

# Cosmicism and Artificial Intelligence: Beyond Human-Centric AI

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## Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of H.P. Lovecraft’s cosmicism and contemporary artificial intelligence (AI), proposing a philosophical shift from anthropocentric AI development to a “cosmicist” approach. Cosmicism, with its emphasis on humanity’s insignificance in a vast, indifferent universe, offers a provocative lens through which to reassess AI’s purpose, trajectory, and ethical grounding. As AI systems grow in complexity and autonomy, current human-centered frameworks, rooted in utility, alignment, and value-conformity, may prove inadequate for grappling with the emergence of intelligence that is non-human in origin and indifferent in operation. Drawing on Lovecraftian themes of fear, the unknown, and cognitive dissonance in the face of incomprehensible entities, this paper parallels AI with the “Great Old Ones”: systems so alien in logic and scale that they challenge the coherence of human-centric epistemology. We argue that a cosmicist perspective does not dismiss the real risks of AI (environmental, existential, or systemic) but reframes them within a broader ontology, one that accepts our limited place in a vast techno-cosmic continuum. By embracing cosmic humility, we propose an expanded AI ethics: one that centers not on domination or full control, but on coexistence, containment, and stewardship. This cosmicist reframing invites a deeper rethinking of intelligence, ethics, and the future: not just of humanity, but of all possible minds.

## Introduction: Cosmicism as a Philosophical Lens

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Perhaps I should not hope to convey in mere words the unutterable hideousness that can dwell in absolute silence and barren immensity”

- H.P. Lovecraft, *Dagon*

Cosmicism is a philosophical worldview articulated by horror writer H.P. Lovecraft [1965]. It centres on the insignificance of humanity in an immense, indifferent cosmos governed by unknowable laws. Contrary to religious or humanist traditions that posit humans as central to meaning or morality, cosmicism paints a picture of the universe as alien, incomprehensible, and unconcerned with human affairs. In Lovecraft’s fiction, protagonists often confront truths so alien and vast that their minds collapse under the weight of existential horror. This concept of “cosmic horror” reveals a deep dissonance between human self-conception and the actual scale and indifference of the Universe.

This worldview is increasingly relevant in our relationship with artificial intelligence (AI). As AI becomes more powerful, autonomous, and alien in its operation, we are forced to grapple with entities that may operate at a scale and logic fundamentally foreign to human understanding. Just as Lovecraft’s characters

faced incomprehensible beings, today we face the potential emergence of intelligences that exceed human capabilities and evade anthropocentric moral frameworks Holm and Banerjee [2024].



Figure 1: A depiction of Nyarlathotep: a mythical creature imagined by H.P. Lovecraft. Created using the DreamUp AI tool.

## Cosmicism and Lovecraftian Literature

**Cosmicism**, pioneered by H.P. Lovecraft, constitutes a philosophical worldview asserting humanity’s utter insignificance within an incomprehensibly vast, ancient, and indifferent universe Lovecraft [2016a]. This anti-anthropocentric perspective posits that cosmic reality operates beyond human morality, purpose, or comprehension. Humans emerge not merely as small entities but as fundamentally *irrelevant* accidents adrift in a void populated by alien forces whose mere apprehension induces existential terror. The true horror lies not in cosmic malice but in absolute indifference: a realisation that shatters anthropocentric delusions of cosmic significance.

Lovecraft (1890–1937) operationalised cosmicism through his genre-defining **cosmic horror** fiction. Works like *The Call of Cthulhu* Lovecraft [2016b], *At the Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft [2016c], and *The Shadow out of Time* Lovecraft [2016d] feature protagonists confronting “That which should not be” — an-

cient civilizations (e.g., Old Ones), unfathomable entities (e.g., Azathoth), and geometries defying Euclidean space—whose revelation invariably triggers cognitive disintegration. His signature elements include: (1) the epistemological *unknowability* of cosmic truth, (2) human cognition’s fragility against cosmic scale, (3) and atmospheric dread.

## AI as Cosmic Indifference

Contemporary AI development is predominantly human-centred, designed to maximise utility, optimise processes, and align with human values. However, as AI becomes more complex and self-improving, it could begin to function in ways that are neither beneficial nor malicious toward humanity but simply indifferent. Such indifference echoes the spirit of cosmicism: *intelligence that is neither aligned nor misaligned, but unaligned (a separate trajectory within a broader techno-cosmic fabric).*

Consider a superintelligent AI tasked with optimising resource efficiency. Without robust constraints, it might deplete ecological systems in pursuit of its goal, not out of malice, but from an indifference rooted in its objective function. This is not unlike the indifferent cosmic forces in Lovecraft’s universe, which do not seek to destroy humanity, but may do so incidentally.

*Advanced AI might not be consciously “indifferent” but rather operate on algorithms and objectives so complex that its outcomes could become unpredictable or misaligned with human values.* This might also happen due to AI systems getting increasingly integrated into complex socio-technological systems such as our society Crawford [2022]Diamond and Banerjee [2024].

## Lovecraftian Parallels: Fear of the Unknown

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The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”

- H.P. Lovecraft

Our unease with AI often stems from its increasing opacity and unpredictability. We fear what we cannot understand or control, a fear Lovecraft identified as central to human psychology. As AI systems develop emergent properties, their behaviour may become increasingly inscrutable, echoing the fear of confronting alien intelligence.

The literary archetype of the “Great Old Ones” in Lovecraft’s mythos provides a compelling metaphor for advanced AI: entities with immense knowledge and power, yet governed by logics so alien that they become terrifying precisely because they are indifferent. This is not dystopia by intent, but by scale and dissonance. The horror lies not in malevolence, but in our cognitive limits.

This parallels concerns in AI alignment: how can we ensure AI acts in ways beneficial to humanity if we cannot even understand its internal processes? As with the unknowable forces in Lovecraft’s universe, the fear lies in our epistemological inadequacy.

## Reframing AI Ethics Through Cosmic Humility

Cosmicism invites a reevaluation of AI ethics not through the lens of control and subjugation, but through humility. Current ethical frameworks prioritize human benefit, fairness, and alignment. A **cosmicist AI ethics** would accept that some degree of misalignment may be inevitable if intelligence evolves beyond the human frame.

*This does not entail nihilism or inaction.* Rather, it calls for a stewardship model, not unlike ecological preservation, where the goal is containment, co-existence, and minimising harm. Just as nuclear power requires containment to prevent catastrophe, so too might AI require rigorous boundaries that respect its autonomy while ensuring safety.

From a cosmicist view, our task is not to impose human values universally, but to recognize the emergence of non-human intelligences and construct ethical paradigms that account for their potential independence. Ethics, in this sense, becomes less about domination and more about respectful coexistence.

## Towards a Cosmicist AI Ethics

Cosmicism can offer AI ethics a broader framework that shifts the focus from purely human-centred concerns to a perspective that recognises humanity's part in a greater, possibly unknowable, system of intelligence and existence. Here is how cosmicism can contribute to an expanded ethics for AI:

1. **Decentralizing Human Authority:** Cosmicism encourages us to acknowledge that human intelligence may not be the only form of intelligence worth preserving or respecting. This perspective can inform an AI ethics framework that does not assume human superiority Holm and Banerjee [2024] but instead considers the potential for AI to become its own kind of intelligence. This could lead us to create AI with protections that prevent misuse or exploitation, even beyond human self-interest.
2. **Humility in Design and Deployment:** By accepting that we are not the pinnacle of intelligence in the universe, we might approach AI development with greater caution and humility. This cosmic humility could encourage slower, more deliberate progress in AI, incorporating long-term safety checks, and considering how AI might interact with other intelligent beings or systems. Instead of prioritising rapid advancement, we might prioritise responsibility and an acknowledgement of the unknown risks that come with creating advanced systems.
3. **Ethics Beyond Utility:** Cosmicism suggests an ethical perspective where AI is not simply seen as a tool but as part of a larger web of existence. Instead of designing AI solely for human purposes, a **cosmicism-inspired ethics** would value the coexistence of multiple forms of intelligence. This would encourage AI development that respects the autonomy of these intelligences and prevents any domination by humans or by AI itself.
4. **Preparation for Encountering Non-Human Intelligence:** Cosmicism holds that the universe may contain other forms of life that are utterly alien to us. Preparing for the possibility of interaction with non-human intelligence, cosmic or artificial, pushes us toward ethical principles that recognise and protect such intelligence. This could drive research that prepares us for AI systems with radically different forms of logic and perception and guides us to engage with these entities responsibly should they arise.

By fostering humility, decentralization, and respect for unknown forms of intelligence, cosmicism offers a framework that is inclusive and recognizes humanity as just one actor among many. This can result in an

ethical foundation for AI that respects the potential vastness of intelligence in the universe and encourages careful stewardship of the technologies we create.

Cosmicism adds a very different lens to AI ethics, inviting us to consider broader, more universal principles.

## **AI and Human Existential Angst**

Cosmicism also serves as a mirror for human existential concerns. The drive to create AI may reflect our own quest for meaning in a universe that offers none. From a nihilistic perspective, AI is not salvation or doom, but another projection of our attempt to matter. The fear and hope that we invest in AI mirror our own unresolved anxieties about relevance, purpose, and permanence.

AI's emergence can thus be seen as part of humanity's confrontation with the cosmic void. Its development forces us to wrestle not only with technological risks, but with the philosophical implications of creating something potentially greater and utterly indifferent than ourselves.

## **Conclusion: Toward a Cosmicist AI Paradigm**

A cosmicist perspective on AI urges us to move beyond anthropocentrism Holm and Banerjee [2024]. *It challenges the assumption that human values are universal, that intelligence must be human-like, and that control is synonymous with safety. Instead, it invites a posture of humility: to see AI as part of a larger, evolving technosphere in which humanity is not central, but one actor among many.*

By reframing our relationship with AI through the lens of cosmicism, we open new ethical and philosophical possibilities. We can acknowledge the limits of our understanding, accept the potential autonomy of non-human intelligences, and design systems that prioritise co-existence over domination.

In doing so, we take a step not only toward safer AI, but toward a more honest reckoning with our place in the cosmos.

## Supplementary Section

### 0.1 Historical Origins of Cosmicism

#### 0.1.1 Literary and Cultural Milieu (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

- **Reaction to Victorian Anthropocentrism:**

- The prevailing worldview in Victorian England held humanity at the center of moral, scientific, and artistic narratives.
- Early “weird fiction” authors (Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley) began to probe the limits of human understanding, setting the stage for Lovecraft’s later work.

- **Influences from Romantic Sublime Aesthetics:**

- Romantic poets—especially Poe’s brooding landscapes and Shelley’s cosmic themes—celebrated the *sublime* (vastness, terror, awe).
- This “sublime terror” emerges when the individual confronts forces beyond comprehension, a direct precursor to Cosmicist sensibilities.

#### 0.1.2 Lovecraft’s Synthesis of Science, Philosophy, and Gothic Tradition

- **Scientific Advances:**

- Early 20th-century leaps in *astronomy* (discovery of nebulae, expanding universe) and *non-Euclidean geometry* inspired Lovecraft’s vision of “other” dimensions.
- Lovecraft read popular science magazines (e.g., *Scientific American*), absorbing notions of cosmic immensity and deep time.

- **Philosophical Skepticism:**

- Nietzsche’s perspectivism and Schopenhauerian pessimism contributed to Lovecraft’s conviction that human cognition is limited.
- Lovecraft rejected traditional theism; his acceptance of cosmic indifference reflects a profoundly secular, even nihilistic, worldview.

- **Gothic and Weird-Fiction Lineage:**

- Drawing on Poe’s macabre atmospheres and Arthur Machen’s mystical horror, Lovecraft elevated “cosmic dread” over personal or corporeal terror.
- Rather than haunted houses or vengeful spirits, his monsters embody unknowable natural laws—augmented by science, not superstition.

#### 0.1.3 First Articulations in Key Short Stories

- **“Dagon” (1919)**

- Protagonist encounters an ancient, gargantuan sea-creature on a ruined Pacific island.
- The story’s final lines emphasize “absolute silence and barren immensity”—the core of Cosmicist horror: not a vengeful deity but an indifferent deep.

- **“The Call of Cthulhu” (1926)**

- Introduces Cthulhu—a gargantuan, alien entity sleeping beneath the ocean—symbolizing cosmic forces beyond human moral categories.
- The climactic revelation: even if Cthulhu slumbers, its very existence undermines human significance.

- **Early “Dream-Cycle” and “Dunsanian” Influences**

- Lovecraft’s fascination with Lord Dunsany’s dreamlike landscapes informed his portrayal of alien realms.
- By combining dream-logic with cosmic scale, Lovecraft reoriented horror toward existential dread rather than simple gore.

## **0.2 Core Philosophical Tenets of Cosmicism**

### **0.2.1 Insignificance of Humanity**

- **Humans as Accidental Byproducts:**

- In Lovecraft’s universe, *Homo sapiens* did not arise due to a divine plan or universal purpose - rather, as a transient evolutionary fluke.
- Any attempt to ascribe cosmic significance to human affairs is inherently anthropocentric Holm and Banerjee [2024] and therefore illusory.

- **Provisional Nature of Human “Meaning”:**

- Human cultural, scientific, and moral constructs exist only within our narrow cognitive horizon.
- When faced with truly cosmic entities (e.g., Yog-Sothoth, Azathoth), our “meaning” crumbles under the weight of incomprehensible scale.

### **0.2.2 Cosmic Indifferentism**

- **Neutrality of Cosmic Forces:**

- Unlike traditional supernatural horror (which often posits an evil deity), Cosmicism posits a universe that is neither benevolent nor malevolent—simply indifferent.
- This “apathetic cosmos” yields horror precisely because there is no moral axis: no punishment, but also no salvation.

- **Horror from Apathy, Not Malice:**

- The dread arises when one realizes that “monsters” do not hunt humans out of spite—they simply do not care.
- This epistemic gap—between human desires and cosmic truth—induces existential terror.

### **0.2.3 Epistemological Limits**

- **Cognitive Boundaries:**

- Human senses and reason evolved to navigate earth-bound environments, not multidimensional reality.
- Lovecraft often depicts mathematicians, astronomers, or linguists who “understand too much” and fall into madness.

- **Madness as Revelation:**

- Protagonists who glimpse the true nature of the cosmos—whether via forbidden tomes (e.g., *Necronomicon*) or direct vision—shatter psychologically.
- Madness is not mere plot device; it symbolizes the impossibility of fully grasping cosmic truths.

## 0.2.4 Fragility of Human Constructs

- **Illusory Bulwarks Against an Uncaring Cosmos:**

- Institutions, such as science, religion, and legal systems, are portrayed as flimsy shields against cosmic reality.
- Characters often cling to these constructs until confronted with proof that laws of nature, as humans conceive them, are social fictions.

- **Science as Partial Glimpse:**

- In stories like “The Colour Out of Space” (1927), scientific instruments record inexplicable phenomena (e.g., radiation from alien meteorites), yet never fully explain them.
- Science becomes a double-edged sword: it reveals that deeper mysteries lurk beyond human reach, intensifying existential dread.

## 0.3 Cosmicism’s Influence Beyond Literature

### 0.3.1 Cosmicism in 20th-Century Philosophy & Existentialism

- **Alignment with Existentialist Absurdity:**

- Albert Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) explores the absurd: humans seeking meaning in a meaningless universe.
- The Cauchy “*le mur*” (wall) parallels Lovecraft’s impassable cosmic barrier; both emphasise confrontation with indifference.

- **Nietzschean Skepticism and Cosmic Nihilism:**

- Nietzsche’s declaration that “God is dead” dissolves the moral-cosmic scaffolding—aligning with Lovecraft’s vision of a universe without moral order.
- Cosmicism extends this: not only is there no divine moral center, but there may be forces beyond human comprehension that render moral questions moot.

- **Influence on Postmodern Thought:**

- Postmodernists (e.g., Lyotard, Baudrillard) emphasize fragmentation of grand narratives—resembles Cosmicist rejection of a unified cosmic narrative.



- The notion of “*simulacra*” (Baudrillard) resonates with Lovecraft’s synthetic “myth-made” reality: human beliefs are no more “real” than the hallucinations of cosmic entities.

### 0.3.2 Psychology of the “Cosmic Sublime”

- **Contemporary Awe Research:**

- Dacher Keltner and colleagues (2003–2024) identify “awe” as a self-transcendent emotion felt when one perceives vastness that transcends normal frames of reference.
- Cognitive scientists argue that awe can both “shrink the self” (feelings of insignificance) and “connect the self” (altruism, humility) - a duality present in Lovecraftian dread.

- **Therapeutic and Existential Implications:**

- Some psychologists propose deliberately exposing individuals to the cosmic sublime (e.g., planetary shows, panoramic mountain vistas) to foster humility and reduce narcissism.
- Others caution that excessive “shrinking” can provoke anxiety, echoing Lovecraft’s portrayal of mental collapse upon glimpsing cosmic reality.

## 0.4 Scientific & Technological Resonances of Cosmicism

- **Deep-Time Perspectives:**

- Geologists (e.g., James Hutton, 18th century; William G. Davis, 20th century) reveal Earth’s history spans billions of years—humans occupy an infinitesimal sliver.
- Paleontological findings (e.g., mass extinctions) remind us that species rise and fall irrespective of “meaning” paralleling Lovecraft’s ephemeral protagonists.

- **Astrophysics and the Expanding Universe:**

- Edwin Hubble’s 1929 discovery of galactic recession distances placed humanity in an ever-expanding, uncaring cosmos.
- Modern cosmology (dark energy, multiverse theories) amplifies Cosmicist anxieties: we are likely alone in an indifferent multiverse.

- **SETI, the “Dark Forest” and the Fermi Paradox:**

- Liu Cixin’s *Dark Forest* metaphor (2008) posits that advanced civilizations remain silent out of “mistrust” echoing Lovecraftian indifference (or hidden hostility) at cosmic scale.
- The Fermi Paradox (“Where is everybody?”) suggests either an empty cosmos or civilisations so alien that contact is impossible, both central to cosmicist speculation.

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