

**What Is Cosmism?**

By **Cosmism** I mean: a practical philosophy focused on enthusiastically and thoroughly exploring, understanding and enjoying the cosmos, in its inner, outer and social aspects

**Cosmism advocates**

- pursuing joy, growth and freedom for oneself and all beings
- ongoingly, actively seeking to better understand the universe in its multiple aspects, from a variety of perspectives
- taking nothing as axiomatic and accepting all ideas, beliefs and habits as open to revision based on thought, dialogue and experience

The word "Cosmism" has been used by others in the past in various ways, all of them related to and fairly harmonious with the sense in which I mean it here ... I will review these briefly below; but in this Manifesto I'm largely ignoring the particulars of these prior uses.

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My goal in this Manifesto is to clearly and simply articulate *my own* take on Cosmism — that is: the particular flavor of Cosmism that I find most sympathetic.

I've said Cosmism is a practical philosophy. What I mean by a "practical philosophy" is, in essence, a **world-view and value-system** — but one that, in addition to containing abstract understanding, provides concrete guidance to the issues we face in our lives.

Like any other world-view and/or value system, Cosmism is not something that can be scientifically or mathematically proven to be "correct"; it is something that an individual or group may adopt, or not. Obviously I think Cosmism worthy of adoption, or I wouldn't be writing a Manifesto about it.

Not only do I think Cosmism is a Good Thing in a general sense — I think it will become increasingly relevant in the next years, decades and centuries as technology advances, as the "human world" we take for granted is replaced with a succession of radically different realities.

The currently standard world-views and value-systems will, I suggest, not only fail to survive this transition, but — worse yet — fail terribly as guides as we pass through it. Cosmism is far better suited to guide us as these changes unfold.

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It appears likely to many knowledgeable people — including me — that advanced science and technology will soon allow our minds to expand far beyond the limitations of the human brain architecture that has historically supported them.

I won't take up space repeating the evidence for this assertion here: Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Near* and Broderick's *The Spike* are good places to start if somehow you've found this Manifesto without first being familiar with the canon of modern futurism.

Cosmism would be an interesting and relevant philosophy even without this dawning technological Singularity/ Transcension.

However, these probable impending events make Cosmism more appealing — for the reason that the alternative philosophies more prevalent among the human race at the current time, are deeply incompatible with the changes that are coming.

Cosmism provides a world-view and value-system that makes sense in the human world now, and will continue to make sense as the practical world advances, even as some of us leave our human bodies and brains behind and explore new ways of existing and interacting.

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Quite possibly once we become advanced enough, Cosmism will appear to us roughly equally silly as all other "legacy human" philosophies. If so, then I doubt I will be shedding any tears for it at that stage! But I will be happy that it proved adequate to help nurse us through the transition to our next phase of being. (Although, even if some continuous evolution of mine is around at that time, it's unclear whether it will still identify itself as being the same "self" or mind as Ben Goertzel circa 2010!)

If your main interest is in Cosmist views of future technologies, you may wish to skip toward the middle of this Manifesto where they're explicitly treated. But eventually you'll probably want to look back at the earlier parts, which outline the philosophical foundation on which the later more tech-focused discussions are based.

Every one of the radical future technologies dawning has profound philosophical implications, going beyond what is explored in SF movies and all but the most profound SF books. Understanding these technologies and what they will do and what they will mean requires taking a deep look at the nature of the mind and the universe.

Just as the Internet is about people as much as it is about wires and bits and protocols, the new technologies dawning are about mind and reality as much as they are

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about AI algorithms, engineered gene sequences and nanodevices.

Understanding **artificial intelligence** — and the sense in which it may be sentient — requires us to look deeply into the nature of mind and awareness.

Understanding **brain-computer interfacing** requires us to deeply understand the mind and the self, and their relation to other minds and to physical reality.

Understanding the emerging **global brain** requires us to understand the nature of mind and society in a way that goes beyond the models we conventionally use, which are based on current biological brains and societies that will soon be dramatically augmented or transcended.

Understanding **immortality** and the issues associated with it requires an understanding of self and identity — of what is a "self" that it might be immortal.

Exploring the various possible means to immortality — including **uploading** and other forms of **cyberimmortality** — requires an understanding of the relations between minds and bodies.

Understanding what advanced **unified physics** might mean requires deeply understanding the nature of physical

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reality, including subtle issues like the relation between reality and simulation.

Understanding what **virtual realities** or inexpensive **molecular assemblers** would mean for human or more advanced forms of life and mind, again requires a profound understanding of the interrelation of mind, reality and society.

Understanding what sorts of **alien minds** we might discover — elsewhere in the physical universe, in other "dimensions" or potentially right here on Earth — requires a deep understanding of mind, reality and their relationship.

Thinking about these possibilities from a purely technological perspective is inadequate and may perhaps be dangerously misleading. These possibilities must be considered very deeply from a perspective of pragmatic philosophy, if one is to have any real hope of understanding and approaching them in a useful way. That is one of the key things that Cosmism, as I interpret and pursue it here, attempts to do.

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So, in the first N sections of this Manifesto I'm going to delve fairly deep into what will seem like abstract philosophical considerations. But it all will get pulled back into the practical by the end.

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### Ten Cosmist Convictions

*(Mostly Suggested by Giulio Prisco)*

Giulio Prisco, on the mailing list of a group called the "Order of Cosmic Engineers", posted a wonderful "mini-manifesto" listing principles of the OCE. I have edited and extended his list slightly, without altering its spirit, to obtain the following, which may serve as a reasonable preface to this Manifesto:

- 1) Humans will merge with technology, to a rapidly increasing extent. This is a new phase of the evolution of our species, just picking up speed about now. The divide between natural and artificial will blur, then disappear. Some of us will continue to be humans, but with a radically expanded and always growing range of available options, and radically increased diversity and complexity. Others will grow into new forms of intelligence far beyond the human domain.

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- 2) We will develop sentient AI and mind uploading technology. Mind uploading technology will permit an indefinite lifespan to those who choose to leave biology behind and upload. Some uploaded humans will choose to merge with each other and with AIs. This will require reformulations of current notions of self, but we will be able to cope.
- 3) We will spread to the stars and roam the universe. We will meet and merge with other species out there. We may roam to other dimensions of existence as well, beyond the ones of which we're currently aware.
- 4) We will develop interoperable synthetic realities (virtual worlds) able to support sentience. Some uploads will choose to live in virtual worlds. The divide between physical and synthetic realities will blur, then disappear.
- 5) We will develop spacetime engineering and scientific "future magic" much beyond our current understanding and imagination.
- 6) Spacetime engineering and future magic will permit achieving, by scientific means, most of the promises of religions — and many amazing things that no human religion ever dreamed. Eventually

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we will be able to resurrect the dead by "copying them to the future".

- 7) Intelligent life will become the main factor in the evolution of the cosmos, and steer it toward an intended path.
- 8) Radical technological advances will reduce material scarcity drastically, so that abundances of wealth, growth and experience will be available to all minds who so desire. New systems of self-regulation will emerge to mitigate the possibility of mind-creation running amok and exhausting the ample resources of the cosmos.
- 9) New ethical systems will emerge, based on principles including the spread of joy, growth and freedom through the universe, as well as new principles we cannot yet imagine
- 10) All these changes will fundamentally improve the subjective and social experience of humans and our creations and successors, leading to states of individual and shared awareness possessing depth, breadth and wonder far beyond that accessible to "legacy humans"

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**P.S.**

Giulio Prisco, who formulated the first draft of the above list, made the following comment on the use of the word "will" in these principles:

*"... 'will' is not used in the sense of inevitability, but in the sense of intention: we want to do this, we are confident that we can do it, and we will do our f\*\*king best to do it."*