

## **The Nocturnal Future as Alienated Existence: Blade Runner**

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**Abstract.** Dystopic works, cinematic and literary, often project onto an idealized past or imaginary future some spatio-temporal possibilities, which human intellectual and physical dynamics can explore and realize. Blade Runner (1982) by Ridley Scott inverts, in science-fiction style, the exalted aspirations of humankind for scientific and technological progress, and attacks the morality of futuristic capitalism. A careful analysis of the film will impart an amalgam of the past and the future, of film noir and classical science fiction and detective film genres in it. Moreover, the film incorporates Biblical, mythological, and philosophical leitmotifs to pass a serious comment on the modern state of the relations between technology and people, freedom and slavery, the meaning of life and death, the metropolis and people, and man and woman, drawing immensely on a variety of retrospective and prospective apocalyptic literature. The present study analyzes the thematic and structural parallelisms between the film and apocalyptic works that focus on similar points.

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**Key Words:** Apocalypse; Cinema; Blade Runner; Existentialism and Genesis.

### **1. Introduction**

Blade Runner (1982) has proved to be one of the highly acclaimed and influential science-fiction films of all time, and is a follow-up to another film, Alien (1979), by the same director Ridley Scott.<sup>1</sup> The film inverts, in science-fiction style, the exalted aspirations of humankind for scientific and technological progress, and attacks the morality of futuristic capitalism (Wellan 167). Blade Runner got its original inspiration from the novel, Do

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<sup>1</sup> In my analysis I have referred to two versions of Blade Runner, the VHS version of “the European Theatrical Release” (1982), and the DVD version of “the Director’s Cut” released in 1992. I have, however, based my analysis on the Director’s Cut. See Ridley Scott, dir. Blade Runner. Perf. Harrison Ford, Sean Young, Edward James Olmos, Daryl Hannah, Rutger Hauer, M. Emmet Walsh, and Joe Turkel. Warner Home Video, 1992.

Androids Dream of Electric Sheep, by Philip K. Dick.<sup>2</sup> However, as the producer, Michael Dealey, remarks, there are many points of “divergence” between the film and the novel.<sup>3</sup> The director, Ridley Scott, once ironically commented on the film as merely “an entertainment” (Sammon 8). A careful analysis will, nonetheless, impart an amalgam of the past and the future, of film noir and classical science fiction and detective film genres in it. Moreover, Blade Runner incorporates Biblical, mythological, and philosophical leitmotifs to pass a serious comment on the modern state of the relations between technology and people, freedom and slavery, the meaning of life and death, the metropolis and people, and man and woman, drawing immensely on an a variety of retrospective and prospective apocalyptic literature (Cook 491). The present study will analyze the thematic and structural parallelisms between the film and apocalyptic works that focus on similar points.

## 2. Running the Tape of Creation

A significant feature of Blade Runner is that it projects a nightmarish vision of the early twenty-first century, while, at the same time, recapitulating the Biblical creation story, written millennia ago, in science-fiction camouflage. Yahweh in the Jewish Bible is the author of the universe, who creates within six days a series of binary oppositions; the heaven and the earth; light and darkness; the day and the night, etc.<sup>4</sup> Then, Genesis goes on to tell the story of creation of Adam and Eve, their sin in eating the forbidden fruit from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” and their expulsion from Paradise. This symbolizes man's first disobedience, and his Fall. In defiance of God's single command, Adam and Eve fall from God's grace. The Fall is said to be the cause of all evil, including death and pain in the world as a result of the original sin. The story, therefore, implies, in Heideggerian terms, that man is a result of God's “tikto,” in the sense of “producing,” “bringing forth,” and “letting-appear” (159); that the beginning “already contains the latent end within itself” (92); that man is more venturesome than any other living

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about the relationship between the novel and the film, see the essays in Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, ed. Judith B. Kerman (Ohio: Bowling Green State U P, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Paul M. Sammon, Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner (New York: Harper Prism, 1996) 8.

<sup>4</sup> For the passages from the Bible, I have referred to H. G. May and B. M. Metzger, eds, The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apochrypha (New York: Oxford UP, 1972).

being, and his Fall stems from his self-assertion (135); that man's disobedience implies that he wants to "measure" himself against Yahweh (223); that man, as a result of his disobedience, becomes mortal, capable of death (178) since, above all, to be a human being means "to be on earth as a mortal," and to experience the "rift," i.e. "the rending" pain (204); that man's Fall is a movement from Paradise into the "Abyss" (92, 108).<sup>5</sup>

Earlier Yahweh, out of primordial chaos, creates an orderly universe in which man has been assigned a preeminent place. Creation by the word of God "Let there be...." expresses His absolute omnipotence and prepares for the doctrine of creation ex-nihilo. Yahweh overcomes the chaos, but with the creation of man emerges another problem; man himself. Man is created in God's image, after his likeness, and is the creature through whom He manifests his rule on earth. Man, thus, created out of clay, is a product of godly power. There, however, is something wrong with him, and Yahweh knows the shortcoming of his product: self-assertion. It is crucial here to observe that Adam is created out of clay, Eve (which means "living") out of Adam's rib and the clay is from the ground, and the forbidden tree from which they later eat comes out of the ground. Until now, we have no mention of either death or suffering; and Adam and Eve have everything to eat and drink at no expense. Planted in the garden are two significant trees, one of life, and the other of "the knowledge of good and evil"--tantalizing figures of temptation. Then, comes Yahweh's warning: "out of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat"; otherwise, they will die.

For a while, humans dwell happily in the garden. "Dwelling" postulates death and straying because it etymologically means, and is related to such derivations as "to die" and "to stray," which Heidegger does not mention in his work. Adam is a product and a raw material of Yahweh in the story because Adam is created out of the ground, Eve out of Adam, respectively. Eve means "living"; however, ironically, it is Eve who paves

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<sup>5</sup> All the references to Heidegger are from Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York and Toronto: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975). "Being" for Heidegger contrasts not only with knowledge, but with "beings" or "entities." According to Inwood, the verb "to be" has different uses or senses: "the existential, the predicative, and the 'is' of identity" (12). He says that Heidegger agreed with Aristotle that there were "different types of being, if not exactly different senses of 'being.'" He introduces for this a third term alongside "that"-being, the fact that something is or exists, and "what"-being, what that thing is: "how"-being, the mode, manner, or type of an entity's being. For more information, see Inwood 10-25.

the way for the death of humankind. In (Sirach 25:23), in fact, the following is noted: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die." Besides, the ground, out of which Adam was created, is nature. "Nature" etymologically means "birth," and birth postulates death. This is how in the beginning is the latent end. However, they anticipate death through their desire for knowledge.

With death completing the process of life, Yahweh's creation of binary oppositions is thus completed. The ground, the essential matter (meaning both "substance" and "mother") of creation, itself leads to "abgrund," the complete absence of the ground, the loss of innocence, the Fall (Heidegger 92). The movement away from the earth to the world in this context is a process of Man's "manning," and "becoming" (Heidegger 42, 53).<sup>6</sup> Because "earth" means "ground" and is etymologically related to "to be": its is in the world, the same in root as "man." In other words, Man becomes Man.<sup>7</sup> This marks a passage from Being to Becoming; Man is now on his own, has to fend for himself using his ability to think. Thinking implies the desire to know, and self-consciousness, and etymologically derives from "gno," which means "to know, to be able, to declare" etc. Yahweh in Genesis does not simply want man to know good and evil because knowing is a god-like ability, and the desire to know is to become god-like. As a matter of fact, after Man has eaten out of the forbidden tree, Yahweh says: "Behold, man has become one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 4: 22). He, therefore, considers man to be a rival for himself. In other words, in man's self-assertive sin in "knowing" lies his urge to measure himself against Yahweh, who, seeing the danger, takes the precaution that man does not also get "the tree of life" (Gen. 4:21). Being knowledgeable and immortal are threats to Yahweh's sphere of domination as divinity. Therefore, he takes precaution that humans not acquire the other sphere of divinity, "tree of life," which might, otherwise, undermine the divine order.

It is self-evident that the monomyth has a number of misogynistic as well as misanthropic implications. Above all, the myth has it that in the beginning there is a primordial chaos, out of which Yahweh creates an orderly universe, the Garden of Eden, in which he later places Adam, the

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<sup>6</sup> See the article "dheu" in The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots, ed. Calvert Watkins (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985) 14. Unless otherwise indicated, all the references to etymology are from this edition.

<sup>7</sup> According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, "Man" is related to the root "to think," as well as "manna."

representative of his patriarchy. In this sense, Eden is the primary and ultimate utopia in the myth (Gen. 2: 8-9). The woman comes later in the order of creation, and she is only a derivation of man. She is named by Adam, and has no individual self (Gen. 2: 23). That is, Eve is depicted as inferior to Adam, and later proves to be rebellious and falling prey to her instinctual desires symbolized by the serpent that urges her to eat the forbidden fruit. The man is godly, and the woman is serpentine and demonic: Yahweh and Adam are one party, the serpent and Eve the other. Eve is also presented as the negative party in the dyad created: she is contrasted with the man just as darkness is contrasted with light. Finally, she destroys the archetypal paradise, which is gifted to the man originally, and becomes a source and symbol of agony of all humankind.

Then, death and disorder are introduced into the universe; the harmony in divinely ordered Eden is soon transformed into disharmony by Eve, who transforms the utopia into dystopia. As Campbell puts it in The Power of Myth, “the corruption of life, the sinfulness of natural impulses” and the “identification of woman with sin, of the serpent with sin” in the Judeo-Christian tradition all go back to this monomyth (Flowers 47). The whole story amounts to the fact that emotions and sexuality in particular are despicable. This confrontation between God and humans presents a disruption of communication between them, and communication on agreed terms is interdicted because as Heidegger puts it, language tells us “to be a human being is to be on the earth as a mortal...and doing all this in the context of mortals who, living on earth and cherishing, look to the sky and to the gods to find the measure of their dwelling” (Heidegger XIII-XIV) The sin involved here is the emotional liaison between Adam and Eve that is called “knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Eve represents the language of emotions and disobedience, and Adam that of obedience. When Adam speaks one language at the expense of the other, he becomes liable to punishment. Self-assertion, which is initially related to emotional development in Eve, also engages Adam in the process at the instigation of the serpent. This marks out a new phase in the dyad's following life, which introduces “a world of difference between man's present life as technological being under the aegis of *Gestell*,” where “man”

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the Biblical story of creation, the relationship between God and humans, and man and woman in the Bible, see Tribble 251; Hartley 767-768; Plaut 36; Kasher 60; Foh 9; Schaeffer 47; Blocher 139; Spencer 32; Virkler 109; McQuilkin 98; Litfin 267; Hurley 142; Knight 22; and Mollenkott 114.

becomes material for a process of self-assertive production,” and “a life in which he would genuinely dwell as a human being” (Heidegger XV). They have now forgotten the essence of Being, which makes them part of the material world to which they have been consigned.

Structural and thematic similarities between Genesis and Blade Runner abound. Just as Yahweh in Genesis creates humans in primeval times, Eldon Tyrell in the film is the creator, who, through the genetic engineers’ good offices, serially creates humanoids in Tyrell Corporation that he owns. Tyrell is the “big boss,” the “big genius,” says Chew, who knows the “answers” and “everything.” As Roy alternately calls him, Tyrell is the “Creator,” “Father,” or “god.” He has the characteristics of both a tyrant and “El,” God as his name suggests. Early in the twenty-first century, the corporation appears to have developed Robot evolution into the nexus phase. The number, six, of Yahweh’s creation period here appears to be the serial production number of the Replicants, Nexus 6. God makes “man” in his image in Genesis, human makes machines in their image in the film. Generation Nexus Sixes, constructed of skin-flesh culture, are capable of self-perpetuating thought, para-physical abilities and developed for emigration program. Earlier in the century, Huxley had hinted at this possibility in Brave New World in terms of the principle of mass production “at last” applied to biology (7). Similarly, biology and technology have combined in the film to produce the humanoids. They are predestined and conditioned like modern-day slaves. Bryant’s description of the humanoids is as short and mechanical as his emotions are:

Roy Batty. Incept date 2016. Combat model. Optimum self-sufficiency. Probably the leader. This is Zhora. She is trained for an off-world kick-murder squad. Talk about beauty and the beast, she is both. The fourth skin job is Pris. A basic pleasure model. The standard item for military clubs in the outer colonies. They were designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions. The designers reckoned that after a few years they might develop their own emotional responses. You know, hate, love, fear, anger, envy. So they built in a fail-safe device.

Deckard: Which is what?

Bryant: Four-year life-span.

According to the opening crawl, these humanoids are actually serially produced androids, called Replicants, virtually identical to human beings. They have been created in "the image" of humans. Especially the Nexus 6 Replicants are superior, in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who have created them. Replicants are used in off-world colonies as slave labor, in the hazardous exploration and colonization of other planets. After a bloody mutiny by a NEXUS 6 combat team in an off-world colony, Replicants are declared illegal on earth - under penalty of death. Special police squads called "Blade Runner" have orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing Replicant. This is not called execution, but "retirement." Tyrell imposes this punishment on them through the blade runners.

After their first disobedience, according to the Bible, comes man's fall from Paradise. Though forgiven later by Yahweh, thereafter the humans are inflicted with death.<sup>9</sup> While the Biblical paradise is a prototype of religious utopia, man's downfall after the first sin causes his troubles on earth, leading to the notion of dystopia. Similarly, there is an escape in the film from the off-world colonies two weeks ago. Six replicants, three male, three female, slaughter twenty-three people, which is against Tyrellian laws. Bryant is a police captain who provides Deckard and us with information about the happening: "An aerial patrol spotted the ship off the coast. No crew, no sight of them. Three nights ago, they tried to break into Tyrell Corporation. One of them got fried running through an electrical field. We lost the others." So Tyrell corresponds to Yahweh; creation, to serial production; eating of the forbidden fruit, to the mutiny of the replicants upon realizing that they are meant to be slaves only and have no emotions; Fall

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<sup>9</sup> The film is full of Biblical imagery often treated with bitter irony. Consider, for example, a scene in the following:

"Cambodian Lady: I think it was manufactured. Look. Finest quality. Superior workmanship. There is a maker's serial number 9906947-XB71. Interesting. Not fish. Snake scale.

Deckard: Snake?

Cambodian Lady: Try Abdul ben Hassan. He makes this snake.

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen. Taffy Lewis presents Miss Salomé and the snake. Watch her take the pleasures from the serpent that once corrupted man.

Deckard: Little, uh, dirty holes they uh, drill in the wall so they can watch a lady undress.—Is this a real snake?

Zhora: Of course it's not real. Do you think I'd be working in a place like this if I could afford a real snake?"

and punishment, to denouncement of the replicants and death warrant. Particularly, the death motif and inflicted mortality are strikingly similar in Genesis and the film.

Scott's film is open to various philosophical interpretations. It also carries certain ideological undertones, which comments on "the dawn of Reaganism" when it was shot.<sup>10</sup> He shows through Tyrell's overarching presence both in his pyramidal dwelling and the police force at his disposal that it is not consciousness that "determines life, but life that determines consciousness."<sup>11</sup> According to Marx, the class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, prevailing as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of an epoch. The function of the dominant ideology is to prevent the emergence of a revolutionary consciousness, which in turn, through the mediation of other factors, ensures the continuation of the dominant ideology.

Tyrell is on top of the Olympian gods of capitalism. Minor gods of capitalism, genetic engineers like Chew and J. F. Sebastian, are mere tools like other humanoids alienated from their labor. It seems they have not even seen their products in living form as is extrapolated from Chew and Sebastian's remarks about the replicants. Tyrell's laws overwhelmingly operate everywhere in not only the production of humanoids with a built-in-obsolence so that people would have to buy new ones at the end of every four years, but also humans who seem to exist either to help him with his corporation or with its protection. Tyrell has power over all, the metropolis, the people and the police force, and his cult becomes an end itself. Objects separated from Tyrell's laws lose their value. As Sartre puts it, "objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them; they are useful, nothing more"(1). Hence, the objects, humans and humanoids altogether, only have value insofar as they represent and serve his rule.

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<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the movie is a "rebuttal" of "the cruel politics" during the Reagan era. See Sammon 110.

<sup>11</sup> See Karl Marx, The German Ideology in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works, vol. V. (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 36-7.

Even the jaded ex-cop, Deckard, is initially no more than an object in a totalitarian future, forced out of retirement to hunt down a group of genetic super humans engineered to serve Tyrell.<sup>12</sup> His ideas, mental process and his actions are governed by material processes, which are themselves defined, to use an Althusserian term, by “the material ideological apparatus” (Althusser 34). In other words, like other replicants and police officers that deify Tyrell, he is “thingified.”<sup>13</sup> That is why when initially Deckard is reluctant to resume his job, Gaff insists that he is either a cop or one of the “little people.” Bigness is thus associated with one’s compliance with Tyrell’s law and being at his service. Identity in the Tyrellic world is “a false consciousness” and no autonomous, independent and conscious subjects are allowed to exist.<sup>14</sup> Humans as well as humanoids have become so objectified that they are identified by what they are not, and do not want to be. Identity turns out to be no more than a conglomeration of images and memories implanted in “little” beings or irresistible tasks that they have to carry on for survival.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Traditional Marxist thought is based on a specific model of society in which the base (material means of production, distribution, and exchange) is the driving force of society, and the superstructure (cultural world-- ideas, art, religion, law) is shaped by the base or is a reflection of events that take place within the base. This view of society is economic determinism. Based on this description of art as influenced by the economic base of society, general traditional Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer's social class and the prevailing ideology (outlook, values) thereof have major bearing on what s/he writes. The nature of literature is seen as influenced by the social and political circumstances within which it is produced, and authors are constantly formed by their social contexts. Traditional Marxist criticism views history from a general standpoint - discussing conflicts between social classes and large historical movements. Very rarely does traditional Marxist criticism relate a specific historical situation to a certain text.

<sup>13</sup> “Thingify” comes from Michael Taussig, The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America (Chapel Hill: U of California P, 1980) 36.

<sup>14</sup> For the expression, see David Hawkes, Ideology (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 4.

<sup>15</sup> Understanding traditional Marxist theory would require a look at the economic theory upon which all Marxist thought is based. German philosopher Karl Marx and German sociologist Frederich Engels founded this theory which they labeled Communism. Marx and Engels believed in the state ownership of industry and transport rather than private ownership. In the Communist Manifesto of 1848, they discussed their aim - a classless society arrived at through the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. As a materialist philosophy that does not look at outside forces to explain life's occurrences, Marxism does not only seek to understand the world but to change it, using what is essentially the here and

Humanoids are like the prisoners in Plato's Republic, who have escaped into sunlight and returned to tell his fellows about their knowledge and experience, which they have acquired in the cave. They, however, are declared either illegal aliens or disobedient lunatics by the inhabitants of the world.<sup>16</sup> They are predestined to live alienated and objectified lives in a world of their dislike. Humanoids should not show emotions, which humans seem to have long forgotten about, which might threaten to upheaval the present order. They have to seek meaning, if any, in activity, not contemplation. The positions of both humans and humanoids within the capitalist patriarchy present them with a purpose in life: to work, provide, protect and serve patriarchy. That is why there is no laughter and no family in the film; they seem to have perished in a far distant past. Life outside the boundaries of this system, which actually has no telos, is destruction, and nothingness.

Loneliness follows up to an anguish-laden world, and people try to compensate for it by material or sexual satisfaction. The one case is true of Tyrell in particular; and the other, of the people in *The Snake's Pit*, a smoke-filled night-club where Pris is working with her artificial snake wrapped around her body. When the two replicants enter the pyramid-like residence of Eldon Tyrell by Sebastian's help, they see that he is all alone. Despite his apparently huge wealth, Tyrell is soliloquizing about new "investments" in bed. After a moment of surprise to see Roy alongside Sebastian, he says that he has actually been expecting to see Roy earlier. Roy's answer is that "it is not easy to come before the creator." Roy simply states his purpose that he wants to live longer, and asks Tyrell to find a solution for his aging process. Tyrell expresses that even he is helpless in the face of death:

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the now. Based on this philosophy, capitalism is viewed as the exploitation of one social class by another, and this treatment results in the alienation of the worker from the overall purpose or finished product. This alienation causes what Marxists call *reification*. Reification takes place when the concerns of capitalism --profit and loss--become primary and consequently the worker is seen only as part of the labor force. The worker becomes no more than a cog in the machine --and as a result loses some of his/her humanity -- people become things. See Taylor's introduction in Karl Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto, ed. A. J. P. Taylor (1967, London and New York: Penguin, 1985) 8, 9, 12, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 39, 119. For the Marxian ideas, I have largely drawn on this text and Taylor's introduction in Fredric Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton and New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1974) 163-9.

<sup>16</sup> See Plato, Republic, trans. G.M.A. Gube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1974) 515-6.

Tyrell: The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long. And you have burned so very brightly, Roy. Look at you. You are the prodigal son. You are quite a prize!

Roy: I have done questionable things.

Tyrell: Also extraordinary things. Revel in your time.

Roy: Nothing, the god of biomechanics would not let you in heaven for.

The "creator" thus confesses to the prodigal son" that he is unable to "repair" his creature. Upon the dissatisfaction of the answers he gets from the "gods of genetics," Roy kills both of his creators, Tyrell and Sebastian, as he looks down with an uncharacteristic note of guilt in his voice. It is only after the Tyrellic presence ends and the oedipal struggle is won that certain things begin to change in the life of the characters. For instance, Deckard begins to change and becomes more empathetic towards the replicants. After Tyrell is killed by Batty, he realizes the heroic struggle of the humanoids against an inhuman system, and ultimately falls in love with one of them, Rachael. Thus, the events that take place in the aftermath of Tyrell's death witness the re-humanization of at least two people.

### **3. Dehumanization as a Dystopic Theme**

Blade Runner is a film noir with a dystopic edge to it.<sup>17</sup> In fact, as Fancher puts it, the dystopic content in the film was inspired by Philip Dick's book, and "the movie complied with it" (Sammon 110). The events in the film take place in the future as it lives in the memory of the Blade Runner (Harrison Ford) in Los Angeles, November 2019.<sup>18</sup> The name of the city, it appears,

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<sup>17</sup> For "film noir," see Leighton Grist, "Moving Targets and Black Widows: Film Noir in Modern Hollywood" in Ian Cameron, ed. The Book of Film Noir (New York: Continuum, 1992) 267-85; Foster Hirsch, The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1981) and J.P. Tellotte, Voices in the Dark (Illinois: Illinois U P, 1989).

<sup>18</sup> Voice-over narration in the first official release of the film has been omitted in the Director's Cut. Moreover, the protagonist, Deckard, is jobless at the beginning of the film. The first time we see him, he is reading through newspaper ads for a job, soliloquizing that he is an old cop, and old "murderer" and nobody is publishing a "wanted" ad for a killer.

has been ironically chosen to be Los Angeles, “the city of Angels,” because it, figuratively speaking, appears to have turned into a city of demons. The setting reminds us of Eliot’s *Wasteland* in his The Waste Land. A cosmopolitan city, Los Angeles seems to have undergone a holocaust. The establishing shot consists in an aerial view of the city, in nocturnal blackness, of chimneys out of which flames gush forth like volcano lavas, accompanied by a titillating music composed by Vangelis. The camera, then, moves forward for an extreme close-up of an anxiety-laden eye in which are reflected the flames, and the diagonal full shot from below of the golden building of Tyrell Corporation to imply the seemingly gorgeous and powerful appearance of capitalism, which has enslaved not only the humans as well as the humanoids. The total darkness blanketing the city and the extreme close-up of the eye reflect the pessimistic dystopic perspective of the future. At times, we see that the streets are foggy as well. Thus, the dystopic outlook is clear from the very beginning of the film. The movie's spectacular futuristic vision of Los Angeles, a perpetually dark and rainy metropolis, contrasts the nightmare antithesis of “Sunny” Southern California. The movie's shadowy visual style, along with its classic private-detective-murder-mystery plot line place in the film noir tradition.

Dystopic works, cinematic and literary, often project onto an idealized past or imaginary future some spatio-temporal possibilities, which human intellectual and physical dynamics can explore and realize (Elliott 22). For instance, H. G. Wells, a vigorous advocate of socialism, evolutionism, and the advancement of science, prophesies in A Modern Utopia (1905): “No less than a planet will serve the purpose of a modern utopia” (21).<sup>19</sup> Early in the 1940s, Orwell attacked Wells for his utopianism because he concluded that the latter saw history as “a series of victories won by the scientific man over the romantic man” (142). Furthermore, Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932) demonstrates a dystopic perspective opposite to Wells'. Set in the year 632 AF (After Ford), the book unravels a grim picture of the world, which, Huxley suggests, scientific and social developments have begun to create. The book presents human embryos developed in bottles and conditioned to collectivism and passivity. To present a contrast between the serially produced humans and a natural

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Rousseau's utopian idealism in the following: “...your happiness is complete, and you have nothing to do but enjoy it; you require nothing more to be made perfectly happy than to know how to be satisfied with being so.” See also J. J. Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in Cole 182.

human being Huxley introduces an interesting case study.<sup>20</sup> A so-called "Savage" is found in New Mexico and imported as an experiment. He appears to be a self-made man, and, unlike denizens of his new environment, believes in spirituality and moral choice. In the new world where he feels out of his element and alienated, however, he goes berserk and kills himself.<sup>21</sup> This suicidal cognizance of the Savage is an attempt in many ways to protest life in the modern metropolis where humans are relegated to nothingness, and machines and capital are predominant, thus turning upside down the notion of who is, if any, going to be the slave and who, the master.

Jean-Charles Seigneuret writes that works objecting to utopian ideas as either unworkable or leading to a bad society have been prominent in the last half century; the theme of humanity lost "in a quest" for the ideal world is common to most twentieth century anti-utopias (1367).<sup>22</sup> It is particularly in this century that the utopian yearning for "idealized stability, the eternal sameness once associated with heaven, took on hellish connotations," as Naomi Jacobs observes (110). Unlike utopias, which, to use D. Rohatyn's phrase, "promise salvation from earthly cares," dystopias "signify, not the promise of damnation, but the absence of promise."<sup>23</sup> Shane writes that, following the waning of hopes about a dream future, writers like Huxley told Russian writer Zamiatin's "dystopic fable and made it more responsive to the impact of technological change and made the fable even more narrowly concerned with politics and power" (Scholes and Robkin 34).

Like Huxley's novel, Brave New World, the movie expresses a concern about the lurking dangers of scientific progress. Interestingly, with references to the ancient past and near future it questions the ontology of

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<sup>20</sup> For a comparative view of dystopia, see Eugene Zamiatin, We (New York: Dutton, 1924).

<sup>21</sup> For more information on this work and disillusionment dystopias often exhibit, see M. Keith Booker, Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide (Connecticut and London: Greenwood, 1994) 171 and 208; Krishan Kumar, Utopia and Dystopia in Modern Times (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 168-223;

Krishan Kumar and Stephen Bann, eds., Utopia and the Millennium (London: Reaktion Books, 1993) 81-88 and Krishan Kumar, Utopianism (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) 43-46.

<sup>22</sup> Isaiah Berlin, The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 176-205.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis Rohatyn, "Hell and Dystopia: A Comparison and Literary Case Study" in Cummings and Smith 99.

human existence. Whereas, technology means "the logos of making," technology is so developed and placed at the disposal of capitalism here as to produce humanoids, and has turned into the "logos of destruction." The film, too, projected as it is to the future, has serious concerns about the potential drawbacks of the scientific and technologic development, the mechanical treatment and exploitation of the people by the capitalistic machinery, which does not care an iota about feelings in the persons of the six androids. This film is not about science, but about disaster: the poetics of apocalyptic destruction and the age-old duality of corporeal and incorporeal existence in the life of humanity. Thus, the film, like most science-fiction films, does both jobs, which Susan Sontag expresses in "The Imagination of Disaster," reflecting worldwide anxieties, including how "naked" man is without his artifacts, and the theme of dehumanization of humans on the way to living more humanly.<sup>24</sup>

The eye that appears at the beginning of the film reflects this apocalyptic setting most intensely. Huge clouds of dust shield all light off the barely populated city with a crumbling infrastructure. Constant rain and a hardly survivable ambience seem to contribute a lot to the obscurity of the city to establish a camera obscura of future world, which shoots glimpses of a near future through the eye. The eye presents several layers of meaning. Magnified and deeply revealed, it receives and relays the disaster in the subject position. The viewer sees the eye roving about the city in its objectified form; just as the viewer looks at the eye, the eye looks at the viewer to warn him about the impending disaster. The eye stands for a camera shooting the near future.

Blade Runner centers around such themes as life and death; freedom and feeling versus capitalistic slavery; the rebel by the created against the creator. Capitalism and genetic engineering have arrived at such a zenith of technology that humans created by Yahweh create humanoids in turn. Understandably, the genetic engineers do not want the androids to have feelings--of love, hatred, fear of death etc. -- so that these human-like slaves will serve them faithfully without any objections. As Deckard says to Rachael, the androids are expected to work like machines, and they are treated like machines:

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<sup>24</sup> For the entire article, see Susan Sontag, "the Imagination of Disaster," in Mast and Cohen 451-65. See also Agustin Sanchez Vidal, Historia de Cine (Madrid: Historia 16, 1997) 153-66, and Dudley Andrew, Concepts in Film Theory (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1983) 46-7.

Deckard: Replicants are like any other machine. They are either a benefit or a hazard.

If they are a benefit, it is not my problem.

Tyrell: Is this to be an empathy test? Capillary dilation of the so-called blush response? Fluctuation of the pupil? Involuntary dilation of the iris?

Deckard: We call it Voight-Kampff.

There is a striking moment in the film when Rachael, to whom Deckard has applied the Voight-Kampff Test (VKT) to check whether she has developed feelings, asks the latter whether "they have ever applied the VKT" to him. Rachael, initially a mechanically alive Madonna figure, has already evolved into a charming lady with hair intentionally unkempt, points to how insensitively Deckard can kill people without any feeling of pity. However, the cop is not listening as he has long since fallen asleep! Extrapolating from the attitudes of both the hunter and hunt, the viewer already has the answer: Deckard is less empathetic, and almost shorn of feelings. Deckard only gradually gives vent to his emotions, as he becomes emotionally attached to the woman he is supposed to kill. From the beginning, he plays the macho automaton. Actually, he does not like his job, nor does he have the qualities of a film hero. The replicants he manages to kill are women without any guns, and a third female replicant, Rachael, saves him from being strangled to death by Leon. He is sandwiched between his emotional and moral stance, and job-related fears. Judging from her impulses, keeping mementos of Rachael's past, Deckard learns about himself, too. Gradually, he unearths his long-buried emotions and evolves from the callous, officious cop to an understanding and empathizing human. Each time he encounters the replicants, he learns from them fear, solidarity and love, and challenge vis-à-vis death.

The replicants, thrilled by the misery of life that comes with the realization of their mortality, want to break the dike of slavery as well as mortality to become masters of their own faith. Second class aliens in a world where machines and capital speak louder than humane values, they desperately struggle to escape their Tyrellic destiny. Just as human emotions are relegated to minimum, they are also barred from any emotional involvement. Ironically, the replicants, contrary to the expectations of their creator, display more friendship, understanding and interpersonal solidarity than humans, including Deckard, fail to have or to show. Viewed from this angle, humans seem to have based their lives on the Socratic debasement of

emotions in The Republic where ideas of superiority of reason over emotions prevail.<sup>25</sup>

The engineers do not fail to foresee that the humanoids will soon develop feelings, for which they have the capacity and the required potential. The humanoids with a four-year lifetime do, indeed, develop feelings, start realizing that they will die some day; and after a bloody rebellion off world, they come back to earth. In other words, the "angels" (humanoids), as Roy calls them, ascend to the presence of the creator because, says Roy, "I like those who prefer to stay in the world." They want to increase their lifetime by talking to their engineers and their creator, Eldon Tyrell in particular. Whereas Adam in the Bible is the father of humans, Eldon Tyrell, who is said to be the father of humanoids and to know everything, is representative of Western capitalism. Pitted against Western capitalism is the Japanese capitalism in Los Angeles, represented by a giant Japanese woman on a huge media screen, that appears almost omnipresent, advertising food, travel tours off-world, and even the American elixir, Coca Cola!

In the film neither capitalism nor the advance in science and technology seems to have helped humankind develop ethics and happiness. They have neither a telos nor ethos:

Tyrell: Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell. More human than human is our motto. Rachael is an experiment, nothing more. We began to recognize in them strange obsession. After all they are emotional inexperienced with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them the past, we create a cushion or pillow for their emotions and consequently we can control them better.

Deckard: Memories. You are talking about memories.

Granted, the city is replete with skyscrapers, and capitalism can produce artificial humans, birds, snakes etc., people can detect feelings by means of machines. Nevertheless, it is an artificial development. While

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<sup>25</sup> See Plato, Republic, trans. G.M.A. Gube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1974) 515-6.

capitalism is able to produce humanoids, it seems to have lost humanity. A single person, even Tyrell himself is living in an entire skyscraper virtually alone, like a God in the Pantheon. People are shopping at open bazaars as in mediaeval times. It seems the world had gone through destruction. The spinner in the air constantly advertises how beautiful life is off the world! The ad blimp runs: "A new life awaits you in the Off-World colonies. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure. New...—a new life awaits you in the off-World colonies. The chance to begin again in a golden land of opportunity and adventure. New climate, recreational facilities...absolutely free" This shows the boredom and frustration of people with life on the planet earth. The date "November, 2019" is also symbolic of the cold future of humankind. It is so cold in the city that people have to put on thick overcoats even indoors.

A genetic engineer of Nexus 6, Sebastian is inflicted, just as the Replicants he has engineered, with aging syndrome, Methuselah Syndrome, at the age of twenty-five; he is alone, living in a huge skyscraper by himself. Here is a speech between Sebastian and Pris at the Address Bradbury apartments, ninth sector, NM46751:

Pris: Do you live in this building all by yourself?

Sebastian: Yeah, I live here pretty much alone right now. No housing shortage around here. Plenty of room for everybody. Sebastian says to the female replicant, Pris, that he is happy living alone in the Bradbury Apartments.

Pris: What is your problem?

Sebastian: Methuselah's syndrome."

Pris: What is that?

Sebastian: My glands. They grow old too fast.

Pris: Is that why you are still on earth?

Sebastian: Yeah, I could not pass the medical. Anyway, I kind of like it here.

As Sebastian talks, the camera move on to shoot Sebastian's small android friend in general's uniform, who has a Pinocchio-like long nose. Thus, the emerging third meaning is that Sebastian is not honest to himself or to the others: he is simply lying. Even Sebastian, though he is helpful to Pris, is himself a part of the capitalistic machine, and is reluctant to consider the replicants Roy and Pris as machines. In a scene, for instance, Sebastian

asks the replicants to do a show for him. Roy's answer about their existence is very telling. In addition, quoting Descartes' dictum "cogito ergo sum," Pris responds: "I think therefore I am." This is also a moment of empathy because Sebastian has a lot in common with them:

Sebastian: Ah, I knew it. 'Because I do genetic design work for the Tyrell Corporation. There is some of me in you. Show me something.

Roy: Like what?

Sebastian: Like anything.

Roy: We are not computers Sebastian, we are physical.

Pris: I think, Sebastian, therefore I am.

Roy: Very good Pris, now show him why.

[Pris throws hot egg at Sebastian]

Roy: We have a lot in common.

Sebastian: What do you mean?

Roy: Similar problems.

Pris: Accelerated decrepitude.

Sebastian: I do not know much about biomechanics, Roy, I wish I did.

The protagonist, Deckard, is jobless at the beginning of the film. Though he is initially reluctant, he, nonetheless, accepts the job offer by his old captain, Bryant, to kill the replicants trying to enter the Tyrell Corporation for some "unknown" purpose. "You could learn from this guy, Gaf," says Bryant, "He is a god damn one-man slaughterhouse. That is what he is."

They pass into a canopied, air-filtered corridor. Deckard does not answer the question because he is looking at the animals. Small northern animals in neat "environmental" cages. He looks at the rabbit, the raccoon and the squirrel, but the owl asleep on its perch stops him. The armed guard at the exit never takes his eyes off them.

Neither the Captain nor the mysterious-looking Gaff nor Holden we at the very beginning of the film inspecting a replicant are inspiring individuals. Perhaps it would be wrong even to call them individuals because though they lead individual lives, they are not different from each other. The captain, especially do not give a "damn" about killing people: they are only replicants that ought to be "retired." The first time the Captain

appears at the Police Headquarters, a mobile crane camera has an establishing shot of the Headquarters first; then slowly moving down on him, it shoots the Captain from profile to connote his base nature. When Deckard declines the job offer, the Captain's answer is explicative of his philosophy of justice:

Deckard: I do not work here anymore. Give it to Holden, he is good.

Bryant: I did. He can breathe okay as long as nobody unplugs him. He is not good enough, not good as you. I need you, Deck. This is a bad one, the worst yet. I need the old Blade Runner, I need your magic.

Deckard: I was quit when I come in here, Bryant, I am twice as quit now.

Bryant: Stop right where you are. You know the score, pal. If you are not cop, you are little people.

Deckard: No choice, huh?

Bryant: No choice pal.

Deckard chooses to follow the lesser of the two evils, resuming his old job, killing to protect capitalism in return for his own life. It appears principles of social Darwinism are immensely at work in the metropolis. An ordinary person is, thus, someone who is unprotected, cowardly, and who can be killed without incurring any legal obligations. Actually, when Deckard declines the offer, Gaff the Japanese-looking cop makes an origami of a chicken from paper, and puts it on the desk, to imply that the former is a coward. This is the first of the origamis Gaff makes; Deckard and Gaff inspect the apartment. Deckard finds a scale in the bathtub and some family photos. Gaff watches quietly, folding an origami statue of an erect man. Rather than communicating with him, Gaff exhibits his thoughts about events and people through them. The second origami implies his appreciation of Deckard's attention for hairsplitting details.

Deckard, despite his initial hesitation, does not refrain from killing all the replicants, except Rachael, with whom he has fallen in love, and Roy, who prefers dying himself to killing Deckard. At the beginning, Deckard is hostile to Rachael. It is after the woman has saved his life, by killing a fellow

replicant, that there occurs a love affair between them. The report would be routine retirement of a replicant, which did not make me feel any better about shooting a woman in the back. There it was again. Feeling, in myself. For her, for Rachael. Deckard: I get them bad. It is part of the business. Rachael puts is succinctly: "I'm not in the business.—I am the business."

In the last sequence there are several emotion-laden scenes. Roy's girl friend Pris has been killed--a moment recorded in repeated shots of the suffering girl on the floor-- and it is Roy's turn to die, whom the protagonist has already wounded. There occurs a hunt-hunter chase between them, first in the mazes of the Bradbury skyscraper, and then on top of another skyscraper, with TDK and Pan Am logos viewed in the background. At the very moment the haggard-looking Deckard is about to fall off the brink of the building, Roy saves his life by pulling him upon the building. Then, Roy poetically talks to the cop about life and the fear of death, freedom and slavery: "I have seen things you people would not believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the darkness at Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die." Meanwhile, it is raining down Roy's face. Then, Roy drops his head as he is sitting on his knees in a lotus-like position. A white pigeon is seen flying off Roy's hand toward the sky, and is contrasted with the chimneys stretching to the sky from a diagonal shot from below. The motion is slowed down to intensify the emotional impact of the moment. As Roy passes away, his figure is prophetic and noble, even nobler than the cop's is. He shows, by not taking revenge on Deckard through killing him, that he, a humanoid, is more human than a human. Deckard, in turn, watches him totally shocked and embarrassed. Gaff says in a rewarding manner that Deckard has done a "good job." As he goes away, he leaves behind the third origami he has made: a unicorn.

In the last sequence of the original release of the film, we see that Deckard and Rachael are driving happily through open natural scenes. Rachael is said to be a special replicant, and can live longer than she is programmed to. The sky is clear through high-key tonality. Then, the natural scenery is superimposed on them. The film, as it ends like this, however, does not represent a progress from dystopia to utopia.<sup>26</sup> It does, nonetheless, show that only by considering human feelings and sensibility would science

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<sup>26</sup> For conversion of this kind, see Frank E. Manuel, "Toward and Psychological History of Utopias" in *Utopia and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton, 1966) 69-70.

and technology make humankind happy. Otherwise, it would bring about destruction, not only to their creations, but also to their creators, just as in a memory Rachael relates to Deckard. Rachael remembers having seen a spider when a child: the spider lays about one hundred eggs; later, the offsprings hatch and eat up their mother, just as the replicants eat up their father, Tyrell.

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