides posed by the self-destructive actions of the AI humanoid robots.

The fact that artificial intelligence robots prefer to commit suicide through self-destruction presents an extremely disturbing and frightening situation in terms of questioning, analytical intelligence, and perceiving moral issues in terms of human relations. Realizing how corrupt and selfish some people are, and thinking of nothing but their own interests, Adams and Eves seriously discuss whether this world is liveable or not. In a world where every conscious individual tries to survive by going through mental or spiritual suffering, artificial intelligence robots prefer suicide, revealing the possibility that they can convince people of this when they enter all areas of our lives with advanced technology. The atmosphere created by Ian McEwan in this novel also shows how uninhabitable people have made this world.

Hedonistic Way of Treating AI Humanoids

Owning an AI robot, treating it like a human-toy with intelligence and emotions and then breaking it into pieces wildly, and murdering it without a flinch when a conflict appears all demonstrate how human being gets the right to do anything on Adams and Eves including raping, manipulating, using and abusing, even killing them whenever they want. This may pose questions of morality and legal sanctions of any sort because of such treatments of human beings over humanoid robots. Who gives the right to do anything to AIs? Is there any possibility for some of us to see in the future that AIs will be represented with laws and rules of living and working? The answers will become commonly encountered by many of us soon enough to see that people will even start showing off with what kind of AI humanoid friends they have and what those AIs are capable of doing, or which one is the most likely to act like a human being without any clue that it is actually not. McEwan is "equally interested in observing how our interpretation of the human mind is increasingly colonised by the models deriving from artificial intelligence and responding to the logic of a normative neo-humanism" (Colombino, 2022, p. 390), and what is for sure in his narrative with significant examples is that AIs will be treated like normal people with an identity, self, and consciousness, and it will not be bizarre after all to start applying a psychoanalytic approach for understanding their personalities, egos, and superegos to see what is in that artificial mind so that the construction of their moral and ethical structures could be enlightened a little bit.

You weren't simply smashing up your own toy, like a spoiled child. You didn't just negate an important argument for the rule of law. You tried to destroy a life. He was sentient. He had a self. How it's produced, wet neurons, microprocessors, DNA networks, it doesn't matter. Do you think we're alone with our special gift? Ask any dog owner. This was a good mind, Mr Friend, better than yours or mine, I suspect. Here was a conscious existence and you did your best to wipe it out. I rather think I despise you for that (McEwan, 2019, pp. 303-304).

But that will not be easy to get because as we can see in many parts of the novel human beings cannot even understand each other in the first place. How can they expect to understand AI Adams

and Eves or expect AIs to understand them? Knowing that “McEwan is an exquisite cartographer of human behaviour and his scientific vigor and literary skills aid him in his literary project to graph various territories of human nature” (Hejaz&Singh, 2022, p. 2) may help to answer the above question as well as point out the problem that human beings have with the way their minds work. Moreover, their cognitive abilities interrelated with what they create in AI humanoids seem like one of the major issues to solve first to be able to understand what the meaning of existence is and what it means to be happy.

I think the A-and-Es were ill equipped to understand human decision-making, the way our principles are warped in the force field of our emotions, our peculiar biases, our self-delusion and all the other well-charted defects of our cognition. Soon, these Adams and Eves were in despair. They couldn't understand us, because we couldn't understand ourselves. Their learning programs couldn't accommodate us. If we didn't know our own minds, how could we design theirs and expect them to be happy alongside us? But that's just my hypothesis (McEwan, 2019, p. 299).

Considering that the novel's main subject is related to a moral choice, Adam, with his role of moral superior, impresses on the moral inconsistency of humankind. Science fiction tradition provokes anxiety about being captured and directed by more intelligent others. As a matter of course, science fiction utopias generally tend to turn into moral dystopias as is seen in the novel, because as a representative postmodern text, it is fragmentary, full of ambiguities that lead to possible interpretations that end in unresolved questions. It manifests the influence of the postmodern condition on contemporary individuals, the significance of disbelief towards grand narratives and grand traditions, postmodern individuals' hyperreal world, the disappearance of totalizing systems, particularly of the moral system, mirrors the inclination of consumer culture, the tendency of constructing subjective styles and highlights pluralism in contemporary society. Reflecting these diversities, McEwan once describes the historical atmosphere in the novel which is generally adaptable to contemporary conditions as follows; “global temperature rises ... the temperature rises faster, everything is rising – hopes, and despair, misery, boredom and opportunity, there is more of everything. It is a time of plenty” (McEwan, 2019, p. 113).

The excessive amount of developments, freedom, dispute, and contradictions are intermingled in contemporary society. The novel starts with the impassioned description of the ancient dream of humankind, that is; the invention of artificial intelligence, of humanoid robots:

It was religious yearning granted hope, it was the holy grail of science. Our ambitions ran high and low – for a creation myth made real, for a monstrous act of self-love. As soon as it is feasible, we had no choice but to follow our desires and hang the consequences. In loftiest terms, we aimed to escape our mortality, confront or even replace the Godhead with a perfect self. More practically, we intended to devise an improved, more modern version of ourselves and exult in the joy of invention, the thrill of mastery (McEwan, 2019, p. 1).

Despite the hopeful dream of invention, the novel depicts the chaos of the process of orientation supporting Lyotard's description of the postmodern. The nature of the postmodern narrative being as catastrophic, discontinuous, and paradoxical is coupled with McEwan's focus on fear and fate which shows his focus in this novel on “the intrusion of brutal, inescapable reality into comfortable lives” (Rennison, 2005, p. 110). So, the combination of the uncertain and unknown, as depicted in his moralistic narrative, reveals different ideas and disputes on the process of adaptation of humankind and humanoid robots.

In this novel, it is seen that artificial intelligence robots are involved in every area and moment of human life. Adams and Eves, who appear in every field from sexual intercourse to the most private conversations, represent their existence as much more than a toy. However, when it comes to the attitudes of human beings towards them, we see that artificial intelligence robots are easily destroyed, dismembered, shut down, and treated as if they were objects. One of the important questions to be asked here is, will artificial intelligence robots, which will be included in all areas of human life in the future, have rights? Will they be represented legally, morally, and ethically? Will humans face certain consequences according to their actions against artificial intelligence robots? On the other hand, will artificial intelligence robots record all kinds of speech, communication, interaction, action, and sharing in their memory and allow these data to be used? All things considered, this fictional narrative of McEwan presents an extremely grim prospect for the future.

Conclusion

For Bauman, ethics, in the most general form, is a discipline that deals with human behavior. Philosophers “make ethical statements when they talk about the ways in which people behave towards each other and towards themselves” (Bauman, 1995, p. 10). The difference between modern and postmodern approaches to ethics is revealed in their attitude towards what this *speech* is like. Bauman says that if this speech is purely descriptive, modern philosophers would not agree with it.

Accordingly, “ethics, the moral code, [the discipline] that wishes to be the only moral code, is the one and only coherent set of principles that every moral person must obey...” (Bauman, 1993, p. 21). The reason why modern philosophers, whose most important aim is to find a satisfactory answer to the question of why I should be moral, identify ethics with a discipline that seeks a code, is that they believe that this question can only be answered with certain codes. For this reason, all efforts of modern philosophers have been to search for codes that they believe exist and that can be easily reached if the right method is used. Because, if the question of why I should be moral can be answered, how to be moral will also be answered. How to be moral can only be possible with certain codes that tell what to do. Thus, modern ethics is described as ethics that seeks a basis for moral actions through codes, that is, tries to show how to be moral.

This is where all the criticisms of the postmodern perspective toward modern ethics focus on. Because Bauman thinks that creating principles to guide human actions means directing these actions from outside. This is a view that sees morality as a phenomenon that needs to be designed and inserted into human life rather than being a natural feature of human life.

But how can people be made more moral by simply describing *what* and *how* they value? Bauman considers that the help of postmodernism in this regard is neither an aid to determine the various prescriptive rules that are supposed to guarantee the “good”, nor an aid to persuading people to do the *better*. Postmodernism helps by revealing the nature of morality and giving people an awareness of the choices, they make, making them more conscious of the moral content of their choices.

As seen in these examples, codes that draw the boundaries of what is moral and what is not, also serve as a criterion for actions. This means determining the direction of action, and giving direction to it in advance. Because the code, by specifying *good* and *bad*, also prohibits some courses of action and allows others. Therefore, the language of the codes is a *prohibitive* and *permissive* language. This language is a language that states what is unconditionally valid for every action and

what every action should absolutely avoid. Therefore, besides removing the agent and the addressee of the action from being the determinants of the action, it also abstracts the action from all conditions. Regardless of who the perpetrator is, to whom the action is directed, and what is needed, what is called good is expected to be done.

The moral subjectivity of contemporary individuals and their clash with totalizing systems are effectively displayed in *Machines Like Me*. Adam follows his “symmetrical notion of justice” (McEwan, 2019, p. 298) disregarding the threat to the adoption process and securing justice, and he gives money away to address the greater needs of other people. While he searches for golden rules of conduct and morality, Charlie and Miranda accept “individual impulses of here and now” (Kelemen & Peltonen, 2001, p. 154) which recognize the subjective morality (based on pragmatic values) of the contemporary individual.

With particular reference to postmodern ethics, what my present reading seeks to add to the debate of morals and ethics reconstructed and redefined with artificial intelligence is the idea that *Machines Like Me* is to delve into the discomfort of living under the constant monitoring of a superhero with artificial intelligence that determines new codes of morality and ethics. In addition to the ethical and moral issues discussed in the novel, the question of whether the actions of artificial intelligence robots that can choose to self-destruct by suicide will have a repercussion is another subject implied by the author. Although it seems that it is not taken seriously when an artificial intelligence robot seriously harms itself, the question of what kind of reaction will occur when it uses its destructive actions against a human comes to the fore.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar, çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar, bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

Conflict of Interest: The author have no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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