

SERIES EDITOR: WILLIAM IRWIN  
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# D · U · N · E

## AND PHILOSOPHY



BLACKWELL PHILOSOPHY AND POP CULTURE SERIES

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# **DUNE AND PHILOSOPHY**

## **MINDS, MONADS, AND MUAD'DIB**

**Edited by**

**Kevin S. Decker**

**WILEY** Blackwell

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Navigators, Mentats, Fremmen, and Bene Gesserit

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**Steve Bein** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Dayton, where he is a specialist in Asian thought. He has written chapters for 11 different volumes on philosophy and popular culture, on topics ranging from *Blade Runner* to Wonder Woman. He's also a science fiction and fantasy novelist, and his sci-fi short stories make the occasional appearance in Philosophy and Science Fiction courses across the US. Steve knows fear is the mind-killer, and he can recite the Litany Against Fear by heart. However, these days he thinks the Litany Against Wasting Your Whole Night Watching Netflix is just as important.

**Matthew Crippen** has wormed his way across the world, touching down for visits in about 60 nations and holding academic positions in five, as well as doing other jobs ranging from teaching and performing music to coaching gymnastics to machete work on farms. The intercultural waters of his life - which range from living in Egypt and Korea to excavating indigenous ruins to tramping through African bush on anti-poaching patrols - has spiced his *Dune* chapter. It has also flavored his research, which burrows through the sands of history, cognitive science, and cross-

cultural value theory informed by one another and orbiting ecological concerns.

**Kevin S. Decker** is Professor of Philosophy at Eastern Washington University. He has edited or co-edited more than a dozen anthology books in philosophy and popular culture and is the author of *Who Is Who? The Philosophy of Doctor Who*. He failed the gom jabbar test on his first try, so his saga is over.

**Alexandru Dragomir** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Bucharest. He actually took up saber fencing after reading *Dune*, but had to quit to pursue his dream of becoming a Mentat-philosopher. Currently, he's doing research on the ethics of human enhancement and the problem of post-personhood. This involves mostly “armchair” conceptual analysis, so he won't get to travel the galaxy with a pain box in one hand and a gom jabbar in the other in search of superbeings.

**Sam Forsythe** studied philosophy and war studies at King's College London, and now works as a researcher at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt while finishing up his doctorate at Goethe University, Frankfurt. He has recently contributed chapters to the *Springer Handbook of Abductive Cognition* (2022), the *Routledge Handbook of Disinformation and National Security* (2022), and his first book, *Every Day Catastrophes*, will be published by Urbanomic/MIT Press in 2022. His current research interests led him into the wilderness between scientific inquiry, strategic rationality, and international politics, where he navigates using the concepts of C.S. Peirce as a philosophical paracompass. Otherwise, Sam spends his time as a good Fedaykin ought to: studying the secret Chakobsa hunting language and practicing prana-bindu grappling arts.



**Luke Hillman** did his graduate studies at the University of Arkansas and the University of Oklahoma, despite no formal Bene Gesserit instruction. His contribution in this volume is his first Wiley Blackwell publication, but hopefully not his last. His philosophical interests include philosophy of religion, philosophy of language, and Wittgenstein. Ever since Luke bought his first copy of *Dune* at a garage sale in high school, he's remained awestruck by Herbert's expansive universe, captivated by the history of House Atreides, and lost in the smell and taste of spice melange.

**Ilmari Hirvonen** is a doctoral student working on the philosophy of pseudoscience at the University of Helsinki. The Orange Catholic Bible has become quite familiar to him since, in his spare time, Hirvonen has been dabbling in the philosophy of religion. His other work and interests lie within metaphilosophy, epistemic justification, the epistemology of modality, philosophy of language, history of empiricism, and the Bene Gesserit venture of creating the Kwisatz Haderach. Hirvonen also makes Filmbooks on philosophy and worldview studies for high school students.

**A.M. Houot** completed his master's degree in Philosophy of Science, Technology, & Society at the University of Twente in The Netherlands. He podcasts, blogs, writes articles, and will pursue further graduate work. He is currently working on his first book, about psychedelics. *Dune* has been his favorite science fiction story since childhood, before he even knew what mind-altering drugs were. A friend of Frank Herbert once sent him peyote as a cure for writer's block; fortunately, A.M. did not experience writer's block at any point during the writing of his chapter.

**Aaron Irvin** is Associate Professor of the Ancient World at Murray State University. His research examines human organization, government, empire, and religion in the

Roman world. Completely lacking any sense of rhythm, he can proudly boast that he has never attracted a sandworm.

**Kara Kennedy** is a researcher, writer, and educator in the areas of science fiction, writing, and digital literacy. She completed her doctoral dissertation on the Bene Gesserit in the *Dune* series and is the author of *Women's Agency in the "Dune" Universe: Tracing Women's Liberation Through Science Fiction*. She has also published articles on world-building in *Dune* and runs the blog [DuneScholar.com](http://DuneScholar.com). She put off taking the gom jabbar test for too long and is now on the run from the Sisterhood as a suspected thinking machine.

**Tomi Kokkonen** is a philosopher of science, mind, and technology, with both personal and professional interest in science fiction. He has a PhD in theoretical philosophy and a MSocSc in practical philosophy, both from the University of Helsinki. This doubling down in philosophy is but one reason his colleagues consider him a genuine thinking machine. His dissertation discussed human evolution, a vision of which revealed itself to him after a feast of spicy food and Irish water of life. He currently works on how to introduce AI applications in society in ethically responsible ways. This is going to lead to a disaster, but someone has to take the first steps on the Golden Path.

**Mehmet Kuyurtar** has completed both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the Ege University Department of Philosophy, Turkey. His main research interests and publication areas include moral and political philosophies of Alfârâbî and Ibn Khaldun. Also, out of contempt against the Missionaria Protectiva, he studies religious pluralism and liberation theologies. In 2016 he participated in the organization of the International Borkluce Mustafa Symposium. Since the Harkonnen raids of January 6, 2017, he and his co-workers have been defending the Ege

University Department of Philosophy against the evil empire.

**R.S. Leiby** is a PhD candidate in philosophy at Boston University. She has recently contributed a chapter to Wiley Blackwell's *The Expanse and Philosophy*. When she's not thinking about political philosophy or science fiction, she's eagerly awaiting the Butlerian Jihad (since only the absolute destruction of thinking machines will get her off of the internet and back to work on her dissertation).

**“Greg Littmann,”** intoned Korba of Muad’Dib’s Quizarate, “you are accused of being a philosopher, of conducting a personal hunt for truth rather than accepting the truth of Muad’Dib or submitting to any orthodoxy.” Numb with terror, Littmann only shook his head. Korba glanced at the charge sheet. “You’re Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department at SIUE,” he pointed out. Littmann tried to speak but no words came. “The charges state that you willfully and with malice aforethought did publish on paradoxes of self-reference, evolutionary epistemology, and the philosophy of professional philosophy, among other topics. And not content to keep your heresies to academia, you wrote chapters for the public, tying philosophical issues to popular culture. You have contributed to numerous such volumes, including books dedicated to *Black Mirror*, *Doctor Who*, *Game of Thrones*, Neil Gaiman, Stephen King, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*.” Littmann looked desperately to his lawyer, who avoided his eyes and studied the courtroom floor. Korba put down the charge sheet and smiled. “Dr. Littmann, we Fremen have a saying. *Polish comes from the cities, wisdom from the desert*. Perhaps if you are quick, you will find some wisdom before Shai-Hulud takes you. Take him away.”

**Matti Mäkikangas** is a teacher and an author of philosophy and worldview studies. His philosophical

interests lean toward ethics and political philosophy and his worldview toward the needs of the invisible nobodies. On some mornings, Matti wakes up from dreams where he finds himself leading a great revolt against venture capitalists and fossil-fuel-driven conglomerates.

**Ethan Mills** is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where he trains student-Mentats in the weirding ways of Greek and Asian philosophy as well as philosophy and popular culture, including a course during which students make their own horror films. When he's not writing articles and books about classical Indian philosophy, he follows a Golden Path of engaging philosophically with popular culture in a mélange of locations from *Philip K. Dick and Philosophy* (2011) and the *Journal of Science Fiction and Philosophy* to his personal blog: *Examined Worlds: Philosophy and Science Fiction*. He became a *Dune* fan at age 15, but his attempts to usurp the Imperium were thwarted by his lack of water discipline and love of walking in rhythm.

**Jennifer Mundale** is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Cognitive Science at the University of Central Florida. She finds gholas intriguing and sometimes wonders if she is one. Her chapter would have been done sooner but the Mentat she hired to do the research ran off with a Bene Gesserit to market skincare products on Arrakis.

**William Peden** researches the philosophy of economics at Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He wrote his PhD thesis at Durham University (UK) after studies in Cambridge (UK) and Edinburgh. Before all that, he was a high school student in Scotland, where *Dune* was one of his first experiences of philosophy. Unfortunately, his school banned Frank Herbert's books as senior English literature dissertation topics, due to "insufficient literary merit" (the list of forbidden subjects also included anything by Tolkien,

Bram Stoker, Isaac Asimov, and Ian Fleming!). After waiting so many years to write about the Duniverse, he is glad that this volume will prove just how much there is to say about it.

**Edwardo Pérez** spent years as a Spice Driver, learning the Fremen ways and the cries of the water-sellers (Soo-Soo Sook!), before giving it all up for the contemplative life of an English professor. While the skill set Edwardo acquired comes in handy during faculty meetings and “office hours,” it’s the eyes – the blue within blue within blue – that keep his students mesmerized through lessons on critical and rhetorical theory. And it’s the secret stash of melange, hidden in a compartment carved into the pages of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, that allows Edwardo to endure semester after semester of endless grading. Kull Wahad!

**Kenneth R. Pike** teaches philosophy and law at the Florida Institute of Technology, where from his office window he watches spaceships leave the planet. He writes at the intersection of moral theory and technology, and is especially interested in the challenges posed by values inculcation – both in his own four children, who are probably not gholas, and in the mechanical minds he hopes will one day constitute humanity’s collective offspring. As an aspiring transhumanist and techno-optimist, he will be first against the wall when the Butlerian Jihad comes.

**Zachary Pirtle**, PhD, is an engineer and policy practitioner working on lunar exploration. He also teaches systems engineering and publishes research in philosophy of engineering, including the co-edited book *Engineering and Philosophy: Reimagining Technology and Social Progress*. He wanted to help Leto II with the Golden Path, until one day he sparked the fury of the Worm.

**James R.M. Wakefield** teaches political theory and government at Cardiff University, Wales. For reasons that

made sense back in graduate school, he writes mainly about Italian philosophy, and sometimes translates it into English. He also has interests in ethics, the philosophy of education, and neglected thinkers of the past. When not worrying about these things, he's usually pretty good value in a pub quiz. After spice melange, his favorite spice is probably smoked paprika. It's so versatile!

**Zach Vereb** teaches philosophy, critical thinking, and environmental ethics at the University of Mississippi. There, he goes off on tangents about the mental lives of zombies and the virtues of coffee (the true spice of earth). Zach also thinks anime is cool, and so recently published a chapter in *Neon Genesis Evangelion and Philosophy* with Open Universe. Since he began practicing kung fu, Zach often lets his hands do too much talking. One day he even hopes to master the crysknife.

# Introduction

“He Who Controls the Spice Controls the Universe”

*Kevin S. Decker*

A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that the balances are correct. This every sister of the Bene Gesserit knows.

*Dune*

Frank Herbert's *Dune* is a space-opera treasure trove, and its sequels show it to also be a Pandora's Box of latent surprises and long games. In the Duniverse we explore *so many* things – survival, honor, deep ecology, strategy, weird psychic and physical capabilities, psychology, gender, prophecy, religion, and cultural mutation over millennia. But one omnipresent theme in the *Dune* tales – a theme that also characterizes the popularity of the book series and film and television adaptations – is *endurance*. Paul Atreides finds a way to endure his tests for taking over the Ducal seat from Leto. Jessica and Paul endure the Arrakeen desert's daily hostility – sand getting everywhere, winds whipping at hundreds of miles per hour, every drop of water needing to be saved, and, of course, the sandworms. And the *Dune* saga endures – over the six books that Frank Herbert published between 1965 and 1985, to the many prequel and sequel books written by Herbert's son Brian and Kevin J. Anderson, loads of fanfic, Sci-Fi Channel television miniseries, and two-and-a-half feature films and counting (Alexander Jodorowsky's *Dune* was never filmed, but Jodorowsky's mid-1970s script adaptation would have resulted in a 14-hour film; and that deserves a little credit). Director Denis Villeneuve's latest adaptation, released in 2021, garnered enough critical praise and audience fervor

to justify at least one sequel. The brief timeline of the *Dune* series included in this book shows that even without dipping into the *XD* Duniverse - mostly constituted by the quasi-canonical writings of Herbert *films* and Anderson - the stories of the great houses of the Landsraad, the Emperors, and the God Emperor unfurl over a jaw-dropping 16,000 years' span of time. *That's* endurance.

The Duniverse began in two novellas, *Dune World* and *The Prophet of Dune*, serialized in *Analog* between 1963 and 1965. Herbert developed the sands and sieves of what would become *Dune* the novel with the editorship of the great John W. Campbell. For the magazine *Analog* (formerly *Astounding Science Fiction*), Campbell "demanded that his writers try to think out how science and technology might really develop in the future - and, most importantly, how those changes would affect the lives of human beings."<sup>1</sup> This new level of sophistication raised *Analog* above its peers in the dust chasm of SF pulps, and many of the chapters in this book stress the importance of Herbert's careful research in historical, cultural, and ecological themes - among others - to meet the demands of Campbell's stricter approach.<sup>2</sup> Knit together and published in 1965 by Chilton (yes, the publisher of those incredibly detailed car manuals), the *Analog* novellas became *Dune*, winner of the prestigious Hugo and Nebula Awards.

*Dune* was part of the New Wave of science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, which was characterized by literary experimentation with shifting styles, differing narrative points of view, and unreliable narrators, and with the integration of elements of the "psychedelic" culture of the period. Authors like Herbert, Joanna Russ, Harlan Ellison, Philip K. Dick, and Ursula K. Le Guin represent this movement. In the *Dune* books, plots are often driven by futuristic developments of psychedelic culture like mind-expanding drugs (Arrakis's spice melange), psychic powers



(the weirding ways of the Bene Gesserit), dystopian themes (the culture of House Harkonnen, the genetic manipulations of the Tleilaxu), race memories, and martial arts that allow control of the mind and the body. All are explored in their philosophical richness in the pages of this book.

Many of the chapters you're about to read rightly emphasize the ecological themes of Herbert's book series. The immersive experience Herbert wished for readers of *Dune* was based on his own immersive experiences in the Pacific Northwest. John Notarianni of Oregon Public Broadcasting wrote:

In the early 20th century, the coastal Oregon city of Florence was under threat of being consumed by the nearby dunes that were being whipped across human structures by the coastal winds. Roads, railroad tracks, even homes were being swallowed up by blowing sand. Starting in the 1920s, the US Department of Agriculture ran a program to try and stabilize the dunes by planting European Beach Grass ... Herbert came to Florence in 1957, planning to write an article documenting this battle between man and nature. He was awestruck by the power of the blowing desert sand. As he wrote in a letter, "These waves can be every bit as devastating as a tidal wave in property damage."<sup>3</sup>

In turn, the scenarios of Herbert's Duniverse frequently depict not only the uncontrollable power of nature's majesty, but also the sublimity of its vast expanses of space and time. Fans frequently recommend reading Herbert to initiates based on the scale of *Dune's* worldbuilding. Whether the treachery of twisted Mentat Piter De Vries or the Golden Path plotted out meticulously by the God Emperor Leto II, strategic and military brinkmanship often takes years or centuries to play out.

The great achievement of the 24 philosophers represented in this book is how they deploy their synthetic imagination. Without even needing to convert the poisonous Water of Life, the philosopher has the ability to see the big picture – how things are and how they could have been. She can also tease out the implications of the smallest threads of relevance, whether from Herbert’s books or from the Denis Villeneuve film adaptation. This kind of guidance, reminiscent of the teaching of Socrates or Hypatia, isn’t a luxury when exploring the vastness of the Duniverse – it’s a necessity.

So it’s entirely appropriate to acknowledge the influence on this volume of the first, groundbreaking book about the philosophical themes of *Dune*, editor Jeffrey Nicholas’s 2011 *Dune and Philosophy: Weirding Way of the Mentat*. When I met Jeffrey at a Spokane-area Ethics Bowl shortly before his book was to be published, I was both excited for its release and disappointed that I hadn’t thought to submit a chapter proposal myself. It’s satisfying to finally be able to offer up one’s own contribution to the enduring *Dune* phenomenon.

A note on the many editions of *Dune*: as a worldwide publishing phenomenon, there are numerous publishers of the book series, volumes of which have been translated into at least 14 languages. Each chapter author has been asked to identify their preferred edition, and page references in their chapter will follow that edition.

My family – Suzanne, Kennedy, Ethan, Jack, my brother Keith and his family, and my mother, Carolyn, provided support in many ways while I edited and wrote, and I appreciate them beyond words. Partners in philosophy and pop culture Jason T. Eberl, Rob Arp, and Bill Irwin also deserve a big “thanks!” The existence of this book also acknowledges the daily inspiration, challenge, and joy that

my colleagues in Philosophy and the Humanities at Eastern Washington University provide, which it turns out is absolutely necessary while trying to produce a book like this in the middle of climate change catastrophes and the COVID-19 pandemic. So I cannot offer thanks enough to Kerri Boyd, Garry Kenney, Scott Kinder-Pyle, Chris Kirby, Kathryn Julyan, Terry MacMullan, Mimi Marinucci, and David Weise. This book is dedicated to them, and in memoriam to a colleague lost too soon, Henry-York “Hank” Steiner, who loved stories.

## Notes

- 1 Trevor Quachri, “History of Analog Science Fiction and Fact,” *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, at <https://www.analogsf.com/about-analog/history>.
- 2 A captivating tale of the early days of Campbell’s editorship and the way in which he cultivated SF Golden Age authors can be read in Alec Nevala-Lee’s *Astounding: John W. Campbell, Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, and the Golden Age of Science Fiction* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2018).
- 3 John Notarianni, “How an Oregon Battle Between Human and Nature Inspired Frank Herbert’s ‘Dune,’” *Oregon Public Broadcasting*, October 23, 2021, at <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/10/23/florence-oregon-movies-dune-frank-herbert-science-fiction-novels>.

## A Brief Dune Series Timeline

1000 BG	Beginnings of space travel.
201 BG	The Butlerian Jihad begins.
108 BG	End of the Butlerian Jihad.
88 BG	Battle of Corrin; House Corrino establishes the Imperium.
80 BG	Founding of the order of Mentats.
0 AG	Founding of the Spacing Guild; Royal Houses of the Landsraad established; CHOAM ( <i>Combine Honnete Ober Advancer Mercantiles</i> ) founded.
2000 AG	The Great Convention is signed, saying that the combined power of the Great Houses may destroy anyone who uses atomic power against human beings; the Commission of Ecumenical Translators compiles the Orange Catholic Bible on Old Earth; Great Convention rule observed throughout the galaxy for the next 8000 years.
10111 AG	House Harkonnen gains stewardship of Arrakis, holding the planet in quasi-fief under a CHOAM company contract to mine the spice melange.
10156 AG	Elrood IX dies; Shaddam Corrino IV becomes Padishah Emperor.
10176 AG	Paul Atreides is born.
10189 ag	Leto Atreides I master trains a small, Sardaukar-level force, threatening the Emperor.

10191-95 AG	Events of <i>Dune</i> (published 1965).
10203 AG	Events of <i>Dune Messiah</i> (published 1969) begin.
10212 AG	Events of <i>Children of Dune</i> (published 1976) begin.
13712 AG	Events of <i>God Emperor of Dune</i> (published 1981) begin.
15212 AG	Events of <i>Heretics of Dune</i> (published 1984) begin.
15214 AG	Events of <i>Chapterhouse Dune</i> (published 1985) begin.

**SONGS OF MUAD'DIB:  
CULTURE AND RELIGION IN  
*DUNE***