

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*.

Contents

Declaration

Abstract

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction 1

Glossary of Terms 6

Part I: Universe 11

1. Universe and Cosmos 12
2. Cosmologies 24
 - The Universe as Machine 24
 - The Genesis Cosmology 30
 - Cartography and Cryptography – the Language of Cosmoses 38
3. Fractured Universe 44
 - Mapping the Unmappable Ocean 44
 - The Deluge 45
 - The Great Creatures of the Sea 49
 - An Isolate Object on a Map 54

Part II: Cosmicism 65

4. Cosmicism Is 66
5. Schizophrenic Universe 81
 - The Alien Universe 81
 - “You’re Not Afraid of the Dark Are You? The Light Hurts My Eyes” 91
 - The Cold Equations 99
6. Heimlich Universe 118
 - Untuning the Universe 118
 - Kaleidoscopic Apocalypse 123
 - Dangerous Liaisons: Chasing the (real) Universe 133
 - The Failure of Success 142
 - Waking in Cosmicism’s Garden 148
7. Frozen Universe 155
 - Everything Will End 155
 - The Book of the Machines 163
 - The Absence of God 182
 - Insignificant Contagion 189
 - At the Water’s Edge 199
8. Perihelion 208
 - The Threshold 208
 - The Grey 216
 - The Universe as Trap 223

Part III: Neocosmicism 241

9. Neocosmicism Is 242
10. Aphelion 263
 - Dark Horizon 263
 - Shadow Universe 273
 - The Void 284
11. Psychotic Universe 300
 - Frozen Ocean 300
 - Lethal Proximity in the Psychotic Universe 310
 - Psychotic Morality 321
 - Beginnings and Endings 329
12. Chimeras and Cannibals 341
 - Everything Changes 341
 - Engaging the Interface 350
 - Accidental Cannibals 352
 - In the Fingers of Machines 358
13. The Romance of the Universe 366
 - Significant Insignificance 366
 - Chaos 374
 - The Voice of the Other in the Dark 381
 - Life in Psychosis 384
 - The Paradox 391

Conclusion 397

Appendices

A: Comparison of *Cosmicism* and *Neocosmicism* 401

B: The Cultural and Literary Background of *Cosmicism* 406

C: Significant Points in H.G. Wells' *The Sleeper Awakes* that parallel Frank Herbert's character Paul Atreides and events in the Narrative of *Dune* 416

Bibliography 418

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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 engage 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*.

engulfment

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.