

This study examines the use of disability tropes to articulate boundary distinctions between humans and artificial life forms in the Ridley Scott film *Blade Runner* (1982; 1992; 2007) and its precedents in classical myth. While the creation of artificial life forms reflects a fantasy of hyper-ability, either in the creator or in the automata, narratives of such figures also include significant motifs of disability. This combination of hyper-ability and disability functions as a normative proposal of human identity, its powers, and its limitations. Current theorists whose work informs this project include Jean Baudrillard, Page DuBois, Donna Haraway, Timothy Beal, David Mitchell, and Sharon Snyder.

The basic structure will be an examination of *Blade Runner* and, secondarily, its direct literary source, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick (1968), for major motifs with classical precedents. The relevant classical myths include Hephaestus and his Golden Maidens; Daedalus and his statues; the figure of Talos; Pygmalion and Galatea; and Pandora. Analysis of the film, the novel, and the classical sources allows us to identify the following motifs: (1) a combination of hyper-ability and disability in the artificial life form or its maker(s); (2) the social functions of artificial life as slaves/servants, soldiers, or sexual providers; and (3) aspiration beyond physical limits as both desirable and dangerous. Underlying these motifs is a persistent disability rhetoric, usually in the form of three figures or possibilities: “normal” natural person; disabled natural person; and artificial, hyper-abled, disabled life (where “natural person” stands for either gods or humans).

Although disability images play a significant role in *Blade Runner* and its classical sources, we can observe differences in which boundaries are sites of cultural anxiety. In classical myth, the human-god distinction seems to be the major concern, even as the notion that artificial forms pose dangers for their human makers is present. By contrast, *Blade Runner* strongly reflects contemporary anxiety about the human-artificial distinction and its growing murkiness. I shall conclude by suggesting why disability is such a tempting and powerful trope for these distinctions and how a rhetoric of disability proposes or interrogates specific human identities.