

PHILIP K. DICK AND THE QUESTION OF DYSTOPIA AND UTOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates the question of utopia and dystopia, the issues of human conflicts with technology, deterioration of society and nature vis-à-vis fanciful technological worlds, dystopian dominance of technology over humans, and searching for redemption in Philip K. Dick's novels. It also says about disadvantages of mechanization of life and high-technology as a disastrous advancement which leads to dystopian world. Technology is known as a double-edged sword and human usually thinks about the beneficial and utopia-making edge of it, but Dick's novels show his fears of war, social failure, emerging of military technology and political struggles; and he portrays turning of life which is looking for a utopia into a dystopia on the other edge of this sword.

KEY WORDS

Utopia, Dystopia, Science and Technology, Future Societies

1. INTRODUCTION

Science Fiction has attempted to trace and analyze the advances of technology and its effects on society. This literary genre has arisen in literature to focus on technology and civilization. It focuses on the debates between human and machines, both mechanical and organic. One of the concerns which has been surveying in this genre is the human dependence on technology in every aspects of his progressing life.

Science fiction has been as a main part of popular culture since the beginning of nineteenth century. Since that time, it also has been functioning as a historiographer of the technological advances in human life in literature. It predicts and follows many unbelievable achievements such as space colonization, robotic life, super/trans/post human life, cyborg culture, and so on.

One of the main themes that science fiction tries to show is about creating a peaceful and paradise-like world called a term which Sir Thomas More coined it "utopia" as an ideal and imaginary community which owns a perfect commonwealth. He attempted to create an ideal city from human values in lieu of mirroring the stability of economy and politics. More scientifically, it is an ideal society based on scientific and technological progress in which government, laws, and social planning makes use of science to promote ideal living standards in the near or distant future. In contrast, dystopia, according to M.H Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, is "a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination." Dystopias are dreadful images of the future, that give people a chance to run away, so far as their capabilities can perhaps take them. Dystopias usually show different types of oppressive control systems for societies, absence of personal freedoms and are also characterized by mass poverty for its

citizens. Science fiction almost shows (not-too-) distant future through utopian and dystopian narrative. Utopian stories show perfect worlds far from any war, racism, dictatorship, and so on.

2. Philip Dick and PAST AND FUTURE

Philip Kindred Dick (1928-1982), American writer, who has written 44 novels and 121 short stories. Philip K. Dick, Sci-Fi American novelist whose fictional world is extraordinary in that a novelty on the nuclear apocalypse is noticeable. His novels deserve a meticulous look about nuclear issue because the nuclear threat and its impact on human psyche are not usually debated. Dick's farsighted writings embody strong visions of a highly technological world which collapse borders between human and technology. He shows trends at the present time that will lead to future suffering and disorder, predicts entropic deterioration of society and nature, and dissolves reality and society into malformed structures, in which usual classification of space, time, and reality are broken. Dick describes fanciful technological worlds with weird forms of art and media culture, and a breakdown of borders of modernity that foresee concepts of hyper-reality, and imitation. He was more interested than his other contemporaries to write about the human decline and social values, and giving warning against the future disasters over mankind. Like cyberpunk, a postmodern subgenre of Science Fiction in which stories happen incompletely or completely in the virtual reality world created by computers or networks, and the characters in cyberpunk may be either human or artificial intelligences (George Slusser and Tom Shippey, 1992). Dick predicts and sets his fantasies within a world drawn from contemporary forms of global capitalism and Cold War.

During the Cold War the threat of nuclear annihilation and dystopia were always on people's minds. Most of his dystopian works show the reality of technology as a double-edged sword. His works show deep fears of war, social failure, nuclear apocalypse/holocaust, and military technology and political struggles increasing rapidly out of control. That is importance of dystopia and one of the reasons that Dick has chosen it. He shows a future in which totalitarian rulers use media culture to manipulate and control crowds of people, and were the consequences of cybernetic systems in a society govern humans through the use of machines, technology, and in some cases predominant species. As a result, the collapse of humans and technology are two main themes of Dick's fiction.

Dick's works regularly show occurrences from numerous points of view, making him a forerunner of postmodern multi-outlook vision. He deals with the invention of androids (humanoid robots) which put in question the boundaries between reality and simulation, technology and the human, as in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), which presents his most convincing post-apocalyptic vision, and typifies Dick's original themes of the collapse between the real and unreal, human and technology, and natural reality and simulation in high-technology world.

Unlike most other writers in these traditions within Science Fiction, Philip K. Dick employs the basic strategies of these traditions to analyze the issue of nuclear as a technological threat without, however, reaching the same conclusion as the other writers. Further, the solutions he evolves are also very different from that of the other novelists. Seeking for nuclear weapons as fate technology in order to protect peace can be traced back to the role which is played by science and technology in modern technocratic societies. Literature, especially Science Fiction genre, has been always tried to trace and analyze the development of science and technology and its impact on human society. Dick has created apocalyptic worlds and through the medium of common

working people who inhabited these worlds tried to understand shifting nature of reality and humanity. There are two principles focus in Dick's fictions which are shifting nature of reality and what it means to be human. In order to my paper these aspects he looks at certain issue that is generally raised in apocalyptic fiction in Science Fiction in general.

One of the main concerns is the issue of human beings becoming victims of their own machinations. The analysis of the characters in Dick's works depict how the characters experience extreme forms of mental anguish due to the presence of the dystopia shadow and attempt to develop various defensive psychological mechanisms. The characters under threat initially develop into victims or victimizers but eventually all of them end up as victims without fail. Dick's works focus on the characters' search for redemption in apocalyptic fiction. He portrays conflict as a struggle between two opposing forces locked in a struggle for the control of power. The strategies adopted by fictional characters facilitate an understanding of human fears, despair, selective ignorance, and anxieties. His fictional worlds make the readers confront the dystopian threat without being a participant in violence.

According to DarkoSuvin, utopia is the imaginary structure of a specific human community where standards and personal relations are arranged based on more ideal rules and the structure is concerning a fact emerging out of human's oldest dream. The War of the Worlds by H.G Wells is a good example of this, and Lyman Tower Sargent, the American professor, believes that the structure that most promptly comes to our mind is utopia and the writer proposes a comprehensive explanation of a society that he intends his readers to look at it noticeably. In my opinion, dystopian fiction indicates a new society in which there is a fundamental social fissure between the masters of the modern technical system from those who work and live within it. According to my research, Dick's works can be read as a dystopian vision of the postmodern adventure in which science and technology are showed as creating new forms of life. The next few generations keep the destiny of the evolution of all human life on the planet in their hands.

3. DYSTOPIA IN TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

Dick creates technological societies in which conflict plays a predominant role. Dick's fictions reflect contemporary technological societies in which the economic production is primarily carries out through the use of science and technology. His primary concern in science fiction about such societies is how they are often in a state of conflict. Carl Freedman was one of Dick's first critics who attempted to develop a comprehensive critique of Dick's works. He, in his article in science fiction studies, argues that the defining features of Dick's fictions are possessed by period in which social and economic elements are mainly affected by the common capitalistic system of his environment.

Dick's fictions display how war economies use technological improvement to alter reality and retain humans in a state of belief in perpetual and unavoidable war. In other fictions, it avoids humans from progressing thoughts that could make alternative worlds related in human values. After studying the psyche of people under the dystopian threat and working backwards to analyze technological societies that began as scientific and technological utopias before its degeneration into dystopias, Robert Jay Lifton, argue that these technological societies are based on accumulation of power to carry out widespread violence. After a broad analysis of Dick's fictional display of the society, a serious threat

of nuclear weapons will be shown. To have a better understanding of such threat, in his view, human needs to be aware of the different debates on it in a multidisciplinary field including literature, history, and psychology. This could be a good reason. And another reason could be that it can bring different experts and critics to the table of nuclear issue. Dystopia has been very important for science fiction readers because of the importance of science and technology and complexity of robotic human life in very close future and its impacts on our life, our wrong conception about having a utopian world only by science and technology, abusing the power of technology in having totalitarian dominance over societies and human fear of confrontation with a post-apocalyptic or dystopian situation. There are some more reasons which are available in Dick's fictions: firstly, society is consumed by science and technology and the pursuit of robotic human life, which are important not only in the society, but also in the immediate future. Secondly, some people believe that science and technology can usher in the era of utopia, but most believe it as a fallacy. Thirdly, there are many examples throughout Dick's works where governments or powerful characters have used science and technology to suppress and control others. As technology advances, there will be more and more opportunities for those to abuse this power. Finally, human beings on every epoch in Dick's fictions face the same fears regarding a post-apocalyptic future. They know that the world that they are living in is filled with absurdity and dehumanization. In this world, there is no moral value which shows human has kept it alive. The aim for building a utopia is turned into a dystopian nightmare in which technology in the future has shown up having utopia as a mirage.

3. CONCLUSION

The characters in Philip K. Dick's dystopian novels are faced with the danger unbridled technological advancement in a technological society where machines begin to dominate humans in almost every aspect of human existence. Dick's apprehension over this aspect of modern technological societies finds expressions in his fictions. He deals with each of the major aspects of a technology-driven society: the impact on the human psyche, science vis-à-vis technology, and lastly, the shape of the future society.

Dick tries to assess the effectiveness of these defensive psychological mechanism in dealing with the dystopian threat and argues that the characters instead of finding solace are further traumatized by getting sucked into their inner world or reality and losing the touch with external reality or the world outside. Dick looks at the issue of human conflict in his own unique way by using the conventions of Science Fiction, which portrays worldly and unavoidable wars and adapts it examine human conflict in greater detail or raise questions like what does it mean to be human, the nature of reality, and the role of techno-utopias which degenerate into dystopia. His works focus on the characters' search for redemption in apocalyptic fiction.

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