

1 What does the movie *Bicentennial Man* show is essentially human? The
2 answer is quite a complex one, but as I see it you can sum an answer up in the
3 phrase “human experience”. The World Congress the first time around denied
4 Andrew the status of human ultimately because of immortality. In our current
5 conception of our species a core component is that we’re mortal beings. You are not
6 living the human experience unless that experience comes to an end at some point,
7 though I’ll note that the soul portion of humans may indeed live on after the body
8 (so, did Andrew have a soul by the end?). The final “upgrade” Andrew had enabled
9 him to experience this bookending component of the human experience.

10 I see the learning curve Andrew’s first “owner” to have set him on as
11 representative of another key element of the human experience. By the end Andrew
12 knew how to be a functional member of the human society. This began with the
13 hundreds of books he was given to read, and though the children (multi
14 generationally) pushed him forward and taught him I don’t think he would have
15 gotten to where he had where it not for his initial learning. We see the same in
16 babies and Bloom even shows this. A consistent exploration of what it is to be
17 human is exactly what babies and toddlers experience (indeed that exploration
18 never stops), and so Andrew did as well.

19 In the first World Congress hearing it is clear that human society only
20 considers those whom have all organic parts as being essentially human. The
21 overriding view was that you had to originate as having these parts to be labeled a
22 human. In previous units we’ve discussed rationality, intellect, and the like. These
23 are traits that are normally related to our brains, and as the previous discussions

24 showed they're also necessary components of human nature. For that purpose, as
25 Andrew had a positronic brain, he was denied humanity even though he'd designed
26 upgrades for himself to give him almost every other physical human body part.

27 However, the learning Andrew underwent and the experiences that were
28 clear he had showed that defining humans by our physical body parts isn't enough.
29 As an extension of what the ancestors of those congress people did when
30 determining that African Americans were full humans they now posit that having
31 the human experience, be it with originally having organic body parts or something
32 made in Silicon Valley, doesn't require the set form (stemming in part from DNA) we
33 have historically considered a prerequisite for humanity.

34 I find myself generally agreeing with this component of what being
35 essentially human is, but if these robots really existed maybe I'd reconsider my
36 agreement. Now, in part this may be because I've seen this movie (and others that
37 reach to similar strains) multiple times, so it invariably influenced my initial
38 comments on this final overarching question and tonight I could watch it with this
39 question at the front of my mind, but if we are to further blur the lines of what
40 humanity is, which may be needed to sustainably exist, then accepting inorganic
41 beings as able to have the human experience is a natural step down this path.

42 My reasoning for thinking this comes from the reality that we may just be
43 boxing ourselves in as a species not able to conceive of meaningful human lives
44 outside ourselves. Philosophy is going to lead human society in this direction as
45 technology advances, so truly the conceptions of the World Congress don't seem far-
46 fetched when you look at what the human experience objectively requires.