

DO YOU LONG FOR HAVING  
YOUR HEART INTERLINKED?:  
THE IMAGO DEI AND OUR  
NEED FOR RELATIONSHIPS IN  
THE BLADE RUNNER UNIVERSE

Megan Joy Rials on Love, Authenticity, and  
Reality

*Blade Runner (BR)* and *Blade Runner 2049 (BR2049)* portray dystopian societies that both challenge Christian morals and pose questions to the Christian about essential aspects of humanity. The films present “replicants” that raise the issue of what it truly means to be human and made in the *imago Dei*. Whereas *BR* raises the issue of death as it relates to our humanity, *BR2049*, through its emphasis on birth and issues surrounding female reproduction, studies a crucial part of the *imago Dei*: our desire for community. Despite the bleakness the films present in their constant questioning of reality and the breakdown of community they portray, they serve as a reminder of God’s creation and plan

for us and show us a glimmer of hope in forging relationships with one another once again.

### More Human than Human

The plots of both films revolve around “replicants,” which the opening scene of the second film describes as “bioengineered humans.”<sup>1</sup> The main character of *BR*, Rick Deckard, refers to them as “machines,” but this characterization is misleading.<sup>2</sup> The replicants, called “more human than human,” are created primarily to serve humans in various capacities.<sup>3</sup> *BR* features three different replicant models: combat, pleasure, and military. They are meant to duplicate humans but with superior physical resistance and speed and without emotions. The development of their emotions, however, eventually becomes the catalyst for the events of both films, particularly *BR*. Here, we will focus first on the importance of the body.

As Christians, we believe that to be made in the *imago Dei* entails two parts: the immaterial (the

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<sup>1</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve (Alcon Entertainment, Columbia Pictures, 2017), DVD (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2018). *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott. The Ladd Company, Shaw Brothers, 1982. DVD, Warner Home Video, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott (The Ladd Company, Shaw Brothers, 1982), DVD (Warner Home Video, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

mind and soul) and the material (the body).<sup>4</sup> The essential nature of the body is questioned in *BR2049*, where hologram personalities such as Joi, the girlfriend of the replicant main character, K, exist. Joi's awareness of others' preferences and mental states, such as the scene where she cycles through a variety of different outfits before settling on one K likes, indicates she is close to being able to reason about her own mental states.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of the film, Joi becomes a strong agent when she transcends her programming to satisfy the desires of her owner by instead recognizing her own conflicting desires and committing wholeheartedly to a decision or a desire. This point comes when she demands that K fully download her onto a device called an emanator, which renders her susceptible to the death of permanent destruction — "Like a real girl," as she puts it.<sup>6 7</sup> There is a distinction to be made, however, between being a human being with its full attendant biological realities and having

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<sup>4</sup> H.O. Mounce, "On Dualism," *New Blackfriars* 91, No. 1034 (July 2010): 406-407.

<sup>5</sup> Robert W. Clowes, "Breaking the Code: Strong Agency and Becoming a Person," in *Blade Runner 2049: A Philosophical Exploration*, eds. Timothy Shanahan and Paul Smart (New York: Routledge, 2020), 118-19.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-23.

<sup>7</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

“personhood” by possessing many of our cognitive abilities, but not a body.<sup>8</sup> Under the Christian conception, Joi cannot possess the *imago Dei* because of her lack of a body.

The replicants, on the other hand, clearly possess the material part of the *imago Dei*. Further, they even possess DNA, as we discover when K and Joi visit an archive and comb through records of replicant DNA. Although we are not given details, the replicants’ creation appears to take place in a lab and is artificial. Other than not gestating in a womb, however, they do not appear to possess any morally significant bodily differences from humans. The development of the replicants’ emotions in *BR* raises the question: when replicants can be created who look and behave like humans, what are the distinguishing characteristics of the soul that signal its presence?

First, we will examine emotion. The question of whether replicants even possess emotions at all is central in *BR*. Deckard’s boss indicates that replicants 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,

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<sup>8</sup> Clowes, “Breaking the Code,” 111.

love, fear, anger, envy.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, it seems replicants were originally not supposed to have emotions but eventually developed them. Despite this, however, there is a suspicion that the replicants do not completely possess one key emotion: empathy. The film’s fictional Voight-Kampf test, meant to distinguish replicants from humans, centers on a series of questions that expose a lack of empathy in the subject, such as whether the subject would help a tortoise being baked to death in the sun. The suggestion is that replicants would not help another in need.

In the course of the film, this assumption is challenged as Deckard, who is seemingly human, “retires” rogue replicants as part of his job as a blade runner — that is, he kills them.<sup>10</sup> The replicants, conversely, are concerned with their replicant friends’ well-being and their short, four-year lifespans. Their leader, Roy Batty, is particularly insistent that their lifespan be extended. In another show of empathy, after a long chase scene following Deckard’s retirement of Batty’s replicant girlfriend, Pris, Batty has the opportunity to kill Deckard by

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<sup>9</sup> *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott.

<sup>10</sup> The question of whether Deckard is a human or a replicant has been subject to much debate, but is not germane to this discussion.

dropping him off a building. Instead of taking revenge for Pris's death, however, he pulls Deckard up and spares his life.

Connected to this discussion of emotion is the replicants' ability for moral reasoning and their free will. In *BR2049*, K, a blade runner like Deckard, is tasked with "retiring" older models of replicants that are not as obedient as the Nexus-9, the replicant model of which K himself is a member. When his boss, Lieutenant Joshi, orders him to find and retire Deckard's child, who is at least half-replicant because the child's mother was a replicant, he replies, "I've never retired something that was born before."<sup>11</sup> She asks him why it matters, and K explains, "To be born is to have a soul, I guess."<sup>12</sup> Because of the inculcated idea that replicants are not human, K evidently does not consider the killing of other replicants to be immoral, but he seems to identify the killing of an entity with a soul as morally wrong. K continues to rebel against his orders to kill the replicant child and eventually reunites her with Deckard. This is K's moment of "wholeheartedness" when he proves himself a

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<sup>11</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

strong agent.<sup>13</sup> Despite the assertion that the replicant model to which he belongs, Nexus-9, is obedient to human masters, K proves his free will by asserting his moral reasoning.

The replicants also possess both strong self-awareness and an awareness of death. In *BR*, one of the human characters, J. F. Sebastian, a genetic designer of the replicants, requests that Batty and Pris perform a trick for him. “We’re not computers, Sebastian,” Batty reminds him, and with a quote recalling Descartes, Pris chimes in, “I think, Sebastian, therefore I am.”<sup>14</sup> In this exchange, we see the replicants’ awareness of themselves and of their relation to the “lived body.”<sup>15</sup> The replicants, led by Batty, have returned to Earth from their relative safety on other planets and risk their lives to find the owner of the Tyrell Corporation, the company that creates the replicants, to discover how they can outlive their preordained four-year lifespans.<sup>16</sup> Batty becomes incensed when Tyrell, the

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<sup>13</sup> Clowes, “Breaking the Code,” 124.

<sup>14</sup> *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Atterton, “‘More Human than Human’: *Blade Runner* and Being-Toward-Death,” in *Blade Runner*, eds. Amy Coplan and David Davies (New York: Routledge, 2015), 53-54.

<sup>16</sup> Because the replicants in *BR2049* have normal lifespans, this issue does not arise in the second film.

eponymous owner of the corporation, cannot extend their lifespan, hissing, “I want more life, father.”<sup>17</sup> It is the dread of death that is “human *par excellence*” and separates humanity from animals, and it allows Batty, a replicant, to die an “authentic” death. Batty stands in contrast to the human Sebastian, who lives without an “essential anxiety” toward death and with a “banal everyday selfhood” that does not allow him to develop an “authentic self.”<sup>18</sup>

The entire mood of the film, in fact, heightens the viewer’s awareness toward death via the replicants’ desperation to live longer. The lighting is consistently dark, and the gloomy *mise-en-scène* as a measure of character evokes the replicants’ despair.<sup>19</sup> Many of the scenes are dreary with dirty city streets and constant rain. It is this grimness we recall as Tyrell assures Batty that although his life has been short, it has been spectacular: “The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long. And you have burned so very, very brightly, Roy. Look at

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<sup>17</sup> *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott.

<sup>18</sup> Atterton, “More Human,” 46-47, 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience: An Introduction*, 3d ed., (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004), 87.

you. You're the prodigal son. You're quite a prize!"<sup>20</sup> Batty reminds him, "I've done questionable things," which precedes his deadly reaction to Tyrell's flippant response to his worries and serves as a mirror to our feelings about ourselves.<sup>21</sup> Yes, we are all sinners who have done questionable things, but this knowledge does not lessen our desire to live; neither do reminders of our achievements comfort us when faced with the prospect of death.

Based on these factors — empathy, moral reasoning, free will, self-awareness, and an awareness of death — combined with the fact that the replicants are created from DNA in what is essentially an artificial birth process, the conclusion that the replicants possess souls and the *imago Dei* is inescapable. Most tellingly, when Batty dies, the dove he has been holding flies away, symbolizing his soul leaving his body.<sup>22</sup> One final element confirms that replicants possess the *imago Dei*: their desire for community. Batty is desperate for "more life" for his replicant friends and remains loyal to them even unto his death, and K searches for meaningful

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<sup>20</sup> *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Berys Gaut, "Elegy in LA: *Blade Runner*, Empathy and Death," in *Blade Runner*, eds. Amy Coplan and David Davies (New York: Routledge, 2015), 38.

relationships, whether with Joi or with his own family, when he believes he might have biological relatives. C.S. Lewis explains that because God is triune, He Himself is relational: “Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love. . . . [I]n Christianity God is not a static thing — not even a person — but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.”<sup>23</sup> The replicants’ desire for community is reflective of our need for relationships because we are made in the *imago Dei*. Just as God Himself is a personal, relational God, so we also desperately need community, as *BR2049* explores in great detail.

### A Part of Us That’s Missing

The human (and replicant) need for relationships is perhaps best seen in our society’s epidemic of loneliness. The relational brokenness in our world manifests itself in a variety of ways: religious service attendance has declined; the average person in the United States says he has only one close friend; one in four people have no friends; more than two in ten adults in the United States and

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<sup>23</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 1952), 174-75.

the United Kingdom say they always or often feel lonely; the average marriage age has risen; and fertility rates have declined.<sup>24</sup> Loneliness can be the culprit behind mental illnesses such as anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia, and it was recently discovered that it can be responsible for cellular inflammation that can lead to heart disease, stroke, metastatic cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.<sup>25</sup> Millennials identify loneliness as their primary fear, ahead of losing a home or a job, with 42% of women saying they fear loneliness more than a cancer diagnosis.<sup>26</sup> Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, this societal problem has intensified. Loneliness rates skyrocketed in 2020, with approximately 75% of men and women in the United States reporting that they feel lonelier because of the pandemic.<sup>27</sup> Clearly,

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<sup>24</sup> Jillian Richardson, "Lonely? You're not alone. America's young people suffering from a lack of meaningful connection," *NBC News*, January 1, 2019, last accessed October 2, 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/lonely-you-re-not-alone-america-s-young-people-are-ncna945446>; Neil Howe, "Millennials and the Loneliness Epidemic," *Forbes*, May 3, 2019, last accessed October 2, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2019/05/03/millennials-and-the-loneliness-epidemic/#1c60ca6f7676>.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson, "Lonely? You're not alone."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Jamie Ducharme, "COVID-19 is making America's loneliness epidemic worse," *TIME*, May 8, 2020, last accessed October 2, 2020, <https://time.com/5833681/loneliness-covid-19/>.

relationships with one another are necessary for us not only to thrive, but to survive. We see the effects of sin in the disruption and corruption of our relationships with our fellow man, which serve to deprive us of this essential aspect of life and the *imago Dei*.

*BR2049* confronts our relational brokenness head-on and features the yearning for connection as one of its main themes. Many scenes throughout the film feature snow, whether floating down from above or compacted on the ground, both of which reflect the remoteness and iciness of the society portrayed.<sup>28</sup> The question of the humans' cold behavior is specifically raised in connection with the reproductive alterations in the design of female replicants and is intimately connected to the interpersonal brokenness portrayed in the film. As *BR* focused on death and the end of life, *BR2049* is conversely preoccupied with birth and the beginning of life. This interest reaches back to *BR*, in fact, where one of the questions in the Voight-Kampf test prompts the subject to discuss only good things that come to mind about his mother, and the replicant being tested shoots the administrator of the test to death. *BR2049* addresses issues

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<sup>28</sup> Corrigan and White, *The Film Experience*, 87.

surrounding natality and its implications for relational problems in society.<sup>29</sup> The female replicants do not possess the ability to bear children, but after K discovers the remains of Rachael, Deckard's replicant girlfriend, and it is determined that she died after an emergency Caesarean section, the film reveals that she was an "experiment" capable of having children. Niander Wallace, head of the Wallace Corporation, which took over the production of replicants from the Tyrell Corporation, admits that the secret of creating female replicants who can bear children has eluded him.

The relational issues seen in the film are predominantly related to its society's twisted views of women and female replicants, which indicates that our tinkering with God's design for creation has disastrous effects on us and our relations with one another. There are two opposing misogynistic viewpoints in this society. The first is the idea that women should conform to the whims of men. This view is embodied in the very existence of the hologram Joi, which the Wallace Corporation sells to customers seeking companionship, promising that

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Treanor, "Being-From-Birth: Natality and Narrative," in *Blade Runner 2049: A Philosophical Exploration*, eds. Timothy Shanahan and Paul Smart (New York: Routledge, 2020), 71-72.

she is “everything you want to hear.”<sup>30</sup> This concept of a woman customizable to every whim of the man who owns her extends into the treatment of women solely as sexual beings to please men. The Wallace Corporation’s advertisements in Los Angeles feature a fully nude Joi beckoning to passersby. This emphasis on the nude female form continues as K tracks Deckard to Las Vegas and while traveling through the desert encounters a series of statues of nude women in suggestive poses.

The idea of women conforming to men’s preferences, especially the hypersexualized ideal seen in the film’s society, is destructive to the formation of genuine relationships, whether platonic or romantic, between men and women and is particularly destructive to the institution of marriage. Any woman, whether human or hologram, who adapts her personality and actions constantly to please a man is not behaving as a real person, and such an expectation strips any human relationship of its authenticity, both for the woman whose personality is undermined by the charade and the man for whose benefit she performs. This kind of convenient “relationship” allows men to have a shadow of the genuine article while dodging

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<sup>30</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

its inevitable challenges and responsibilities, particularly the marriage vow and the creation of a family. The film bears this out in that a mention of marriage is not even made, and no intact nuclear family unit is portrayed. This portrayal reflects our current society with its overall rise in divorce rates and the decline of the traditional, two-parent family.<sup>31</sup>

The second misogynistic view in *BR2049* is the marginalization of the female replicants for their lack of reproductive capabilities and finding their value only in their ability to produce children. Nowhere is this depicted more clearly than when Niander Wallace visits a newborn female replicant. She drops out of a sac and lies trembling before him and his female replicant assistant, Luv. After she gains enough strength to stand, Wallace ponders the mystery of natural reproduction and his anger over his failure to create female replicants with this ability. He observes, "Every leap of civilization was built off the back of a disposable workforce. We lost our stomach for slaves, unless engineered. But I can only make so many."<sup>32</sup> Concluding that she is

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<sup>31</sup> "The American Family Today," *Pew Research Center*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/17/1-the-american-family-today/>.

<sup>32</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

worthless, he murders the newborn replicant by slashing her abdomen with a scalpel where her womb would be. This view also results in the commoditization of children and, again, in the destruction of the nuclear family in its emphasis on children as products and slave labor.

Neither the first view nor the second view is Biblical because both reduce women to their worth strictly in relation to their bodies rather than properly focusing on women being made in the image of God and finding their value therein. As Dr. Holly Ordway has observed, “I came to realize that my identity as a woman is not dependent on marrying or having children ... I am a woman in all the fullness of my femininity because that is how God made me.”<sup>33</sup> Under either of these views, women are not valued as complete individuals; they are appreciated only for the purposes their bodies can fulfill.

Two relationships in the film provide an interesting counterpoint and portrayal, respectively, of these two views. First, there is the relationship between K and Joi. Joi embraces her romance with K and appears consumed by it,

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<sup>33</sup> Holly Ordway, “The Trauma of the Given,” *Word on Fire*, January 5, 2018, <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/the-trauma-of-the-given/5679/>.

although her affection for K seems genuine and her desire for a “normal” relationship is noble in this unstable society. As discussed previously, Joi seems to have surpassed her programming to become a strong agent and to develop a real relationship with K. The question of the degree to which her love for K is merely the product of her programming is, however, a stumbling block to their relationship, because when Joi purrs, “I’m so happy when I’m with you,” K immediately responds, “You don’t have to say that.”<sup>34</sup> K must help Joi transcend her programming, and based on his desire to help her do so, it seems he is also interested in a genuine relationship. It is noteworthy that given Joi’s existence as a hologram, K’s motivation for the relationship is not physical in nature. He apparently believes a relationship with a hologram is his best chance of creating a genuine bond, likely because as a replicant, he is treated as an outcast. K and Joi’s relationship is the exception to this society’s first view of women that proves the rule. He visits with Joi about his day after he returns home from work and purchases an emanator so that she can travel with him as his constant companion, which shows

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<sup>34</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

our innate desire for relationships — romantic or not — with others.

K and Joi's relationship is the only healthy one portrayed in the film, and significantly, K also struggles with the implications of possibly being the miracle replicant child of Rachael and Deckard before realizing he is not. In doing so, he must confront various relational issues, and thus it is not surprising Joi finds a good relationship with him. We see K pass his first baseline test, which has replaced the Voight-Kampf test to check for emotional stability — in reality, a lack of emotion — in replicants and asks such questions as “Do you long for having your heart interlinked?” and “Do you feel that there's a part of you that's missing?”<sup>35</sup> Later, though, he flunks his second baseline test, indicating that he has started to form relationships with others. The mere chance that he might be the replicant child serves as the catalyst for his desire to “explore his natality” by searching for his parents.<sup>36</sup> Issues surrounding natality necessarily involve social and relational issues because it reminds us of our embodied relationality with others and that we were born into a community that knew us before we

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<sup>35</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

<sup>36</sup> Treanor, “Being-From-Birth,” 77.

knew them.<sup>37</sup> Even Joi, who does not possess the *imago Dei*, recognizes the inherent uniqueness of natural birth and the love inherent in the creation of life when she remarks to K, “I always knew you were special. Maybe this is how. A child. Of woman born. Pushed into the world. Wanted. Loved.”<sup>38</sup> Our desire for community is similarly reflected in our desire for authentic relationships with others, because we are made in the *imago Dei* of the Triune, relational God — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are in constant communion with one another, in a continual dance, as Lewis described it.<sup>39</sup> It should come as no surprise that the desire is inherent in us, and in replicants, as well.

The relationship between Luv and Niander Wallace, on the other hand, depicts the toxic, second misogynistic view and its damaging consequences. The ironically named Luv serves her master, Wallace, with a single-minded ferocity and has perhaps the greatest capacity for violence of any character in the film. In a scene of perverted femininity, she has her nails painted while she orders deadly drone strikes. Later, Luv casually

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<sup>37</sup> Treanor, “Being-From-Birth,” 71-72.

<sup>38</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 174-75.

murders Lieutenant Joshi in cold blood and attempts to kill K. Luv is aware her only inherent value to Wallace would lie in her capacity to reproduce: when he murders the newborn replicant, a tear slides down Luv's cheek, betraying her inner turmoil over his attitude toward female replicants. In a world where, under Wallace, she would be valued only for her reproductive capabilities, she instead embraces violence to win Wallace's approval. Denied the ability to create, Luv destroys, and destroys so effectively that she makes herself indispensable to Wallace. The bid succeeds, because even though she cannot reproduce, Wallace praises her as his "best angel."<sup>40</sup> Their relationship is warped beyond recognition of either friendship or romance because of Wallace's insistence on finding value in female replicants only in their childbearing capabilities. His distorted view of women results in Luv's desperate attempt to find another way to prove her worth to him and form at least a shadow of a connection with another being.

Thus, we see that the human alteration of female reproductive capacities has disastrous effects on civilization and on the characters' relationships with each other. It results in a society that overall

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<sup>40</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

does not appear to be that different from our own, with its distressing lack of genuine friendships, breakdown in local communities, high rate of promiscuity, decline of marriage, and destruction of the nuclear family unit as God designed it. In spite of the problems we create, however, our innate, God-given craving for connection with others continues to point us to the relational God we serve. As Lieutenant Joshi remarks to K, “We’re all just looking for something real.”<sup>41</sup> *BR2049* offers a glimmer of the “something real” God’s plan contains for us in the connection K and Joi forge and in the hints of the only family mentioned in the film.

### Looking for Something Real

Before going any further, we must ask the question: do humans act as good stewards of God’s creation in their development and treatment of replicants? Based on the disruptive societal effects of humans’ alteration of God’s design for reproduction and the treatment of replicants as slave labor, the answer is a resounding *no*. As we know, however, God uses everything for the good of those who believe in Him, and the replicants ultimately point

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<sup>41</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

us back to questions about the morality of our behavior and our relationship with God.<sup>42</sup>

They also offer us a glimpse into the only family portrayed in either film. *BR* ends with Deckard leaving, if not for a happily ever after, at least for a chance of a relationship with another individual, Rachael. In *BR2049*, the replicants recognize life's inherent value more clearly than the humans and hail Deckard and Rachael's child as a "miracle."<sup>43</sup> Although this reaction can be partly attributed to Rachael's unknown ability to bear children, in their response, we also hear awe for life itself. The child is revealed to be Dr. Ana Stelline, whom we first meet in her laboratory, a kind of Eden filled with lush green plants. Of all the characters in either film, she comes closest to a Biblical approach of using her talents for the good of others in her creation of beautiful dream memories to be implanted in the replicants. She explains to K that although she cannot help or change the replicants' bleak futures, she can at least give them comforting memories. K praises her in his remark, "All the best memories are hers."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Rom. 8:28 (ESV).

<sup>43</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

At one point in the film, Deckard, Dr. Stelline's father, snaps at Niander Wallace, "I know what's real."<sup>45</sup> As Christians, we also know what is real: the importance of being made in the *imago Dei* and its resulting obligations on our lives to be good stewards of God's creation, our talents, and as we have seen here, most especially, our relationships. In losing our connection with God, we also lose our connection with each other. The two are inextricably linked, for when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He replied that it was to love the Lord our God but immediately added that the second was to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, "The human and the theological, in fact, are so intertwined that to speak authentically of one is to engage the other," and as Martin Buber points out, we must exist in being-in-relation with one another as subjects in an "I-Thou" relation.<sup>47 48</sup>

Our relationships with God and each other are intertwined, and in placing our trust in Christ and

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<sup>45</sup> *e Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

<sup>46</sup> Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 246.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-47.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

restoring our relationship with Him, we can begin forging a path forward to bonding with others. Although our society has forgotten what it means to be a follower of Christ and thereby experience true human connection through Him, the ending of *BR2049* shows there is still hope for us. Even in so bleak a film, the story ends with a reunion of a father and daughter. If we believe in the potential of reunification of the natural family, how much more so should we look forward to that of our heavenly one with our brothers and sisters in Christ! — and how much harder should we work to show our society that a foretaste of it is possible here on earth when in communion with one another in the body of Christ?

When Deckard sees his daughter for the first time, Dr. Stelline is standing in a flurry of snow, letting the flakes fall onto her hand. “Beautiful, isn’t it?” she asks.<sup>49</sup> Deckard approaches the laboratory and tentatively places his hand on the glass. We know what happens when we touch snow: it melts. As Lewis explains, we must participate with the triune God we serve if we are to heal the effects of sin and fulfill this essential aspect of our nature as created in the *imago Dei*:

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<sup>49</sup> *Blade Runner 2049*, directed by Denis Villeneuve.

The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. . . . Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?<sup>50</sup>

As Christians, we must not fear the flames or shy away from the water. We must take our places in the divine dance with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and thereby with our neighbors to heal our broken, lonely lives and our broken, lonely world. Just as Dr. Stelline reaches for the snowflakes and Deckard reaches for his daughter's hand, we can begin thawing the coldness in our world, one relationship at a time.

And through Christ, it *will* be beautiful — won't it?

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.

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