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“What I’ve Seen with Your Eyes”: Relational Theology and Ways of Seeing in *Blade Runner*

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Abstract: This paper examines the theme of relational theology in the *Blade Runner* science fiction franchise by exploring the symbolism of eyes and sight in the films. Using the work of ecofeminist theologian Sallie McFague, we explore the contrast between the arrogant, detached eye of surveillance (what we call the “gods’ eye view”) which interprets the other-than-human world as instrumental object, and the possibility of the loving eye of awareness and attention (the “God’s eye view”) which views the other-than-human world as an equal subject with intrinsic value. How the films wrestle with what is “real” and how the other-than-human is regarded has implications for our present time as we face enormous upheavals due to climate disruption and migration and the accompanying justice issues therein. We make the case that the films are extended metaphors that provide a window on our own dystopian present which present us with choices as to how we will see the world and respond to the ecological and humanitarian crises already upon us.

Keywords: religion; science fiction; *Blade Runner*; Sallie McFague; relational theology; climate change

“As I drove, I wondered if future humans—or humanlike machines—would interpret the ruins of these shopping malls and car dealerships as 21st-century petroglyphs. What stories, if any, would they tell about the people who had once lived here?” (Goodell 2018)

1. Introduction

Released in 1982 and directed by Ridley Scott, the dystopian science fiction film *Blade Runner*, loosely based on Philip K. Dick’s 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, was set in 2019 Los Angeles and told the story of a policeman named Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) from the “Blade Runner” unit. He is dispatched to “retire” (a euphemism for “kill”) five Replicants (bioengineered androids virtually identical to humans) who have escaped from an Off-World colony and returned to Earth. They are the most sophisticated Replicants of a generation known as NEXUS-6. “More human than human” is the motto of the Tyrell Corporation that created them. The problem is that the NEXUS-6 Replicants developed self-awareness and revolted against their human owners. Their ill-fated return to Earth is driven by a desire to find a way to prolong their pre-programmed four-year lifespan. At the movie’s end, the rogue Replicants are dead and Deckard escapes with his paramour, Rachael, Tyrell’s “niece” who is herself a Replicant.

The 2017 sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, picks up 30 years later. In the aftermath of environmental collapse, industrialist Niander Wallace has taken over the bankrupt Tyrell Corporation and designed a new line of Replicants who obey their human masters. This film focuses on one such Replicant who is also a Blade Runner—Officer K. His job is to hunt down and “retire” the surviving older-generation Replicants—including Deckard, who Officer K learns is still alive after finding the buried remains of Rachael.

Like many dystopian science-fiction films, *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* portray a post-apocalyptic world that both fascinates and horrifies. The films contain a subtle theological

theme that may not be at first apparent, but, when brought into focus, raises deep questions about how we see the world and the ways in which our “gods’ eye view” has brought us to the brink of climate and environmental catastrophe.¹ In this essay, we will bring this theological thread to the fore by examining what we have identified as the God’s/gods’ eye view in the *Blade Runner* movies. In conversation with ecofeminist theologian Sallie McFague and her book *Super, Natural Christians*, we will explore the contrast between the arrogant, detached eye of surveillance (what we will call the gods’ eye view) which interprets the other-than-human world as instrumental object, and the possibility of the loving eye of awareness and attention (the God’s eye view) which views the other-than-human world as an equal subject with intrinsic value. We will suggest that the movies confront us with this choice of how we will see the world and ask, along with McFague, “Is everything nonhuman merely an object?” (McFague 1997). In their bleak rendering of a future Earth after the collapse of the biosphere, the *Blade Runner* films offer the possibility of seeing the beauty and intrinsic value of our planet now, while there is still time to pull back from the conditions that will create such an environmental apocalypse.

2. The Gods’ Eye View: The Consequences of Seeing with Arrogant Eyes

McFague (1997) writes, “We do not smell, taste, touch or even hear our way to knowledge of the world. We see our way” (p. 67). This preoccupation with vision as the primary mode of knowledge carries ethical weight. She asks us to consider *how* we see and not just *what* we see: “We are bound to see, so how should we see?” (p. 94). Our choices will determine how we treat every human and other-than-human on the planet. The arrogant eye, for far too long the form of sight humans have adopted, has “seen” the other-than-human world like a god surveilling a planet of servants and objects. Reducing everything that is “not me” or “not human” to a set of “resources” to be extracted or exploited results in violence against the planet and all its residents. It is this violence and exploitation that the *Blade Runner* series depicts with riveting clarity through the symbolism of the arrogant eye. Eyes and seeing function critically to illustrate the privilege of the arrogant eye and the catastrophic results from this form of “seeing.”

Both *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* open with close-ups of an eye. The eye appears to be human, but because we are never shown the entire face, we are left to wonder whose eye this is. Replicant? Human? Or does the eye imply a divine presence, as in the transcendent eye found within Egyptian, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian iconography? In any case, each film shows us what this eye sees: a complete breakdown of the ecosystems that had once flourished on this planet. In the 1982 movie, the camera sweeps over a dark and forbidding skyline punched by plumes of fire erupting into the sky from methane flare stacks. In *2049*, the camera shows us vast circular fields of metallic solar panels trying to absorb whatever pitiful light filters through the grey clouds. Las Vegas is a red-tinted ghost town recovering from toxic levels of radiation, and San Diego is nothing more than a massive dumping ground for the metallic refuse of Los Angeles, itself a desolate panorama of concrete and eerie lights.

Presiding over this dystopia are the god-like men who have discovered how to manufacture and manipulate the human genome in order to create artificial life. Those men are Eldon Tyrell in *Blade Runner* and Niander Wallace in *2049*. Both men’s pyramidal offices evoke the image of the Providential Eye—the all-seeing divine eye topping the pyramid on the back of every U.S. \$1 bill. Like his artificial owl on its perch, Tyrell’s eyes appear enlarged by his thick glasses: he sees everything with an omniscient and paternalistic eye. He is the genius creator of the NEXUS-6 generation of Replicants that possess superhuman strength and intelligence yet lack the capacity to feel human emotion. As they do gain self-awareness and cognizance of their state of servitude, Tyrell refuses to see the existential suffering they endure. His failsafe is designing them with a four-year lifespan. From

¹ For other discussions of theology in the *Blade Runner* franchise, see: (Bunce and McCrossin 2019; Pacheco 2018; Lindsay 2017; Mayward 2017).

a gods' eye view, this is an effective means of controlling any Replicants who get out of hand, but it ignores the cruelty of such efficiency. Though shocking, it is no surprise when Roy Batty, the "prodigal son" Replicant, crushes his creator's skull—the brain that created him—with his bare hands after being told it is impossible to extend his life. Fittingly, his thumbs press into Tyrell's eyes until they bleed and his lifeless body falls to the floor.

In contrast to Tyrell, Niander Wallace's eyes are opaque and he is physically blind. He sees nothing, perceives neither beauty nor pain. His "eyes" are a swarm of tiny, black drone-cameras wirelessly communicating what they "see" directly to his brain. Having taken over Tyrell's bankrupt empire in the midst of planetary chaos, Wallace sees his creations (which he calls his "angels," in keeping with his gods' eye view) only as a means to an end. He is driven to design Replicants that can reproduce—or find the miracle child born of Replicants in order to create an army of slaves to carry out his lust for conquest ("We shall Storm Eden and retake her," he declares). His "eyes in the sky" scour the landscape in search of this child and the ones who are hiding her identity. This is the perspective of the sky-god King, the transcendent being who manipulates his creations like puppets for his own ends.

McFague warns us about the effects of this kind of distanced view from "nowhere." This is the gods' eye view of the world and its inhabitants as brought to us by satellites and nature calendars. It is a perspective that ignores the messy, embodied pain and suffering of Earth-others in favor of a sanitized, controlling gaze. The Earth and its inhabitants are homogenized into a big blue marble in space.²

Like the all-powerful God who sees and knows all, who surveys the entire earth from the privileged perspective of heaven, penetrating even into the inner-most secrets of each and every creature, so we, made in the divine image, see and know from our lesser but similar stance But a disquieting note enters, for such a God (and such a human being) is on a continuum with George Orwell's fantasy of the end of Western culture: Big Brother, who personifies total and totally controlling surveillance. (McFague 1997, p. 69)

The arrogant eye views itself as the only subject and the world (and everything else in it) as objects, with every object being of lesser value than the subject. So it is with many dualisms—the first term is privileged over the second: master/slave, male/female, white/black, reason/nature. In the separation of reason (the eye of the mind, the arrogant eye) from nature (the body's eye, the loving eye) a breach occurs that is so "intense that intimacy, mutuality and interdependence are impossible." The result of this separation is that the subject denies its dependency on the other. "In point of fact, however, those in the 'background' are essential to the foreground subjects who could not exist without the unacknowledged others" (McFague 1997, p. 89).

This is precisely the case in *Blade Runner's* fictional worlds of 2019 and 2049. Humans would not be able to survive without the genetically-designed Replicants that do the jobs humans themselves either cannot or will not do. Replicants are the ones sent to the danger zones in the Off-World colonies. They are placed in the thankless, riskiest, dangerous, and most morally compromised roles. They are the prostitutes ("pleasure models"), the military grunts (Sapper Morton), the bounty hunters (Blade Runners). Some are like Wallace's assistant Luv who is fully accepting of her subservient position. She is devoted to her owner and willing to do every humiliating and evil task he assigns without question—from supervising the "birth" and consequent murder of a female Replicant, to tracking down and attempting to kill Officer K and Deckard. Other Replicants are like Roy Batty and his entourage, and 2049's Sapper Morton and Freysa and her growing army of resisters. They develop self-awareness and the capacity for moral reflection. They recognize their enslavement, rebel against humans who attempt to own and traffic them, and fight any (including fellow Replicants) who seek to keep them in servitude or, worse, "retire" them.

² We make the decision to capitalize the word "Earth" so as to denote the level of respect we are affording the planet as a *subject* rather than object (as opposed to lowercase *earth*, which is a synonym of *soil*).

Astute viewers will see parallels between the predicament of Replicants and the plight of commodified and objectified humans in our own reality. We have previously argued that the criminalization and dehumanization of the Replicant slave class found in the *Blade Runner* movies plays out in the real-life experiences of African slaves, Chinese laborers, and now Latinx immigrants in 21st Century America. As in *Blade Runner*, the U.S. has a history of forced labor that builds its nation and enables the wealthy class to thrive while causing enormous suffering to those it enslaves and oppresses (Schade and Askew 2019).

However, unlike the ethnic and racial markers used to denote the non-white “other” in our world, Replicants are not so easily identified. In fact, the only way to determine if someone is a Replicant is through examining nearly undetectable differences in their eyes. In *Blade Runner*, the Voight-Kampff test, a series of questions meant to evoke an emotional response measured by dilation of the pupil, examines for these distinctions.³ In *2049*, a special scanning device is used to detect the Replicant’s serial number directly imprinted on the eye. In the opening scene, Officer K scans the eye of Sapper Morton after a violent confrontation that results in Morton’s “retirement.” His eye is ultimately plucked out as proof of K’s kill. Though small, the distinction in the eyes is seen as absolute and the precondition for murder.⁴ Thus, the eye is a source of betrayal, so much so that Freysa, the Replicant leader in *2049*, removes her own eye in order to preserve her humanity and her life. McFague writes that in seeing the world dualistically as subject and object, “the other is polarized through hyperseparation; while only a small difference may separate the two parties (skin color or gender, for instance) radical exclusion is necessary in order to treat the other as object. Differences are not seen as matters of degree, but as absolutes” (McFague 1997, pp. 88–89). The slash separating terms—such as black/white, male/female, human/animal, heterosexual/homosexual, etc.—is interpreted to be an infinite qualitative divide rather than a messy, slippery, mostly oppressive attempt to control difference.

This absolute separation of human and Replicant, determined through subtle differences of the eye, translates theologically into the question of souls. And just here, we remember that the eye, itself, has been considered the window into the soul. “To be born is to have a soul, I guess,” muses Officer K when he is ordered to find and “retire” the miracle child of Rachael. Lt. Joshi responds, “You’ve been getting on fine without one (a soul),” which is likely meant as a compliment, but only serves to underscore the fact that she does not regard him as an actual person. Later, when an unseen eye scans Officer K for signs of emotional response in a routine evaluation, he is declared “way off his baseline” because he can no longer perform his brutal duties without remorse. However, the implication is there: he has a conscience and, we would say, a soul.⁵

Not only Replicants but some humans, too, are viewed dualistically and as not-fully-human (and, thus, dispensable), especially by those who have the privilege to dictate the dualities. The arrogant eye of the movies, like the arrogant eye of Western culture, privileges white, heterosexual, wealthy elites (and, it is worth noting, nearly all the leads of both films portray characters that are white heterosexuals, thus perpetuating the practice of “whitewashing” in science fiction, even as they implicitly critique racial and sexual inequities (Schade 2018). In the films, those with financial means are able to go Off-World into space colonies where they are served by Replicants. The poor, ethnic populations, and those with health or physical defects (such as J.F. Sebastian suffering from “Methuselah Syndrome”) are forced to remain on Earth, crowding into filthy, hostile, urban dwellings awash in intrusive neon-lit advertising and holograms. Abandoned children are conscripted into slave labor in an electronics recycling center posing as an orphanage. All those on Earth are trapped either in garish techno-saturated cities or suffering in the refuse, pollution, and poison of humanity’s waste.

³ The fact that the test was almost insufficient in determining Rachael’s true identity problematized the assumption that Replicants are incapable of emotion.

⁴ We may regard the euphemistic term “retirement” used to describe killing a Replicant as further evidence of the gods’ eye view, wherein the individual is seen as merely a nonhuman machine instead of a person.

⁵ For the purposes of this paper, we are equating having a conscience as a marker of having a soul.

Similarly, humans today (often people of color) who are not wealthy or mobile enough to leave areas devastated by pollution and the effects of climate change are forced to remain in places that rival the post-apocalyptic Earth scenes of the movies.⁶ As climate scientists warn us, these scenes of desperation will become more frequent as the climate crisis continues. Citing Solomon Hsaing, a professor of Public Policy at the University of California, Berkeley, Jeff Goodell writes:

“If we continue on the current path,” Hsaing says, “our analysis suggests that climate change may result in the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich in the country’s history.” Of course, some people are more mobile than others. As our world heats up, the line between those who can move to milder climates and those who are left behind will become increasingly stark. Not everyone has the cash to start over, or the fortitude to begin life again in a better place. Climate change is going to mean gentrification. And it’s going to mean inequity. (Goodell 2018)

And what of the Earth itself? What does the arrogant eye see from its distanced “nowhere” position? In *Blade Runner* (1982), the year 2019 is imagined as a time where animals are extinct (save for rats and roaches), greenery is but a memory, and the sun is shrouded by hazy clouds that douse the futuristic cityscape of Los Angeles in a perpetually dismal rain. *2049* shows us an even bleaker world where the only tree left is a dead trunk supported by hooks and cables, food is reduced to dehydrated grub protein, and a nuclear winter coats Los Angeles in a perpetually frigid snow. The opening prologue of *2049* indicates the environmental disaster upon which the movie is premised—one that leads to the collapse of ecosystems and the threat of massive hunger.

This kind of death-scape is the result of seeing the world, not with intrinsic value, but with instrumental value. As McFague explains:

[T]he natural world has been the object of the arrogant eye: we have broken and trained other lifeforms—domestic, farm and zoo animals—to do our will and have perceived the forests, air and water, plants and oceans as existing solely for our benefit. The natural world with its lifeforms has not been seen as having its health and integrity in itself, for itself, but rather in and for us. (McFague 1997, p. 33)

Because of humanity’s failure to see the intrinsic value of the world, we have fouled our own nest to such an extent that coral reefs are dying, microplastics are found throughout the food chain, and the forests that supply our oxygen are razed to the ground. This creates the conditions whereby those temporarily insulated by their wealth are able to wall themselves off from those they deem undesirable. Climate scientists warn us that under such conditions, where vast gaps exist between rich and poor, where there is massive hunger, lack of water, or the aftermath of devastating monster storms, violence is inevitable.

The destabilizing effects of climate change should be of great concern to all those who seek security and stability Climate and security experts often cite the impacts of the extreme drought in Syria that preceded the 2011 civil war. The security community also highlights the connection between climate change and terrorism—for instance, the decline of agricultural and pastoral livelihoods has been linked to the effectiveness of financial recruiting strategies by al-Qaida. (Arcanjo 2018)

Such violence born of desperation and competition for limited resources as a result of environmental catastrophe is portrayed in many post-apocalyptic dramas. Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, the *Mad Max*

⁶ In the United States, the remnants of super-charged hurricanes in New York (Sandy), New Orleans (Katrina), and Puerto Rico (Maria), increasingly frequent and intense wildfires in the West, and extreme flooding of the wheat fields of the Midwest demonstrate the catastrophes already underway. Add to that worldwide drought (which is said to have led to the civil war now in its eighth year in Syria and the loss of traditional crops in Central America) and the dystopia of *Blade Runner* seems less like fiction than it does warning.

franchise, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* series, and Veronica Roth's *Divergent* trilogy, for example, all present various depictions of the aftermath of ecological devastation and humanity's violent struggle for survival. In *Blade Runner*, the violence is primarily directed toward Replicants who do not "know their place," so to speak. They are disparagingly called "skin jobs" (an equivalent to an ethnic slur), harassed by their human counterparts, and mercilessly hunted and murdered. It is as if Replicants are the scapegoats for humanity, bearing the rage of humans for the ecological disaster they have brought upon themselves.

And yet, as the *Blade Runner* series and McFague both insist, this arrogant eye whose vision leads to violence is not the only way to see. Both the movies and McFague's theology offer us glimpses of a different, salvific way of seeing the world. It is possible, each suggests, that "the disembodied, distant, transcendent, simplifying, objectifying, quick and easy arrogant eye becomes the embodied, lowly, immanent, complexifying, subjectifying, proximate and 'make-do' loving eye. The pure mind's eye becomes the messy body's eye . . ." (McFague 1997, p. 34). And though we only get glimpses of the loving eye in *Blade Runner*, they are what keep Replicants alive and connected to their own humanity—as well as each other.

3. God's Eye View: Seeing with Loving Eyes

*"If you hallow this life, you meet the living God."*⁷

McFague's description of the loving eye is what we are delineating as God's eye, not gods' eyes. The loving eye sees the planet and all other-than-humans as a great, necessary constellation of subjects with intrinsic value. The key features of the loving eye are appreciation and attention, rather than objectification. For many of us, the loving eye is evident in biblical descriptions of the counter-cultural values of the Realm of God, conveyed succinctly in the Beatitudes as well as Jesus' parables. "Blessed are those who are meek, for they shall inherit the earth Blessed are those who are merciful for they shall be shown mercy Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God . . ." ⁸ The loving eye overturns the status quo of who and what should have value and values the beauty of difference in human and other-than-human beings. Where the arrogant eye reduces the other to utility, the loving eye recognizes the subjecthood of the other.⁹ With this recognition comes a realization that "the knower and the known are more alike than they are different" (McFague 1997).

Personhood, eyes, and seeing are intimately connected in both movies. In the first film, Replicant Roy Batty has an encounter with Chew, a genetic engineer who designs eyes. "Chew," he says, "if only you could see what I've seen with your eyes." Later in his death-soliloquy, Roy laments, "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe . . . all those moments will be lost in time like tears in rain." The film is clear that this self-reflective awareness of finitude is one of the distinguishing features of being human, regardless of how that humanity originated.

Yet both films ask: can we trust what we see with our eyes? The memories implanted in the Replicants are manufactured. What they see in their mind's eye is either someone else's memory or is completely fabricated. Officer K, for example, is driven to distraction by his memories of a hand-carved wooden horse—one that he discovers at the grave of Rachael. When he finds out from the memory

⁷ Martin Buber, in (McFague 1997, p. 101).

⁸ Matthew 5:5, 7, 9. New Revised Standard Version.

⁹ It has been suggested that the Creator God of Genesis 1:28–31, saw the world and humanity's place in it through a lens of domination, in which humans are called to use (and abuse) Earth-elements; this is most definitely an interpretation of the "arrogant eye." Indeed, reading with the lens of humanity's "dominion/domination" has resulted in Christianity being complicit in promoting our present climate catastrophe. (See Lynn White's classic discussion of this very issue in "The Historical Roots of Our Environmental Crisis" (White 1967)). However, we believe that, taken as a whole, the creation of the Earth in Genesis 1 and 2 is better understood as advocating humanity's "stewardship" of the Earth (see especially Genesis 2:15). As stewards we are called to tend the Garden, which God calls "good," as God would do. If God considers all things God has created good, this is not intended as an instrumental "good," but rather intrinsically "good." (Gen 1:31) From these interpretations, we call God's eye "loving."

designer Ana Steline that his recollections are, indeed, from a real person and not manufactured, he is flooded with emotion. Hope that he might, in fact, be a “real” human compels him in his quest of self-discovery. Yet he later learns that the memories belong to Ana. *She* is the miracle child, not him.

Throughout the *Blade Runner* series, the characters—and audience—question what is real, what is true. We—and they—question our own humanity. This has implications not just for a futuristic time, but for our own present. As technology develops ever more sophisticated means by which to manipulate and fabricate pictures and videos, we fear that we cannot even trust our own eyes. Yet, such trust is precisely what the characters must cling to as they claim their personhood and resist despotic oppression. Sapper Morton’s final words before being shot by Officer K proclaim what he has seen with his own eyes—the “miracle” birth of a Replicant child. He has committed his life to protecting that miracle and is willing to die for the greater truth. Likewise, Deckard defies the temptation to reunite with Wallace’s facsimile of Rachael by noting, “Her eyes were green.” The almighty Wallace missed this detail from his gods’ eye view.

In other words, attention to detail, the cherishing of things seen with the eye—this is where Replicants find their humanity in the face of the dehumanizing eye of Wallace and Tyrell and the ruthlessness of the police-state. McFague writes, “The eye of the body [the loving eye] is not like the eye of the mind. The eye of the body respects and admires the physical, the concrete, the diverse rather than searching for the abstract, the general, and the same, as does the eye of the mind” (McFague 1997, p. 94). Replicants truly are “more human than humans” in the movies’ rendering because they are the only ones capable of seeing one another and the world around them with a loving eye. Over against the arrogance of the “truly human” positioned above and beyond the Earth, Replicants exhibit the qualities that behold the beloved with compassion and love.

In the 1982 movie, for example, Rachael sits at a piano, looks at the music, and begins to play. “I remember lessons,” she says wistfully. “I don’t know if it’s me or Tyrell’s niece.” Are her memories real or manufactured? Is her ability to play the piano a fabrication? Deckard replies with tenderness, “You play beautifully.” Regardless of the source of the memory or the ability, the music she plays is real and creates a moment of connection between them. Iris Murdoch writes, “Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love . . . is the discovery of reality” (McFague 1997, p. 35).¹⁰ Their attention to one another and to beauty creates love, and love is what makes them “real” (p. 27).¹¹ Even as Wallace later attempts to controvert Deckard’s and Rachael’s love as a mere “mathematical equation” designed by Tyrell, Deckard is unfazed: “I know what’s real.”¹²

This attention to detail nurtures not just the souls of Replicants but also allows them to nurture a newfound relationship with the organic world. While Wallace busies himself with manufacturing life (and mercilessly slaughtering it when it does not meet his standards of perfection), it is Replicants who engage in farming and meager horticulture. Sapper Morton grows garlic on his grub farm. Deckard grows green plants in terrariums—presumably the flowers that will be pollinated by the bees Officer K discovers in the hives outside the abandoned casino where Deckard lives. Now a widower separated from his daughter, alone in his radioactive hermitage, Deckard finds a way to nurture life. Though his fledgling plants and apiary are destroyed by Wallace’s soldiers, Deckard is eventually reunited with his daughter Ana. While she can only create the illusion of memories for Replicants, the hope is that Deckard can now pass on to her actual experiences and authentic memories of how to grow both life and relationships. As McFague suggests, if we give up seeing through the subject/object binary, what will be revealed to us would be “an ecological self, a relational self, a self that would not, could not exist apart from others. It would be a sense of self as relational” (McFague 1997, p. 91).

¹⁰ Iris Murdoch in (McFague 1997).

¹¹ McFague adds that we love by paying attention—not surveilling or observing but honoring the world with our attention.

¹² We recognize that there is ongoing controversy, ambiguity, and debate about whether or not Deckard is a Replicant. Notwithstanding, Wallace’s assertion is premised on Tyrell’s intention to program certain Replicants to fall in love.

4. Conclusions: The Movie's Eye Seeing Us?

“... My eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.” —Psalm 31:9b

Like all good dystopian science fiction, the *Blade Runner* films do not just portend a future of what awaits us. Rather, they are extended metaphors that provide a window on our own dystopian present. Thus, when we see the eye opening at the beginning of each movie, we can infer that the movie itself is an eye—and its gaze is upon *us*. In this sense, the films are apocalyptic in the true sense of the Greek word *apocalypso*—they remove the curtain and show us a hidden truth about ourselves and the world we have created around us. Because, in fact, the films' metaphors of an ecological Armageddon are not a warning; they are descriptive of what we face right now.

Rising sea waters, saturated skies, toxic wastelands, food shortages, and people desperately seeking refuge are not just scenes in *Blade Runner* climate fiction. They are present realities. Eerily, the movies depict a future that is paralleled even now by the projections of climate scientists. According to some estimates, by the year 2050 (just a year after the fictional 2049, we note), climate devastation will result in the mass migration of between 25 million to 1 billion people (Kamel 2017). This movement of populations will be unlike anything seen before in human history. The Pacific Northwest and the inland Midwest will become our “Off-Worlds” in the U.S., remaining relatively temperate as places such as Tucson and Phoenix become life-threatening and portions of Florida cease to exist (Goodell 2018). Those left behind will be, like the humans remaining on Earth in *Blade Runner*, either too ill, too old, or too poor to move, generating the great income disparity and potential for violence described above. Lording it over rich and poor alike will be those who, like Tyrell and Wallace, capitalize on just the right combination of intellectual brilliance, technological ingenuity, concentrated wealth, and ruthless hubris to control the masses, the means of production, and the very keys to life itself. The parallels between the movies and our own world are too alarming to ignore. They demand response and action. In this way, the *Blade Runner* films are parables for our time.

A parable is a story told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson. In the New Testament, Jesus used parables to illustrate truths about what he called “the Kingdom of God” (which we are calling the “Realm of God” in this paper). The parable is a device meant to wake us up from our spiritual torpor, shake us loose from pre-conceived notions, and rethink business as usual. They show us the radical, counter-cultural nature of the values of the Realm of God (God's eye view). They challenge us to make different choices, in this case by disorienting us from the arrogant eye and reorienting us toward the loving eye. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 13:13–16 (which references Isaiah 6:9–10):

This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.” In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.” But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

We suggest, then, that the ethic of seeing in the *Blade Runner* films presents us with a choice about how to shape our future in light of how and what we decide to see. Will we choose to see the world with the loving, compassionate eye, the eye that attends to and values all other-than-humans as subjects and, therefore, “real”? Or will we choose to continue to see with the arrogant eye of surveillance that objectifies, vilifies, and obliterates? The movies create a crisis for the viewer that demands this choice.

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