
FRANK HERBERT'S 'DUNE CHRONICLES' AS EXAMPLE OF AN IDEA OF THEOCRACY IN SCI-FI LITERATURE

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Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to present the theocratic political system presented in science fiction literature, using the example of Frank Herbert's book series 'Dune Chronicles'. The paper consists of analysis of Dune's world and Atreides' religion within it, comparison between theocratic political system presented in 'Dune Chronicles' and real life political systems and defining Herbert's idea of theocracy. The basic questions posed by the author of this paper are connected with defining theocratic systems of Paul and Leto II Atreides and assessing wheatear or not would it be even achievable in real world. This research was conducted in light of theoretical text analysis, especially considering historical counterparts in 'Dune Chronicles', social effects of religion on society and intertextual interpretation of author's views affecting the literary work. The archetypal criticism used in this paper aims to draw comparisons between different characters and their roles within the universe and in consequence - compare them with their functional counterparts in other theocratic systems.

Keywords: sci-fi literature, religion, political, system, Golden Path

1. Introduction

Dune by Frank Herbert might be considered by now as a cultural phenomenon. Since its publication in 1965 by a small publisher, the book received many adaptations and positive reviews. Both critics and readers praise the mix of realism and spirituality that creates a compelling, brutal and deep world. The story's main axis are the times of the rule of two leaders from the house of Atreides - Paul and his son Leto II. In order to fully understand political and theological thought of these two figures, we have to consider two major factors: in-story environment (in its broadest sense) and Frank Herbert's private views on our reality from which his world originated [1].

In this paper I would like to present the idea of theocracy in science fiction literature on example of *Dune Chronicles* by Frank Herbert.

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The plot of the first book takes place around 20 000 AD. Humanity has spread across the galaxy, Earth and its history became an obscure, insignificant legend and most of direct ruling is made by noble Houses, such as Atreides. The power across the Imperium is shared between the Emperor (formal ruler of the Imperium), Landsraad (a body representing the Great Houses), Spacing Guild (interstellar transportation monopolists), CHOAM (monopolist trading consortium) and Bene Gesserit (all-female organization focusing on enhancing human capabilities). All of these entities are dependent on Melange (also known as Spice), which is a substance that enhances human mind and body, since the Butlerian Jihad that led to abolishment of 'thinking machines', this substance is crucial for the functioning of the Imperium. The main problem with Spice is the fact that it can only be found on one planet - Arrakis, also known as Dune.

The inspiration with real-world counterparts is very apparent. Herbert wasn't restraining himself from making allegories. The world of *Dune* is clearly referring to real-life empires such as British or Roman, with motives of fighting over control of crucial resources and persecutions of locals who stand in the way.

Frank Herbert was a Buddhist and ideas of syncretism are present in almost every aspect of the world of *Dune*. The most apparent one is Orange Catholic Bible, the text that combines most significant world's religions into one. Although popular among some people shortly before the rule of Paul Atreides, this book was not considered a holy text in political sense, the Imperium of Corrins was basically secular and focused more on sustaining the balance of powers than pushing religious agendas. Another aspect of syncretism in *Dune* is present in the official language of the Imperium - Galach. It is mainly a combination of English and various Slavic languages but elements of other tongues are also present [2].

The initial syncretic and secular nature of the pre-Atreides elites is personified in the organization of Bene Gesserit. There are many speculations concerning this name. Some argue that it comes from a Latin sentence '*quam diu se bene gesserit*' meaning 'during good behaviour' focusing on primary goal of the organization to control humanity and themselves in order to achieve greater good. Others claim that it refers to the order of Jesuits, making the argument that one of the main tools of Bene Gesserit was missionary work. However, Bene Gesserit did not believe in 'truths' they were spreading, neither did they believe in any form of God whatsoever. This is directly presented in the *Children of Dune*: "Religion is the emulation of the adult by the child. Religion is the encasement of past beliefs: mythology, which is guesswork, the hidden assumptions of trust in the Universe, those pronouncements which men have made in search of personal power, all of it mingled with shreds of enlightenment. And always the ultimate unspoken commandment is 'Thou shall not question!' But we question. We break that commandment as a matter of course. The work to which we have set ourselves is the liberating of the imagination, the harnessing of imagination to humankind's deepest sense of creativity." [3]

All of the aforementioned institutions create a world that seems so alien, yet somehow familiar. Frank Herbert created his world in the likeness of semi-feudal societies of early modern age. With a great Imperium that bears many similarities to many real-world empires, possessing an official head of state in the character of the Padishah-Emperor but on planetary level being run by individual noble families. The initial level of religion intertwining with politics is also relatively low. The official religious organizations are weak and the greatest missionary power lies in hands of mostly atheistic organisation of Bene Gesserit. Things like trade and space travel are monopolized by Spacing Guild and CHOAM, which in return are relying on one substance that can be extracted from only one planet.

Unlike Tolkien, to whom he is often compared to, Herbert was not restraining himself from using allegories [4]. In case of Spice the allegory seems to be oil. Just like melange it is extracted for the needs of a great empire(s) from unhospitable, desert parts of Middle East, so similar to Arrakis. This dependence on this one trading good causes (just like in our world) a state of constant conflict with native populations. This allegory, although justified on some levels omits many aspects of the novel's story, as well as our worlds aspects of colonialism. Surprisingly this does not diminish novel's intellectual value. Herbert's allegories are not about modern world, or even about possible future world. *Dune Chronicles* are accumulating all aspects of empires, faith, violence, psychology and many more. The comparison with Tolkien can be made on a basis of antithesis. Unlike *Lord of the Rings*, *Dune Chronicles* are syncretic in their nature. The issue of colonialism is viewed from a perspective of every colonial empire. This syncretic nature is even presented in novels' language, where words from Slavic, Persian, Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Turkic and other tongues are used to describe numerous aspects of Dune's world.

2. Theoretical and methodological approach

The article is mostly based on theory of literature and includes text analysis. This paper's main goal is to proof that the real theocracy according to Frank Herbert is possible only through achieving divine state of existence on both physical and mental level by the ruler or a society. I have chosen Frank Herbert's works as an example because of his complex approach to the matters of faith, society and politics, considering also his private beliefs.

3. Religion as revolutionary force

All the aspects of the world of *Dune* presented in the chapter above served as a necessary introduction to Frank Herbert's views on politics and religion. The feudal world, despite being very brutal and full of power struggles, is ultimately stagnant. People who live under different nobles are divided almost ideologically. The best example of such divide is a conflict between fear-based rules of Harkonnen and - run by the chivalric ideals - Atreides, who execute

loyalty through promotion of honourable behaviour. This paradoxically prevents any major changes within such world because persecuted people always have a possibility of finding better overlord, which prevents them from staging the revolt or even influencing some changes that would reshape this flawed system. Under this circumstances the only thing that would sprung a galaxy-wide revolution are people who do not belong to the system and simultaneously have some strong motivation to forcibly change it from the outside. In *Dune* those people are Fremen and their motivation is the new religion [5].

Religion under certain circumstances may be an agent of change. Atheistic ideologies also possess such power. The picture of religion as an ideology of change is more apparent when considering words of Steven Hrotic, who defines religion as “a social system, like any other within a given domain, which is legitimated by the claim of supernatural authority” [6]. This definition implies that leaders of a religious revolution would, unlike purely ideological ones, legitimate themselves by some supernatural authorities. The difference between religious and atheistic ideologies lies here in a fact that ‘supernatural’ in case of theists refers to some actual deity. Atheists, on the other hand, would rather refer to ‘will of the people’, ‘greater good’, ‘historical justice’ or any other ideological concept that basically replaces God as a source of morality and goodness but in sociological sense it serves the same purpose of ‘divine’ legitimation.

In the book the atheistic Bene Gesserit create fertile ground for emergence of religious movement before Paul Atreides’ arrival to Arrakis. The lives of Paul and his son are examples not only for world-shifting power of religion but also on how manipulation of narratives and myths might have negative consequences for those who wield them. Plans of Bene Gesserit did not predict the rise of Fremen empire, or the birth of God Emperor. Both of these events have caused a great disturbance within the Sisterhood, bringing it to the verge of extinction during Leto II ‘Golden Path’. Herbert presents this as an example of unpredictable nature of the Universe, where organisation that theoretically possesses total control is defeated by unpredictable success of its experiment. In case of Bene Gesserit this experiment was Kwisatz Haderach - a man possessing ‘genetic memory’ of all of his ancestors. Bene Gesserit were able to access the memories of all their female ancestors, which contributed to their vast knowledge but the male Bene Gesserit, called Kwisatz Haderach would be able to see all of his ancestors memories back to cellular level.

The scene for a revolution is set: a stagnant, oppressive empire with limited possibilities of social mobility, a monopolist economy that relies on one resource and overly confident scientific and religious group that achieves its goals through social manipulation. The only element left are Fremen - the manpower for the revolution.

Just like everything else in Herbert’s book Fremen can be compared to many real-life societies. From linguistic point of view they seem similar to Cossacks from the times of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Their settlements are called *sietches* and, according to *Terminology of the Imperium*, they are:

'Place of assembly in time of danger', a notion that may also be attributed to Cossack sietches. At the same time their style of living puts them closer to Bedouins. This combination creates a nation of independent warriors that is simultaneously perfectly used to harsh desert environment. The concept of violence and war is actually crucial for establishing power structures within Fremen communities. Paul Atreides with his honour-based approach towards social norms is the catalyst for social change. This approach can be encapsulated in the conversation between Paul and Fremen leader - Stilgar: "'Do you think you could lift your hand against me?' Paul asked. Stilgar began to tremble. 'It's the way', he muttered 'It's the way to kill off world strangers found in the desert and take their water as a gift to Shai-Hulud' Paul said. 'Yet you permitted two such to live one night, my mother and myself'. As Stilgar remained silent, trembling, staring at him, Paul said: 'Ways change, Stil. You have changed them yourself'. Stilgar looked down at the yellow emblem on the knife he held. 'When I am Duke of Arrakin with Chani by my side, do you think I'll concern myself with every detail concerning Tabr sietch?' Paul asked. 'Do you concern yourself with the internal problems of every family?' Stilgar continued staring at his knife. 'Do you think I wish to cut off my right arm?' Paul demanded. Slowly, Stilgar looked up at him. 'You!' Paul said. 'Do you think I wish to deprive myself or the tribe of your wisdom and strength?' In a low voice, Stilgar said: 'The young man of my tribe whose name is known to me, this young man I could kill on the challenge floor, Shai-Hulud willing. The Lisan al-Gaib, him I could not harm. You knew this when you handed me this knife.' 'I knew it', Paul agreed. Stilgar opened his hand. The knife clattered against the stone of the floor. 'Ways change', he said." [7] This conversation between friends and allies exposes innate brutality of Fremen system of beliefs. Such political system can function only on a local scale in a decentralized parastate. The origins of such approach are deeply rooted in human nature and are difficult to root out. Nevertheless, Paul's rise to power sprung creation of statehood among Fremens.

This sense of statehood while being a revolution in itself is further consolidated by religious revolution. Paul Atreides could not be able to unify people of Arrakis if it was not for two important players: Missionaria Protectiva and Pardot Kynes.

Initially the Fremen used to share the stagnancy of the Imperium. Despite being in a state of constant conflict with much more powerful opponent, they could not find any ideology that would transform their society into a serious force on Dune. This was change by Pardot Kynes, imperial planetologist, who had offered them a vision of terraforming Arrakis into a more hospitable planet. This promise of better future for next generations was a spark that has started a slow change in Fremen mentality, comparable to the humanist revolution in Europe. It put them in a historiological time perspective, gave them strength to dream, but it was just an immaterial, distant social emotion. Bene Gesserit unknowingly gave this emotion a face of Paul Atreides. Through the actions of Missionaria Protectiva they have planted an idea of Messiah in the Fremen mental space. This had created a revolutionary pot of violent people, resentful

towards the oppressive system and the promise of better future for them. The promise, whose fulfiller would be a prophet from the stars. I believe it explains the phenomena of Paul's rise to power and his jihad during which Fremen conquered the Imperium, reshaping it completely. As put by Thomas Carlyle in his book *Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*: "to dry dead fuel, waiting for the lightning out of Heaven that shall kindle it. The great man . . . is the lightning . . . Those are critics of small vision, I think, who cry: 'See, is it not the sticks that made the fire?'". [8] This lightning coming *nomen est omen* from the sky was Paul Atreides.

4. The Golden Path

Although Paul Atreides's rise to power as Muad'dib was an outcome of plans and ideals of outside forces, he himself created a distinct ideology that affected humanity thousands of years after his death. This ideology was the 'Golden Path'.

First vocalized by Paul in *Dune* the full introduction of this idea was performed by his son Leto II in *God Emperor of Dune*. Its goals were simple: saving humanity from destruction and oppression. That was to be achieved in two forms: sociological and genetic. The first aspect of the 'Golden Path' was directly connected with the rule of God Emperor Leto II. Son of Paul, he achieved superhuman abilities by merging his body with sandtrout (a larval form of sandworm). This made him immune to almost every possible kind of attack and extensively prolonged his life. His rule lasted for over three millennia and was marked by oppression and isolation, goals of which was to spring a great expansion after tyrant's death. The second aspect was the breeding program which ultimate aim was to create people resistant to manipulation by any kind of future tyrants (including Bene Gesserit) [9, 10].

For someone brought up in democracy, especially after the experience of insane visions of 20th century ideologues, this plan of 'saving' humanity through tyranny and selected breeding might seem terrible and straight-out evil. But politics and religion of the world of *Dune* are not the our modern day ones, unless one's perspective is entirely materialistic. In *Messiah of Dune* we can observe how Paul struggles with his own vision. His human mind is not used to dealing with all of his ancestor's memories, as well as constant visions of possible futures. He realizes that his armies of fanatical Fremen are scourge of the Imperium and realizes that his short life and human fragility make him unable to establish the Golden Path [11]. His son, on the other hand is not constrained by such boundaries.

In the character of Leto II Herbert syncretizes two conceptions of God. From a materialistic point of view God is a prophet's child, a synthesized form of religion that is able to drag its parent's visions to their logical conclusions. It is important to point out that Leto II as God incarnated is negating religious institutions. As pointed out by Andrzej Szyjewski in his article *Kiedy Mesjasz wie, że jest Mesjaszem. Koncepcja religii w Diunie Franka Herberta (When the*

Messiah knows he is the Messiah. The concept of religion in Frank Herbert's *Dune*): "According to the regularities noticed by religious scholars, in order to survive, almost every religious community goes through several stages of consolidation. According to Wach, the beginning is a circle students, centred around the figure of a founder and leader (Theios aner - man of God). Students usually break up radically with their current life, creating a new family, and therefore an organization of an informal nature. The death of the founder forces concentration on his teachings - recalling and reflecting on them. Maintains the spiritual and charismatic character of the community as a 'primitive community', and therefore the lack of formalization (except for teachings). The next level of organization is the Church level. Its creation means standardization at all levels, writing down traditions and establishing them canon and consolidation of forms of worship. [...] As a consequence, the faithful are increasingly characterized by less religious fervour, but instead of people experiencing religious experiences, a group of specialists - religious functionaries (clergy) appears." [12] Leto II is supposed remedy for the consolidation and formalization of religion, as God himself he can prevent the religious movement that forms around him from focusing on its own survival rather than realization of religious dogmas. Frank Herbert tells it directly in *Children of Dune*: "Golden Elixir of Life degenerated into external wizardry. Its mystical signs became mere symbols for deeper psychological processes, and those processes of course, ran wild. What they needed was a living god and they didn't have one..." [3, p. 410] In book's world Leto II had to achieve functional immortality and omnipotence in order to fulfil his father's vision, an immortal and all-knowing being was the only one that could ascend over common human morality in order to achieve greater good.

Another possible interpretation of God Emperor is him replacing the conventional Church institution in accordance with Kantian idea of theocracy, as presented by Stephen Palmquist, who argues that in Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793/1794) the author proposes an idea of 'ethical community' which could only become true through the institution of a Church. This community would be of a political form, yet nonpolitical matter and compares it with Jewish theocracy, with warning that it should not devolve into purely political being as it happened in case of Jewish theocracy. Ultimately, such system should unite humanity in a common vision of a divine legislator whose only law is inward, binding Church members together like families, through the law of love. Whereas the legal rights supported by democracy and a system of international law can go a long way to prepare for world peace [13]. What Palmquist calls 'an ethical state of nature' is the rule of a being that embodies the might and omniscience of God. Leto II is able to unite humanity in a common vision, moreover, his rule is the longest era of peace and prosperity in the history of human species and realization of Golden Path is supposed to create a perfect human society that would last forever. In some way Leto II is not a god as much as he is a messiah of a new form of humanity.

5. Leto's theocracy in the light of real political systems

What kind of idea of theocracy does Leto II represent? His supernatural abilities definitely make it hard to compare him to any human leaders, whereas his physical form and lack of direct command over reality exclude him from the category of 'gods'. Knowing Herbert's strong devotion to the idea of syncretism it seems that Leto II possesses the traits of both human leader and divine deity. It is apparent especially if one thinks about his title, which combines these two positions.

In terms of religion, Leto II is a personification of various Christian ideas. His plan of directly affecting humanity through millennia of authoritarian rule and purposefully starting the chains of events that would end up realizing his plans of a perfect future resemble the acts of God in the Bible, especially the Old Testament. His later disappearance and merging with sandworms bring to mind Christian ideas such as *deus absconditus*, or polytheistic ones - *deus otiosus*. Still, there is a problem of physical constraints that make it difficult to apply aforementioned ideas to Herbert's God Emperor. Leto II is still constrained by the nature of reality, which puts restraints on his omnipotence. In fact, the idea that seems to embody the divine aspect of God Emperor is theistic naturalism. According to this idea, the world is like a perfect mechanism that once started does not require constant direct interventions from the outside. From this perspective, the entirety of Leto's rule was a 'setting of mechanism' that would function perfectly and independently long after its creator leaves the scene [14].

From a political point of view, rules of Atreides resemble some of historical forms of theocratic governments. The similarities between Paul Atreides and Muhammad are indisputable. Both are prophets of an upcoming God, both start a jihad that leads to a creation of the new theocratic empire. Although, unlike the father of Islam, Muad'dib sacrifices himself after being blinded by his opponents, he later re-emerges as the Preacher and gets killed by people who used to be his followers. This puts him more in line with Jesus Christ but both of these figures could not form a stable form of theocratic government. In real world, the attempt of preserving a theocratic state after the death of its founder leads to divisions and schisms. In Islam this division occurred right after Muhammad's death and was fuelled by personal divisions between prophet's family and his political subjects. A resonance of this story may be found also in *Children of Dune* where, after the disappearance of Paul the political conflict ensues between his sister 'possessed' by her genetic memory of Vladimir Harkonnen, his mother who wants to secure her grandchildren's future and the son of the previous emperor. The schism in *Dune Chronicles* is stopped by the coming of the God Emperor. Leto II eliminates or subjugates all other parties through plots aided with his powers of prescience and enhanced physicality. This allowed him to call himself 'God Emperor' and therefore prevent the clergy from taking power in his theocratic state [15].

The syncretic nature of God Emperor is what makes it difficult to categorize and assign him directly to any real life religion. As it is explained in the book *Dune and Philosophy*: “Leto II discusses not just the meaning of life for individuals as for ancient Earth philosophers from the Buddha and Socrates to Albert Camus and Susan Wolf, but the meaning of life for humanity itself. In God Emperor of Dune, Leto II talks with the Duncans, Moneo, and Hwi Noree not just about the meaning of life for individuals, but for humanity as a whole, across vast reaches of time. [...] Frank Herbert was trying - in his own imperfect way - to imagine a multicultural future for humanity, one not dominated by Western cultures. To wander back onto the Golden Path, Herbert's imperfect efforts, as well as Leto's example in God Emperor of Dune, show that learning from all of humanity is a key to the meaning of life.” [16].

As Leto II ascended to the throne, he decided to marry his own sister. This move was purely political and was meant to show his absolute, godly power (marriages between siblings were strictly forbidden in Fremen society). This was a symbolic end of hierocracy and beginning of the finest form of theocracy. The rule of God Emperor lasted for over three millennia and was characterized by oppression and stagnation. All of this was planned as a part in ‘Golden Path’. On the outside the actions of Leto II seem suicidal from the perspective of his state. History of countries like China or Japan, which also used to be ruled by theocratic emperors, show that stagnation and lack of modernization ultimately lead to the spectacular fall of such empire. Moreover, the totalitarian and oppressive rule that God Emperor imposes on his citizens would inevitably be a reason for many powerful people within his state to start plotting against him. In Egypt, China, Japan and all other theocracies the leaders used to be periodically pushed aside in favour of the leaders stemming from clergy or military structures. In case of Leto such actions could not succeed due to his mystical abilities [17].

The question of ‘godhood’ is a way in which Frank Herbert deals with the most apparent problem with Golden Path: the applicability. The author lived in times when two great ideologies - national socialism and communism - were trying to introduce their plans for humanity. Both of them relied on advanced social engineering that was supposed to create the perfect society either by eugenics or social and behavioural indoctrination. Both of them also failed miserably, leaving millions of casualties and hundreds of destroyed objects of cultural heritage, not to mention negative social effects that remain until today in countries that were affected by these ideologies. Those systems lacked power that would allow them to introduce their plans. Third Reich was broken militarily, Soviet Union - economically, before they managed to eliminate their external enemies. The plans of entirely reshaping humanity was not just an invention of said ideologies. It derived from the observations how humanity was shaped by various historical events. The conception that lies underneath many ideologies is that those tides of history can be harnessed by the will of the ideologues and ultimately lead to their postulated utopias. However, what those ideologists fail to understand are simple rules of power and passing. Rule of power may be

considered a sociological equivalent of Newton's laws of motion, with the most important one being the third law: 'If two bodies exert forces on each other, these forces have the same magnitude but opposite directions'. Brutal actions create brutal reactions. The rapid change in social and political reality, which is required for the introduction of a new, radical ideology causes an equally strong (or even stronger) reaction to such violation of social order. The alternative would have been gradual introduction of changes, therefore allowing human nature to adjust to the changing environment. The main problem with that approach is the matter of leadership that would uphold the proper direction of their plans without degenerating into an oligarchy focused only on keeping their privileges. Herbert's answer to all of these problems is a figure of God that possesses every bit of knowledge in the history of humanity and can extrapolate that data to foresee future events. His immortality and physical resilience grant him protection from factors that has always led to the downfall of all humans before him and the fact that he is a son of a previous ruler that possessed divine authorization for ruling only solidifies his authority.

The idea of theocracy in *Dune Chronicles* does not refer to applicability of such system of government but rather to a religious aspect of a society that follows (often without even realizing it) the directions of God. Richard Dawkins, a famous antitheist wrote in his book *The God Delusion* that: "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully" [18]. Putting aside all counter-arguments for such radical statement, what Dawkins presents is all human, materialistic argument for the immorality of God, and indeed, from our perspective of merely a century of life (at best) and our limited processing skills the world as it is may seem as cold and cruel. God gives us much greater perspective. Monotheistic religions present the entire life cycle of our Universe as merely a prelude to eternal life. God in that view is not a bloodthirsty oppressor or a mad, selfish dictator, similar to many of polytheistic gods. He is rather a powerful force that lies outside of the natural order but at the same time is its source. The evil done by the God, in opposition to the one done by gods, is only evil from the point of view of humans who see death and suffering as a tragedy. From the point of view of a God death means ascension to the higher level of existence and for a righteous person there is nothing to fear in the afterlife, to quote the Bible: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10.28), or John 8.51: "Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death". In contrast, in most of non-Abrahamic religions Paradise and hell were very similar, often located in the same place and they were strictly connected with one's social position during life on Earth. Leto II is a God in a narrow, more humanist sense. His paradise is the Golden Path that grants immortality not to individual human

souls, but rather to humanity as species. He also has his 'chosen ones' - people who stem from the line of Atreides like Siona from *God Emperor of Dune* [19].

The theocratic regime of God Emperor seems similar to many historical ideas in the way it 'manages' its followers. The main difference lies within divine omniscience of Atreides' theocratic rulers. This is what makes their actions that, if taken by a mortal would be morally unacceptable, even if said individual had intentions of bringing greater good in the long run, are morally right in the cosmic scale. As put in *Dune and Philosophy: Weirder Way of the Mentat*: "Lastly, I disagree with both Socrates and Aristotle that a person can only be living the good life if they are just. I think sometimes better not to act with justice, and again, I think the *Dune Chronicles* demonstrates why. Paul and Leto II are both oppressive rulers who prop up corrupt empires. What they do benefits humanity in the long run, but they do it at the expense of innocent people who must endure their repressive theocratic dictatorships. I think that there's no way to call these two just, and yet I think they are taking the best path open to them, doing what's morally right even though they aren't doing what is just. Being just wouldn't take them closer to the good life, but further away." [20] From this point of view the figure of God Emperor serves not only as a metaphysical manifestation of a divine plan for humanity but also as a tool for social engineering. Leto II serves as a symbol of superiority of the spirit of humanity over matter, he sets standards and hierarchies for every human being in the Imperium, providing each with some kind of purpose within his Golden Path. This puts him above not only any conventional emperors but also his own father.

6. Herbertian theocracy

The idea that protrudes throughout the books is the essence of what could be named 'Herbertian theocracy'. The stark contrast between Paul and Leto II, the first one being a revolutionary, powerful but still a mortal, suffering from a typical human weaknesses. This kind of people appeared often in history either in form of religious leaders like Muhammad or Hong Xiuquan, or radical ideologues like Lenin, Hitler or Napoleon. Paul Atreides stands out among these people because, unlike all of them (maybe except Muhammad), he managed to make his vision a reality. In a sense, he is an ideal prophet, preparing a ground for the coming of God to the point that he literally becomes his father. From *Dune* and *Dune Messiah* one might draw a conclusion that the birth of a new God is a painful process that requires countless human sacrifices. The prophets that spark theocratic ideologies are usually leaders of very efficient militaries, which they use for establishing their domains. Paul is a model prophet in a sense that he does not allow his ego to affect his worldview. Herbert also provides the readers with a possible outcome where the leader of a theocratic empire is consumed by the earthly aspect of her personality. Alia - Paul's sister - initially possessed same powers as her brother but she could not endure such burden. Therefore, she aligned with ego-memory of her grandfather - baron Vladimir

Harkonnen. The character of old baron carries an important symbolism in *Dune Chronicles*, he is a manifestation of hedonism and cruelty, serving as a reminder of how corrupting the power can be. This corruption is the outcome of the inability of an individual to deal with such power and responsibility that comes with it, ultimately leading to either losing the grips on reality while pursuing desired goals, or dedicating oneself upkeeping current position. Both possibilities lead to inflation of value of other people in the eyes of the ruler and subsequently to justification of increasingly gruesome and immoral acts no longer for the sake of leader's subjects but one's own comfort or detached visions.

Paul Atreides, as a model prophet avoided the psychological dangers of his power. Although until this moment his story held much resemblance to that of Muhammad, after losing his eyes he follows the Fremen tradition and sacrifices himself to the desert. Later, as the Preacher he prepares the ground for the coming of God Emperor and gets assassinated in Arakeen. Both of these deaths carry a symbolic meaning within the story. First one is a form of voluntary suicide performed by the Fremen who went blind and became useless for their tribe. By following this tradition Paul underlines his humanity and obedience to Fremen culture, this act should be considered in contrast to the decision of Leto II to marry his own sister, thereby breaking the social taboo, or rather symbolically ascending above it as God Emperor. The second one is more of a final accord that releases the Imperium from the rule of Muad'dib and allows his son to claim the throne. Therefore, the idea of 'Herbartian theocracy' acknowledges the inevitability of tragedy that happens to all of prophets who set the stage for the coming of their God. Just as those who start the revolution do not live to see the new world it would create, so the prophets cannot see their heavenly kingdoms on Earth.

The motif of the need of passing of older generations in order for achieving better future. Even in the Bible the people led by Moses were not able to live in the promised land. Death of Paul is somehow foreshadowing the inevitable cycle of passing presented in later chapters of the series. Generations that are engineered by Paul's son are meant to die in an imperfect world, confined by the will of God Emperor, in order to allow their descendants to be free and strong enough to survive the hardships of reality. Leto II seems to be the only character that fully realizes his place in this *theatrum mundi*. This makes him accept the fact that he will also die and his death will serve the Golden Path. His omniscience is what allows him to strictly control the flow of events without exercising too much force on the world but it is his dedication to the good of humanity that prevents him from falling into pride and selfishness, which theoretically could turn him into a common tyrant.

7. Conclusions

Overall *Dune Chronicles* present an idealistic vision of what can be called a humanist theocracy. Although it might seem improbable for those two

ideologies to coexist, Herbert managed to form a religious belief system derived from syncretisation of known religions and philosophies and attached it to a ruling class of archetypical dynasty of 'noble knights'. Nevertheless, such system fails when it comes to practical applicability. Within the universe of *Dune* exists the Spice, without it human mind is restrained by its biological limitations and although some substances that exist on Earth can cause similar effects they are still inferior to its science-fiction counterpart. Still, the sandworms that enabled the transformation of Leto II are not comparable to any known species. What should be considered is the ultimate goal of the Golden Path - the creation of new humanity comprising of individuals that would be free from the influences of any future tyrants and spread it throughout the galaxy. This idea is in its root a transhumanist attempt to change the human nature through socio-historic and genetic manipulation. Throughout its execution allowing for times of chaos as well as of strict control and isolation (Herbert might refer to behaviour of far-east cultures of China and Japan which, after long period of isolationism, used to rapidly expand their influences). As it is presented in a dialogue between Moneo and Leto II: "For what do you hunger, Lord?" Moneo ventured. 'For a humankind which can make truly long-term decisions. Do you know the key to that ability, Moneo?' 'You have said it many times, Lord. It is the ability to change your mind.'" [21]

Although it is unclear whether Leto II would indeed agree with Kant on liberalism (although Herbert's contemporary liberals were much different from those of Kant) his idea of creating the perfect society of people who are intellectually independent would be similar to the ideals of early liberals. His words from *God Emperor of Dune* seem to rather criticise the inevitable degeneration that occurs in every political system than the liberal thought itself: "Scratch a conservative and you find someone who prefers the past over any future. Scratch a liberal and find a closet aristocrat. It's true! Liberal governments always develop into aristocracies. The bureaucracies betray the true intent of people who form such governments. Right from the first, the little people who formed the governments which promised to equalize the social burdens found themselves suddenly in the hands of bureaucratic aristocracies. Of course, all bureaucracies follow this pattern, but what a hypocrisy to find this even under a communized banner. Ahhh, well, if patterns teach me anything it's that patterns are repeated. My oppressions, by and large, are no worse than any of the others and, at least, I teach a new lesson." [21, p. 227]

Indeed, many deeds of Leto II could be attributed to every other dictator in the history of mankind. What differentiates him from them is his enlightened state of knowledge and power that ascend him above any other human being. This is the point that connects God Emperor with Kantian ideal society of enlightened individuals. Although no single person is able to live for thousands of years, possess a knowledge of all its ancestors or extrapolate all data available to the point of clairvoyance, people as a whole can achieve such things. Even in today's world, with almost instant sharing of great amounts of information, such God Emperor is possible to become a reality in form of a civilization build upon

knowledge, faith and self-discipline, In order to achieve this millions of people would need to learn to accept the past and focus on building the better future. Although as Herbert shows on example of Atreides' history, this challenge would carry many dangers even to people who lived in almost perfect environment of interstellar nobility. Therefore the introduction of such ideas of humanist theocracy would pose a great threat of emergence of such figures like Vladimir Harkonnen and subsequent degeneration of people who possessing great intelligence but insufficient moral and mental capabilities to resist the spirit of Machiavellism and hedonistic decadence.

This chance for transformation of human nature through religion is not a new one, as Herbert in his work syncretises the elements of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. The true question is whether such alteration to human nature, even if done throughout thousands of years, is even feasible.

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