Neocosmicism: God and the Void

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution

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Abstract

Through the use of selected works by Philip K. Dick, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert and H.P. Lovecraft, this thesis explores the question of what it means to be human in the universe when occidental cosmologies no longer align with the universe they seek to describe. Within its view of the universe, H.P. Lovecraft’s philosophy of cosmicism offers the human creature an answer to this question, but in doing so also limits that creature to an isolated life ending in madness or death within an indifferently cold universe.

While this thesis seeks to demonstrate the validity of cosmicism as a lens through which to critically interrogate science fiction texts; it more importantly endeavours to address cosmicism’s inherent limitations as a philosophy of the human creature’s place in the universe. This is done by developing neocosmicism as an outgrowth of cosmicism that offers an alternate experience of the universe and a revitalisation of the human creature’s relationship with the universe. By recognising the significant shift in the human creature’s understanding of the universe – from a Cartesian view to a Quantum view within a broader post-modern context – neocosmicism is developed as an interrogative philosophy that provides a framework for opening up a critical space in which to explore alternatives to modernity’s questions rather than offering mere reactions or polarising oppositions.

For neocosmicism, this thesis represents a beginning, and in no way provides a comprehensive development or analysis of its nuances. At this early stage of development, neocosmicism asks more questions than it answers; suspects that god and the void are a manifest singularity that is the universe; and suggests that
cosmicism’s limiting outcome of estrangement between the human creature and the universe can be transformed to a vitalised outcome of relationship between the emotive biological creature [that the human creature is] and the indifferently cold chaos that creature calls the universe.
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Introduction

What does it mean to be human in the universe? When the cosmological maps that have been used in the past no longer fit the territory they are meant to describe, how does the human creature navigate? How does it know where and what it is? H.P. Lovecraft’s philosophy of cosmicism offers the human creature a view of the universe; a view however, that leads to an isolated end of madness or death. The development of neocosmicism is an outgrowth of Lovecraft’s cosmicism and a response to the limiting options for the human creature that cosmicism extends. For a general comparison of the similarities and differences between cosmicism and neocosmicism, see Appendix A. Neocosmicism offers the human creature an experience that leads to a revitalisation of its relationship with the universe.

There are four core aims to this thesis, and selected works by Philip K. Dick, Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert and H.P. Lovecraft will be used to exemplify these aims. The first is to demonstrate how science fiction (sf) interrogates the experience of being human in the universe, and the ways in which the human creature responds to the universe in which it exists, and of which it is a part. Second, this thesis offers a critique of Lovecraft’s philosophy of cosmicism and in doing so, demonstrates the failure of static, cosmological models for enabling a direct relationship between the human creature and the universe, and between the human creature and others within the universe. Third, this thesis seeks to demonstrate the validity of cosmicism as a lens through which to critically interrogate not only Lovecraft’s corpus, but sf more generally. Finally, and most critically as a development of theory based upon the first three aims, this thesis intends to extend but not replace, the philosophy of cosmicism with what I am calling neocosmicism.
The central concern of *neocosmicism* is to provide a theoretical framework that by taking into account the significant shift in the human creature’s understanding of the universe from a Cartesian view to a Quantum view, allows for a sense of existence in the universe that reaches far beyond the limiting parameters that the dominant occidental cosmologies and the philosophy of *cosmicism* allow. This thesis provides a starting point for the development of *neocosmicism*, identifying issues and characteristics of the philosophy that can be expanded in further research beyond this thesis’ parameters.

It is important to remember that due to a thesis’ economies of size, and given the vast field of enquiry implicit in any one of this thesis’ aims, this document is not proposed as a definitive development and expansion of *neocosmicism*, but rather an introductory foundation. In addition, this thesis is neither an exhaustive study of the works of the primary authors whose texts are herein used, nor an exhaustive critical enquiry of *cosmicism*. There is already a significant body of knowledge that addresses in detail each author and their works; and while *cosmicism* is to date largely only employed in the direct critical enquiry of Lovecraft’s corpus, a significant body of knowledge does exist that addresses how his philosophy manifests within his creative works. Identifying the value of *cosmicism* as a tool for the critical interrogation of *sf* is central to this thesis, and the limitation herein to the authors and texts with which this thesis is concerned, in no way diminishes the argument for *cosmicism’s* wider application.
In addition, the primary authors discussed in this thesis have been chosen on the basis of authors and works that I like; the choices are not, as could be suggested, continuing a historical trend that has seen both the authorship and critical examination of sf to be skewed through a male-oriented perspective. Addressing issues of gender would be a useful addition to the work of this thesis, but a gendered reading of creative text and theory is not the focus of the argument. While I acknowledge the usefulness of such lenses for interpretation and their implied presence within this thesis, the overall coherence of the core argument is not dependent upon the theoretical positioning of gender, ethnicity, religion or political persuasion. Furthermore, while I also acknowledge that the four authors I have chosen are diverse in both their historic context and contemporary reckoning, and they present their readers with significantly different writing voices; an extensive body of critical work that addresses these issues is well established. To engages in such discussions here – as to the changing perception of the authors’ relevance over time, or the nature and accomplishment of their writing styles – would be to replicate work that is not itself the central concern of this thesis; inasmuch as the aim here is to demonstrate the presence of a holistic textural voice across sf’s diversity rather than highlighting stylistic and perceptual fragmentations.

This thesis can be located broadly within the dialogue of post-modernity, and therefore seeks to provide a framework that may open up a critical space for exploring alternatives to modernity’s questions rather than just reactions or polarising oppositions. The hope embedded within the development of neocosmicism is for the provision of a theoretical apparatus that is complementary to the array of tools already available for the critical interrogation of texts; sf
specifically, but also other forms of expression that explore the human creature’s experience of the universe in which it exists.

The methodology employed in this thesis is eclectic in that it draws upon a theoretically diverse body of knowledge, and is literary through its focus on the use of primary fictional text to support its argument. The central line across which this thesis argues, is the trajectory of development from cosmicism to neocosmicism, rather than presenting how an examination of cosmicism and neocosmicism might be evidenced within discrete categories of the four authors’ texts. This thesis uses the works of each author to discuss, exemplify and support the development of cosmicism and to highlight the textural evidence that in being present within their works, also foreshadow the outgrowth of neocosmicism. The authors chosen here are used as examples, rather than as the subject of the thesis, in order to evidence how cosmicism and neocosmicism might also be traced through the wider sf corpus. The thesis is divided into three parts and each part is further divided into a series of chapters with sub-sections.

Part I deals with the broad idea of the universe, and sets out the distinction between the terms cosmos and universe, the alignment of these terms with the concepts of the map and the territory respectively, and the distinction within this overarching framework of what can be classified as the visible and familiar, from the invisible and unfamiliar aspects of the universe. Following this is a general overview of two dominant occidental cosmological models – being the Genesis cosmology and the universe as machine – and how these models are interpreted. With these models established, the presence of other sentient beings in the universe and their
relationship with the human creature is introduced, before a discussion of the
disruption between the cosmos and the universe that in becoming problematic for the
human creature, affects that creature’s sense of relationship with the universe as
adversarial and divisive.

In order to use cosmicism as the underlying philosophical principle of Part II, an
examination of its tenets is first established. After this, the principles of cosmicism
are applied to an enquiry of the human creature’s position in and response to the
universe, culminating in the arguably untenable conclusion that cosmicism draws;
that in the knowledge of what the universe is, as distinct from what a cosmos
suggests it might be, the human creature is afforded no option other than madness or
death in response. From this point, I consider that there is a significant body of
evidence within sf suggesting that while the basic tenets of cosmicism are viable, that
philosophy’s summation of human options when the universe is revealed are
limiting and unreflective of other possible outcomes. As a consequence, I see the
opportunity for opening up cosmicism in a manner that retains many of its defining
characteristics, while also drawing on a view of the universe that is more inclusive of
twenty-first century scientific and cultural theory.

Part III then, in beginning with the human creature’s arrival at cosmicism’s ultimate
and life-negating end, develops neocosmicism. Rather than negate cosmicism by
offering an alternative, neocosmicism offers a complement. Neocosmicism is
presented as a philosophical extension of cosmicism that builds upon cosmicism’s
existing and viable foundation. An alternate path for the human creature is offered,
and rather than succumb to a shattering observation of the universe, neocosmicism
explores the possibility for the human creature to choose the *engulfment* that *cosmicism* warns against as destructive, in order that it might enter an experience of the *universe* that is affirmative. By choosing to be *engulfed* by the *universe*, rather than simply observe from a distance, the human creature in *neocosmicism* can move beyond what stops and destroys it to enter a vitalised engagement with the *universe* and with *others*. 
Glossary of Terms

amnesia of the cosmos
The loss of the memory of the universe that arises from the human creature’s mistaking of the ordered and static cosmos as the universe, and that creature’s subsequent loss of a sense of embodied relationship with the universe.

chaos
The condition that precedes and underpins all else, chaos is the underlying state or condition of the universe. Furthermore, chaos is also a fundamental component of the universe’s overlying, visible landscape of experience.

cold equations
Derived from Tom Godwin’s short story “The Cold Equations,” and for the purpose of this thesis, the cold equations are “the fixed rules” of the universe that operate beyond the sphere of human morals and ethics.

cosmicism
Cosmicism is drawn from the philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft as it is exemplified in his fiction and explicated in his non-fiction texts. The principle tenets of cosmicism are that the universe operates as an indifferent mechanism, without purpose or direction, and the human creature is not only insignificant but exists as a biological mutation or accident of elemental and chemical stellar processes. The mechanism of the universe operates without emotions or ethics of human parameters and understanding, thereby rendering any ethical effort as pointless, for morality has influence and meaning only at an insignificant and localised level. The universe is also characterised by the absence of a moral deity that cares for the human creature.

cosmos
A cosmos has logic and order, and is one version or one way of thinking about and making sense of the universe. As one version, indeed as one vision, a cosmos is like a snapshot, a single ordered view, or even an illusion of some part, but not the entirety, of the universe.

NOTE: in both fiction and nonfiction, Lovecraft often uses the terms cosmos and universe interchangeably and in any material quoted in this thesis from Lovecraft, the term cosmos is to be read as meaning universe.

gulpmefnt
Engulfment refers to a submersion or overwhelming of the physical, mental, emotional or sensory aspects of the human creature. It is not only precipitated by a force greater in some way than the creature being engulfed, but also involves some form of conflict or pull between opposing forces which, through a total immersion or plunging into the experience, threatens the survival of that being. Should the engulfed survive the experience, some form of change occurs that renders it incapable of returning to the same state of being or understanding as it was in prior to the engulfment.
foundation
A *foundation* is that fundamental structure supporting a more visible and tangible formation. It not only refers to a physical object, such as a building or biological body, but it also refers to ideological, geographical and sociological grouping – as evident in modern Western culture. Furthermore, a *foundation* continues to support and inform any new structure in which it remains embedded.

Genesis cosmology
The cosmological view of creation and the Noachian Deluge that has been a substantial part of the *foundation* of Western culture, is written in the book of Genesis in the Christian bible, and will hereafter be called the *Genesis cosmology*. This can be referred to as a religious cosmological model.

heimlich
Within its Germanic origin, *heimlich* is most commonly used to mean homely, but also equally represents its own opposite to connote a distinct meaning of *unheimlich*. This is to say that the term *heimlich* can be used to mean either the familiar or the unfamiliar. More specifically, and the meaning more pertinent to this thesis, what has been familiar and homely becomes hidden and unfamiliar. The *heimlich*, in both its “homely” and its “secretive” manifestations are two sides of the same coin.

heimlich conundrum
A *heimlich conundrum* is the sense of damnation that the human creature feels, irrespective of the direction that creature chooses to move toward when faced with the revelation of the *universe*; the outcome of this will only ever be one of madness or death.

landscape
A *landscape* is a view that is taken from one aspect within either a *cosmos* or the *universe*. Both *cosmos* and *universe* contain a multiplicity of varying *landscapes* that encircle the human creature like the layers of an onion, and at any point in time all these differing *landscapes* contribute to the reality perceived by that creature and are variously interpreted depending upon which map or part of the territory that creature is operating from. A *landscape* can be a part of the territory, in the same manner as a foot is a part of the body; or a *landscape* can be a map, in the same manner as a photograph of a foot is a representations of that foot, but not the foot itself.

map
A *map* is an ordered view or representation of a territory. The term map can be considered synonymous with *cosmos*, in the same way that territory is synonymous with *universe*.

neocosmicism
*Neocosmicism* realigns the human creature’s relationship with the *universe* and others in such a way as to make it possible for that creature to move beyond the incarcerating confines of a *cosmos*. Though it remains insignificant, the human creature’s reinscription by *engulfment* allows it to engage with the *universe* and in doing so, affords possibilities for existence other than *cosmicism*’s madness or death.
proving ground
Derived from military terminology; a testing ground.

psychotic universe
The psychotic universe is a proving ground wherein the gap between illusion and reality, map and territory, cosmos and universe simply does not exist. The human creature is neither outside of nor incarcerated within the psychotic universe, and through emotional investment in the cold equations, that creature’s participation influences and is influenced by the universe.

romance of the universe
The participatory and at times symbiotic relationship between the human creature and the universe in neocosmicism.

schizophrenic universe
The schizophrenic universe of cosmicism is no longer one stable thing or another; it is neither machine nor the creation of deity. It is split from itself and the human creature is also split from it and adrift within it.

sf
science fiction

territory
A territory is the substance or reality, what is represented by a map. The term territory can be considered synonymous with universe, in the same way that map is synonymous with cosmos. Implicit within this, although not necessarily visible, is the idea that the territory, like the universe, is chaos.

threshold
A threshold is that liminal space between one state and another; where varying degrees of transformative experience are encountered, where conflicting opposites merge into one and the same moment of experience. The threshold is where the potential of engulfment manifests, and where the capacity of the human creature to either cross or resist the threshold is greatly tested. Once crossed, there is no return to the previous state, and the human creature will be irrevocably changed by the experience.

universe
The universe is, quite simply, everything. The underlying foundation of the universe is chaos, distinguishing the universe as different from the cosmos where chaos is put into order. There is no requirement for the universe to be ordered, although order may be found within the chaos.

universe as machine
The universe as machine is a metaphorical image of putting order into chaos, and provides an overlying schematic map for, but not the reality of, the universe. As a machine, the universe is without emotion or human morality, and continues to function through the impersonal and perpetual motion of components in the mechanism. The cold equations are inherent within the universe as machine and this can be referred to as a scientific cosmological model.
**vitalised materialism**

Neocosmicism’s psychotic universe unveils the *heimlich* attribute of cause and purpose. What *cosmicism* refers to as the “outside” is simply the territory beyond the parameters of the map; in *neocosmicism*, everything is *universe*. Everything will end because there is no outside, there is no external cause, and the *psychotic universe* is materialist by virtue of this. However, because *neocosmicism's universe* is also a proving ground in which the human creature can be vitalised, the *universe* has purpose, and in having purpose implies cause. *Neocosmicism’s universe* is a universe of vitalised materialism.

**void**

As an ultimate indeterminacy the *void* has no borders or boundaries; it is an emptiness that is nowhere and everywhere, a ubiquitous merging of oppositions that cancel one from another, a littoral space where shore and ocean merge.