



The Philosophy of Science Fiction: Henri Bergson and the Fabulations of Philip K. Dick

By James Burton



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The Philosophy of Science Fiction: Henri Bergson and the Fabulations of Philip K. Dick explores the deep affinity between two seemingly quite different thinkers, in their attempts to address the need for salvation in (and from) an era of accelerated mechanization, in which humans' capacity for destroying or subjugating the living has attained a planetary scale.

The philosopher and the science fiction writer come together to meet the contradictory imperatives of a realist outlook—a task which, arguably, philosophy and science fiction could only ever adequately undertake in collaboration. Their respective approaches meet in a focus on the ambiguous status of fictionalizing, or fabulation, as simultaneously one of mechanization's most devastating tools, and the possibility of its undoing.

When they are read together, the complexities and paradoxes thrown up by this ambiguity, with which both Bergson and Dick struggle on their own, open up new ways to navigate ideas of mechanism and mysticism, immanence and transcendence, and the possibility and meaning of salvation. The result is at once an original reading of both thinkers, a new critical theory of the socio-cultural, political and ethical function of fictionalizing, and a case study in the strange affinity, at times the uncanny similarity, between philosophy and science fiction.



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Editorial Review

Review

"In investigating both the prolific and controversial science fiction novelist Philip K. Dick (1928–82) and Henri Bergson (1851–1941), whom William James deemed an intellectual genius, Burton (Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Berlin) takes a bifurcated path. Examining the strange affinity between these two seemingly different thinkers, the author navigates ideas of mechanism and mysticism, immanence and transcendence, and the possibility and meaning of soteriology. Both Dick and Bergson balked at the push toward mechanization, in which destruction of the planet seemed so immanent (as it still does today). Only collaboration between a science fiction writer and a philosopher could lead, Burton argues, to a realistic outlook that sutures contradictory imperatives. Their respective approaches may be said to fuse in fictionalizing/fabulation, which is a powerful tool of mechanization, yet is also capable of implementing a device for its undoing. This reviewer's favorite chapter deals with Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), adapted for the screen as *Blade Runner* in 1982 under the direction of Ridley Scott. Here the author covers provocative themes like robot theology, creative destruction, and salvation. **Summing Up:** Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty." - *CHOICE*

"Thinking through the work of Philip K. Dick alongside the philosophy of Henri Bergson is no mere contrivance. By showing how each was writing at the edge of knowledge, both theirs and ours, Burton has fabulated a new thought with truly evental consequences for metafiction, ecology, and theology." ?*John Ó Maoilearca, Professor of Film and Television Studies, Kingston University, UK*

"In a brilliant act of superimposition, James Burton brings Henri Bergson's evolutionary mysticism to bear on the divine invasions-in fiction and in life-of S-F writer Philip K. Dick. The vision of "immanent soteriology" that emerges, in which transcendent fictions jam the engines of necessity, not only illuminates the method behind Dick's madness but reveals the crucial emancipatory role that fabulation can and does play within posthuman thought and religion. With clear thinking and graceful writing, Burton boldly indicates a "perturbation in the reality field" of contemporary materialism." ?*Erik Davis, author of TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*

About the Author

James Burton is a research fellow at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry in Berlin, Germany. A former Alexander von Humboldt fellow, he has been a lecturer at the universities of Goldsmiths, Kent and Klagenfurt. His interdisciplinary research across philosophy, literature, cultural and media studies, concerns the myriad critical, cultural and ethical relationships between fiction, technology and the posthuman.

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