**Major Themes**

**Empathy**

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Philip K. Dick explored his "conviction that love and compassion were the crucial differences between man and machine". To this end, the Voigt-Kampff test is based on measuring empathy - it requires the Blade Runners to pose hypothetical scenarios to suspected Replicants and gauge their emotional reactions. The premise of the test depends on the assumption that humans feel empathy, and replicants do not. The line between replicants and real humans gets increasingly blurry over the course of *Blade Runner*. Rachael and Roy Batty (both replicants) each save Deckard's life - showing that they are so sophisticated they have started to develop very complex emotions, including some level of empathy for Deckard. This ties back into the underlying moral question of *Blade Runner*, which is "what makes us human?"

**Dystopia**

Dystopia is defined as "a community or society, usually fictional that is in some important way undesirable or frightening". *Blade Runner* made grounded futuristic projections - and dealt with the moral implications of cloning and the creation of artificial human beings within a recognizable society. Ridley Scott wanted the world of *Blade Runner* to be "authentic, not speculative". Whereas his previous film, *Alien* took place in an entirely fictional environment (in space), and the recent hit *Star Wars* was set "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" - *Blade Runner* takes place only 40 years in the future, in a world that is "at once uncannily familiar and startlingly new" (Bukatman) - which heightened the underlying sense of unease.

**Corporate Power**

In the world of *Blade Runner*, the Tyrell Corporation is housed in a pyramid, invoking images of pharaohs towering over the damp squalor below. Hampton Fancher says, "*Blade Runner* was meant to be cautionary. For instance, [the film] was shot during the dawn of Reaganism. And I was flabbergasted by Ronald Reagan and everything he stood for. So the cruel politics portrayed in the film were my rebuttal of Reaganism, in a sense" (Sammon 110). During his tenure, President Reagan was implementing new economic policies - lower tax rates and inflation coupled with less regulation and free trade. He believed in the idea that by lowering income taxes and giving corporations more autonomy, the economic growth would trickle down to the younger/poorer citizens. But the world of *Blade Runner* contradicts this assumption, in its depiction of ruin and lawlessness in the shadow of an almighty corporation.



**Oppression**

As the replicants have become more and more sophisticated with each generation, the line between them and the actual human beings blurs. For example, it only takes Holden a few questions on the Voigt- Kampff test to determine that Leon Kowalski is a replicant, but it takes Deckard over a 100 questions to come to the same conclusion about Rachael. Replicants are commercial commodities - Tyrell has become rich selling them as cheap labor. However, as they develop emotions, the replicants also become aware of the oppression that defines their existence, which is why the Nexus 6 group escapes and comes back to Earth. They understand the value of their lives - whether artificially created or not - and feel that they deserve basic human rights. Ultimately, Tyrell is punished for his greed when one of his most sophisticated creations, Roy Batty, kills him out of frustration that he cannot elongate his life.

**Conscience**

At the beginning of the film, Deckard has quit the Blade Runner game because he does not want to do it anymore. As he tells Rachael later in the film - he gets the shakes whenever he kills a replicant. According to Ridley Scott, Deckard has realized that he is "getting touched by his work. Which of course sets up the ensuing situations that turn his world upside down" (Sammon 381). Over the course of the film, Deckard goes from being a hardened, android-hunting human to discovering his humanity - in the arms of a replicant (along with the discovery that he may be a replicant himself). Rutger Hauer once said, "I always felt the subject of Deckard being a Replicant was a matter of emotional understanding. He certainly behaves like a Replicant, because he's so programmed. Ironically, through their very actions, you understand that it is the Replicants who are free" (Sammon 201).

**Morality**

Ridley Scott said in an interview that be felt "if a society decided to produce a second-class species, that society would also probably develop it with subhuman capabilities...the fact that the replicants in *Blade Runner* are indeed intelligent complicates the situation... you immediately have a huge morality problem" (Sammon 380). Most machines that do subhuman work, like a trash compactor, for example, are not aware of their inferior position in society. The moral question in *Blade Runner* is that once these machines are endowed with enough human comprehension to understand that they are oppressed; do they have the right to be free? These complications are what have necessitated the advent of Blade Runners in the first place - the entire job revolves around catching and killing Replicants that have risen up against their human leaders.

**Vision**

The image of the eye plays a major role in *Blade Runner*. Scott Bukatman writes, "vision somehow both makes and unmakes the self in the film - creating a dynamic between a centered and autonomous subjectivity (eye/I) and the self as a manufactured, commodified object ([Hannibal Chew's] Eye Works)" (Bukatman 16). The Voigt-Kampff test is based on determining subtle reactions through eye movements to gauge a being's empathy - showing the eyes as a window into the core of a being. On the flip side, Scott says, "the eye is the single most vulnerable aperture in your body. Without your eyes, man, you've got nothing. And sticking something through someone's eye is a very simple way of killing somebody" (Sammon 382). Roy Batty knows he is going to perish because of the vulnerability that Tyrell has created in him, and as a result - he kills Tyrell by violating his most physically vulnerable spot. The man with the great vision falls at the feet of his most advanced achievement