Cosmodeism and Cosmism: Parallels, Differences and Possible Synthesis

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New religions and spiritual movements inspired by, or at least compatible with science, keep popping up. Cosmodeism is one of the new kids on this block. I look forward to seeing how Cosmodeism will develop, and I think it can help give meaning to our life and make the world a better place. At the same time, I think it could benefit from an alliance with Russian Cosmism, a spiritual movement that came to this block in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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I have been reading the book *Cosmodeism: A Worldview for the Space-Age: How an Evolutionary Cosmos is Creating God*[1], by Tsvi Bisk. I highly recommend the book. Bisk clearly summarises his overall thesis

in the subtitle of his book: the evolution of the cosmos is creating God. "Not 'In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth', but rather 'In the end an Evolutionary Cosmos will have created God' is the singular message of this book."

Bisk echoes Arthur Clarke: "It may be that our role on this planet is not to worship God but to create him." He praises many of my favourite thinkers, like Clarke himself, Olaf Stapledon and Thomas Nagel, and he uses many of my favourite quotes from them (like this one from Clarke). Bisk's former mentor, Mordechai Nessyahu, strongly influenced his worldview. Many of Nessyahu's writings have yet to be translated, but Bisk provides summaries and insightful observations. Nessyahu used the term Cosmotheism for his philosophy. But Bisk prefers to use the term Cosmodeism because "theism conjures up an image of a supernatural god (outside of nature and natural laws) while deism places the concept within the limitations of natural theology."

Following Nessyahu, Bisk differentiates between what he calls the cosmos and what he calls the universe. The universe is the infinite reality that contains an infinite number of cosmoses. A cosmos starts with some kind of singularity in the overall universe of infinite reality, which spawns a local Big Bang. Bisk refrains from speculating much on the mechanics of a Big Bang but notes the parallels with inflationary cosmology.[2] Referring to the tension between today's Big Bang

cosmology and the steady-state cosmology proposed by Fred Hoyle[3], Bisk suggests that "infinite Nature is steady state (producing singularities ad infinitum) while our Cosmos is a product of one of these singularities which resulted in our Big Bang." This makes sense to me. Besides inflationary and steady-state cosmologies, Bisk notes parallels with the plasma cosmology proposed by Hannes Alfvén and popularised by Eric Lerner.[4]

Bisk does not speculate on possible interactions between our cosmos and the universe at large but notes that "there may be such interaction as yet to be discovered." The evolution of a Cosmos is likely to create a God. Bisk emphasises that the "Godding" of the Cosmos is a natural process (as opposed to something supernatural) that could involve not only known physics but perhaps "a new cosmological/biological law" that "will provide the scientific framework for the creation of 'God' as a universal spiritual entity which will, in effect, be the sum total of conscious beings throughout the Cosmos."

Despite these and other hints at a future science beyond today's horizon, I have the impression that Bisk is still too entrenched in today's mainstream consensus science. For example, he says that there could be aliens much more advanced than us, but they still could not "communicate faster than the speed of light." This is the current

consensus indeed, but quantum mechanics (which is also mainstream consensus science) suggests that reality is nonlocal behind the scene of space and time, so I think Bisk should be more open-minded on this point.

What about us? Bisk argues that actively taking part in the Godding of the Cosmos is "our sacred duty to the Cosmos." Cosmodeism can inspire us "to strive to become part of the Divine Drama (the Godding of the Cosmos)." I totally agree, and I have elaborated on this point in my most recent work.[5] What about artificial intelligence (AI) and robots?[6] Bisk does not talk about AI robots much. He says that they will be our workers in outer space, or "the cosmic proletariat." But I think conscious super-intelligent AI robots could replace us and carry on our sacred duty to the Cosmos in our stead. It seems to me that if this is what is going to happen, building them is our contribution to the divine drama.

If nature is infinite in space and time, "it is impossible that a god has not already been created in some other very ancient Cosmos." Perhaps these gods strive towards the Godding of all of reality and help younger cosmoses create more gods. Bisk does not intend to create a new religion, but his "wish is that Cosmodeism be assimilated by the legacy religions." He cites and praises the book *Human Purpose and Transhuman Potential: A Cosmic Vision for Our Future Evolution*[7], by

Ted Chu. I reviewed Chu's book and argued that Chu's cosmic view can play many of the impersonal, philosophically oriented roles of religion, but it does not offer hope in an afterlife.[8] Therefore, it is not emotionally comforting enough. This is also my main criticism of Bisk's excellent book.

However, Bisk admits that Cosmodeism "might actually give credence" to some intuitions of an afterlife found in the legacy religions. Consciousness might be some kind of energy or coherence that cannot be destroyed, and "survives in a different form" in the Cosmos. Bisk warns that even in this case we "would not retain our individual identities after death." But here again, I think he should be more open-minded and imaginative. In my recent work, I sketched some scientifically plausible (I think) paths to a personal afterlife.[9] Bisk, a Jew, is a student of religions and has included in the book several chapters dedicated to the parallels between Cosmodeism and traditional religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Eastern religions. He is persuaded that these religions "have already intuited the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis… or can accommodate the Cosmodeistic Hypothesis."

This could facilitate the assimilation of Cosmodeism that Bisk is hoping for. But as I noted, I think Cosmodeism is missing the most important factor—the hope in a personal afterlife—that makes

traditional religions emotionally comforting and appealing. I doubt Cosmodeism can make much of a difference without offering this hope. If God will exist in the future, how can God have any influence on the world here and now? This is not a problem for the traditional religions analysed by Bisk, whose Gods have always existed, but Cosmodeism should answer the question. I think a God that is powerful enough would be able to control the totality of space and time and influence events in the past.[10] Bisk does not answer (or ask) this question, but he quotes a passage by Olaf Stapledon that I also quote: "God, who created all things in the beginning, is himself created by all things in the end."

Bisk's book presents a practical philosophy that can help navigate life. Among my favourite gems of rabbinic wisdom for our times are Bisk's praise of laughter, which "purifies the soul" better than meditation or prayer, and his scorn at "a certain intellectual 'elite' whose devotion to analytic thought has explained away everything that people know in their gut and in their heart makes them human." Following Sartre, he believes we must invent our meaning, not for self-deception but "as an ontological categorical necessity to give the Cosmos itself meaning."

After reading the book, I had a long conversation with Bisk. A video of the conversation is published on my website turingchurch.com, and

also on YouTube. We discussed the parts of the book related to this review and Bisk added other insightful considerations and pearls of rabbinic wisdom. I said that my main criticism of Bisk's excellent book is that, while Cosmodeism can play many of the impersonal, philosophically oriented roles of religion, it does not offer hope in an afterlife that would retain our individual identities after death. Therefore, it is not emotionally comforting enough. Some philosophically oriented non-believers might embrace Cosmodeism. But I do not expect believers to do so, because their current religion offers more emotional comfort.

However, the landscape of new religious movements is in permanent flux, and these movements keep borrowing from each other, forking and blending. Reflecting on the future of Cosmodeism, I think of a possible blend with the Russian Cosmist philosophy[11] [12] developed towards the end of the nineteenth century.[13] [14] [15] As I am about to argue, Russian Cosmism is philosophically compatible with Bisk's Cosmodeism but much more emotionally appealing.

The central thesis of Cosmodeism—that the evolution of the Cosmos creates God—appears in the work of Russian Cosmist philosopher and scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, the father of the Soviet space programme. The supreme god "is generated by the universe and may be the cosmos itself," he said in an essay first

published in 1931 (translation by tsiolkovsky.org). Bisk cites the essay, noting that Tsiolkovsky theorised "that a state of 'perfect intelligence' lay in humanity's future" and that other life forms in the Universe had already achieved this state.

Bisk's Cosmodeist thesis is not immediately clear in the works of other Cosmist philosophers. Dividing them into religious and scientific Cosmists[16], many religious Cosmists were immersed in traditional theology, which makes a sharp distinction between God and the created universe, and many scientific ones refrained from discussing God at all. Yet the works of one of the best-known Russian Cosmists, philosopher and scientist Vladimir Vernadsky, propose concepts of panpsychism, pantheism and a noosphere destined to spread into the universe and evolve. Vernadsky's ideas clearly resonate with Bisk's.

Having established some elements of compatibility between Cosmodeism and Cosmism, I will come to what I see as the missing cornerstone in Bisk's Cosmodeism. Tsiolkovsky's mentor was iconic Cosmist philosopher Nikolai Fedorov (or Fiodorov—there are different conventions for the spelling of Russian names), the originator of the concept of technological resurrection. To Fedorov, the resurrection of everyone who ever lived was an engineering project, to be accomplished by future generations using advanced science and technology.

Fedorov considered space expansion a key enabler of this project, both to make room for our resurrected ancestors and because the means to resurrect them could be found in outer space, and played an important role in Tsiolkovsky's formation. The precise influence of Fedorov on Tsiolkovsky's work on spaceflight is hard to pin down, and there are conflicting reports[17], but it seems plausible that the spirit of Fedorov's Cosmism informed Tsiolkovsky's vision of humanity leaving its planetary cradle and becoming a universal force. God wants us to go to the stars and remake the universe. And Cosmism as a whole has been a powerful inspiration not only for the Soviet and then Russian space programme, but also for the global push to outer space.

Fedorov's followers published his magnum opus, the title of which can be translated as *Philosophy of the Common Task*, after his death. There's no complete English translation that I know of, but there is a good French translation.[18] Fedorov was a nineteenth-century Russian and a Christian Orthodox thinker. Reading his words is an experience that I find frustrating, because the really interesting passages are diluted in a way that I find difficult to relate to. But the book has a very useful postface by Svetlana Semenova. Semenova, "the most prominent scholar of Russian Cosmism and a devoted follower of Fedorov"[19], provides a thorough summary with quotes that help find the relevant passages in the main text.

Semenova emphasises that "resurrecting the dead is the key word, the criterion of everything" (my translation) in Fedorov's work. To Fedorov, technological resurrection is part of God's plan for humanity and the universe. Fedorov elaborates on the essential continuity between Christianity and his own views. Worth noting, Fedorov did not care for deism, because "the God of deism is a God without the need to give life back" (my translation).

"Fedorovians tend to identify as Orthodox Christians, while interpreting Christianity in very particular ways," notes Anya Bernstein.[20] Predictably, the Orthodox Church sees Fedorov's views as "nothing but heretical, since they advocate active human involvement in resurrection." But I think Fedorov's views are closer to God than official Christian doctrines. Fedorov speculated about practical methods of technological resurrection. His speculations based upon the science of his time seem naïve to us today, but he realised that technological resurrection is an enormously difficult challenge that "might seem implausible or even impossible from the point of view of contemporary science" (my translation) and is best left to the science and technology of the future. That is, the science and technology of the very far future. New speculations about how to achieve Fedorov's technological resurrection have been proposed.[21]

Young notes that Vernadsky's concept of the noosphere is in some ways similar to the idea of akasha, "a nonmaterial realm in which all human thoughts and memories are recorded, constantly updated, and preserved." Contemporary thinkers like Ralph Abraham and Ervin László have re-proposed the idea of 'akasha'.[22] [23] By learning ways to read the akashic records, future scientists and engineers could achieve Fedorov's technological resurrection. This is likely to involve ultra-advanced forms of spacetime engineering and quantum shenanigans that we could not even begin to imagine today.

David Hume famously argued that we cannot derive an 'ought' from an 'is.' I agree, and therefore I tend to be very skeptical of attempts to derive ethical and moral conclusions from science. But we can derive an 'is' from an 'ought': what is technology, if not the constant, relentless process of turning what ought to be into what actually is? Technological resurrection will be the ultimate realisation of what ought to be.

Traditional believers could frown at the idea that we—not God—will resurrect the dead of the past by means of science and technology. But this is likely to happen only in the very far future, when Bisk's Godding of the cosmos is much more advanced. We have seen that, according to Bisk, God is "the sum total of conscious beings throughout the Cosmos." These considerations blur the distinction

between God and human engineering and could make the idea of technological resurrection more appealing to traditional believers.

I think the emergence of a new religion or spiritual movement built around these ideas, and/or the assimilation of these ideas by traditional religions, would do a lot of good. The Mormon Transhumanist Association, a group active within an established religion, and Terasem, a new religious movement, are open to Fedorov's vision of technological resurrection.[24] The latter is also open to Cosmodeism.

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