

UNITED WISDOM

Russian Cosmism: Human Participation and the Limits of a Grand Project

Traditions and Worldviews

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Epigraph

> *“Supramoralism is a duty to fathers and ancestors.”*

Nikolai Fedorov, Supramoralism, or Universal Synthesis, opening of the main text. Our English translation of the short Russian passage verified in the N. F. Fedorov Library's publication.

What this article is about

A grand project changes how ordinary life appears. A home, research, school, or public activity becomes part of a future far exceeding one person. This has strength: consequences for which nobody individually takes responsibility can become visible. It also has danger: a magnificent whole can make us stop hearing those it is supposed to unite.

Russian cosmism lets us examine both sides. We will compare three distinct conceptions: Nikolai Fedorov's common task, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's cosmic philosophy, and Vladimir Vernadsky's noosphere. Grouping them under one theme does not make their teachings identical. Our practical question is how to participate in something larger than ourselves while distinguishing hope, verifiable knowledge, and duty toward particular people. Historical ideas become interlocutors; the proposed examples are our own exploration of their boundaries.

I. A broad horizon begins by distinguishing questions

“Russian cosmism” is a useful name until it promises a ready-made common formula. Fedorov, Tsiolkovsky, and Vernadsky differ in their initial questions, grounds, and conceptions of results. Placing them together helps precisely because agreement does not follow from their visions' breadth. A common interest in human participation in the world suffices for shared reading; no unified doctrine need be derived from it.

Imagine a project promising to transform a small town's life. Its presentation places solar energy, accessible education, ancestral memory, and residents' spiritual unity side by side. These words may express worthy intentions, but concern different tasks. Equipment performance needs measurement. Educational accessibility needs entry conditions and actual

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learning. Participants discuss memory's meaning. Spiritual unity requires even more careful discussion: who may consider it achieved, and by which signs?

Merging tasks makes success in one serve as proof of the others. A power station supposedly confirms society's proper organization; a ceremonial festival supposedly proves educational quality. These transitions are not necessary. We can support construction while criticizing closed decision procedures, or cherish memory while rejecting the proposed future policy.

Before entering a grand project, therefore, separate its claims. What counts as value? What do we assume possible? What can we already do? What depends on others' consent? These questions do not diminish the horizon. They reveal where responsibility for its content begins.

A broad conception can have several entry points. One person approaches through research, another care, and another historical memory. Cooperation requires no identical explanation of the entire universe. It requires a clear agreement about the immediate undertaking. When explaining the world becomes a compulsory entry pass, a project's scale starts narrowing participation before the first result.

II. Fedorov: the past must not become expendable material

In Supramoralism, Fedorov connects duty toward ancestors with resurrection. He means literally returning the dead to life, rather than merely preserving their names. Restating this as ordinary encouragement to respect a family archive erases its radical character. Presenting a moral task as confirmation of technical feasibility would be equally wrong. An immense distinction remains between the goal and an achievable means.

Its radical character makes a question visible for our reasoning: who belongs to a future called common? We readily speak of later generations and less readily of those whose lives ended with hopes unfulfilled. Development can look like a ladder: each earlier person matters only so the next can rise higher. Fedorov resists ancestors' disappearance into the result.

In a hypothetical family, younger people gain education, housing, and free time through elders' labor. It becomes tempting to call their own success proof that past sacrifices were right. Yet a child's successful life does not automatically make every parental deprivation just. Gratitude and justification of another's suffering are different movements of thought. We can appreciate what was received without declaring every loss necessary.

This does not turn Fedorov's resurrection into a family assistance program. It is a separate contemporary application of the question of duty. It recognizes past lives as having their own meaning, rather than merely supplying useful resources. Archives, stories, and care gain dignity without fulfilling the philosopher's original goal.

Preserving an author's radicality permits them to demand more than we are prepared to promise. Preserving a reader's honesty means not passing off our limited action as fulfillment of that demand. A substantive conversation is possible between them: what does the future overlook when too quickly declaring itself victorious over the past?

III. Duty does not authorize one person to direct everyone

“Common” sounds hospitable but can become a demand permitting no objection. If an undertaking is humanity's unconditional duty, refusal readily becomes moral inferiority. This is where a broad horizon needs checking: how should people enter it, and who established the conditions? This is our question to project logic, rather than a claim that historical authors already proposed contemporary voluntary-participation procedures.

Imagine relatives creating a family museum. One gathers letters, another pays for premises, and a third wants some stories kept private. Shared memory does not remove the last wish. Compulsory disclosure of personal documents can violate the trust that prompted the museum. Calling every refusal indifference to ancestors excludes important conversational content beforehand.

Duty does not disappear. Someone may benefit from others' labor, forget promises, or leave care to others. Responsibility nevertheless needs discussion through specific relationships: what was received, what promised, which opportunities exist, and who already carries the load? A universal formula cannot replace these distinctions, especially when spoken by someone who will control others' resources and time.

Examine refusal's form too. Not joining one project does not always mean rejecting responsibility altogether. Someone may prefer helping a living relative to a public memorial, offer letter copies while preserving originals, or propose a smaller act. These options appear when discussion of duty allows answers.

A strong community distinguishes disagreement over means from rejection of value. If every budget, deadline, or access question becomes betrayal of a higher goal, participants lose opportunities to correct errors. Respect for the goal then prompts restoring discussable conditions. A common task becomes shared responsibility only where people can explain why and how they participate.

IV. Hope can guide research without confirming its results

A large goal often precedes reliable means. This is normal in research: questions remain open, data incomplete, and devices unbuilt. Danger arises when the goal's value does the work of evidence. A noble desired result makes us want the hypothesis leading to it to seem likelier. Hope nevertheless concerns effort's direction; evidence concerns what is established.

A hypothetical research group seeks improved recovery after injuries. It has a preliminary observation worth checking. Reporting that observation is honest. Declaring it proven restoration of every lost capability is another act. That wording affects decisions by people living with limitations now. The difference between possibility and established result has an immediate cost for them.

Reading radical projects can give hope clearer form instead of abandoning it. We can say: this is a desired horizon, this a research question, this an interim result, and here we do not know. The conception remains. It gains room for error, revision, and partial success that a ceremonial promise of inevitability closes.

Resource distribution matters too. An open hypothesis may deserve work, but attractiveness alone cannot determine how much labor it receives at other needs' expense. Immediate help, fundamental research, and maintaining living conditions coexist. Comparing them requires discussion of consequences rather than one future-oriented slogan.

An unsuccessful trial can be substantive if its boundaries remain clear. It identifies which approach failed under particular conditions. If a project must fulfill a historical mission beforehand, acknowledging failure becomes nearly impossible. The right to a negative result therefore expresses respect for knowledge practically. It protects researchers and those who will use their conclusions.

V. Tsiolkovsky: technical work and a picture of the universe need different assessments

In Cosmic Philosophy, Tsiolkovsky discusses an inhabited universe and future forms of life. His reasoning extends far beyond designing an individual technical device. Renown as a researcher of motion in space cannot certify all his philosophical conclusions. Specific technical solutions and a worldview's picture are examined on different grounds.

Such transfer of authority occurs frequently in everyday life. An engineer organizes complex production superbly. People begin asking about fair education, suffering's meaning, and ideal societies as well as equipment. The engineer may discuss all this. Listeners must distinguish professionally substantiated knowledge, personal hypotheses, and value preferences. Respect does not oblige treating every answer as equally proven.

A large picture is particularly persuasive when joining attractive promises: a rational future, continuing life, vanished suffering, and accessible space. A question about transitions between claims then looks small beside the vision's scale. Yet that transition can be the weak point. Travel beyond Earth does not establish a particular future social order. Numerous stars do not establish possible inhabitants' moral character.

We can read this picture as philosophical imagination, dispute it, and recognize historical force without treating it as an established cosmic map. The direction becomes clearer when we see what the author proposes to prove and which premises seem sufficient to them.

Ask about your own response: which claim did I accept because it was grounded, and which because I wanted to share the author's greatness? This does not oppose admiration. It makes admiration more precise and helps us neither lose a sound technical idea through philosophical disagreement nor accept questionable philosophy out of gratitude for a sound technical idea.

VI. Perfection becomes dangerous when deciding who may live

Tsiolkovsky's cosmic optimism has a difficult side that cannot be removed for an inspiring narrative. In his 1935 article, he allows more developed beings to destroy primitive life and replace it with their own, considering this release from suffering. This is reasoning about an imagined cosmic arrangement, rather than observation of real civilizations. Its moral logic nevertheless deserves a direct question: why does a supposedly better result authorize eliminating whoever is considered worse?

Objecting that the agents might miscalculate is insufficient. Even flawless calculation of aggregate happiness does not itself settle an individual life's dignity. A person or being is evaluated from another's position of perfection. Their existence becomes replaceable material for a more beautiful picture.

Take a considerably less radical hypothetical example. An organization wants an ideal learning environment and excludes everyone lowering average success. Numbers genuinely improve afterward, but the indicator now measures a different group. The project did not solve the original task of helping earlier participants; it changed whose outcomes it counts. A beautiful report hides the transition.

This does not equate an educational decision with cosmic destruction. It identifies a shared question about selection: does benefit's intended recipient remain after transformation? If helping these people was promised and their absence then becomes success, the goal was quietly replaced. This needs articulation before comparing benefits.

Critical reading preserves interest in the future without accepting every justification of its perfection. Name separately whose life supposedly improves, who decides, and who suffers irreversible loss. The larger the project, the harder it should be to hide the last group in words of harmony. A happy whole's scale does not make an individual being's loss invisible to moral discussion.

VII. Vernadsky: thought changes the world through human activity

Vernadsky begins elsewhere. A Few Words about the Noosphere concerns Earth's biosphere and humanity's geological significance. He connects increased transformative power with reason and labor directed by it. The material subject must remain: people change substances, water, air, and living conditions. An image of invisible collective consciousness cannot exhaust the concept.

This yields a simple sequence for us. Which thought was proposed? Who turned it into a decision? Which actions followed? What changed in the surrounding world? Thinking of a clean river does not clean water itself. It can organize observation, agreements, funding, and work. These links must become visible; otherwise, “reason” conceals actual labor and consequences.

Imagine a settlement changing wastewater arrangements. Some discuss goals, others investigate soil or maintain equipment, and residents alter habits. Every action has limits. Devices may need care, loads be uneven, and old methods return. A project's rationality depends on accounting for these conditions and checking changes, rather than its name's beauty.

This contemporary application does not mean every local project proves the noosphere's arrival. Vernadsky offers a much broader historical conception. We distinguish thought from material action to avoid presenting intention as completed transformation. A useful concept reveals a question without dispensing with separate investigation.

Power and good also differ. Humanity's immense environmental impact does not itself confirm every intervention's rationality. Powerful means can coexist with poor understanding of consequences. Recognizing participation therefore does more than inspire. It restores duties to observe, discuss, correct, and preserve future decisions. Whoever changes others' living conditions is already involved in responsibility, even when describing the work exclusively technically.

VIII. Future generations cannot sign our decision

Vernadsky discusses preserving marine wealth for future generations. This opens a particular difficulty for our reflection. Future people are absent from today's conversation, cannot clarify preferences, and cannot refuse consequences. We must represent their interests while honestly acknowledging that representation's limits.

A hypothetical community chooses between immediate income and preserving a space for long use. “Future people will certainly want exactly this” is too confident. We cannot know all

their needs. We can know that certain actions close opportunities: access disappears, archives are destroyed, or lasting burdens arise. Preserving choice is sometimes better grounded than guessing a particular future wish.

Present people must not become an endless reserve of sacrifices. They too have needs, finite lives, and rights to help. Discussion becomes harder precisely because both sides deserve attention. Future interests do not cancel present responsibility; present convenience does not make tomorrow's harm irrelevant.

Distinguish necessity, benefit, and displaced costs. Sometimes a difficult decision is genuinely needed. Sometimes a project is convenient because those unable to object yet will bear its principal consequences. Transparent assessment must identify this, and discussion examine alternatives. Absence of voice does not mean absence of interest.

A broad horizon also requires representatives' modesty. Speaking for humanity does not provide information about every future person. Arguments remain open to questions: why does this choice preserve or expand opportunities, which present losses does it require, and who bears them? Such scrutiny does not reduce care to the near term. It permits caring for the distant without appropriating its imagined unanimity.

IX. Shared participation needs distributed opportunities to correct

Everyone in a large project cannot understand everything in equal detail. Some know equipment, others everyday consequences, and others a place's history. Divided knowledge is necessary. It becomes vulnerable when only one center may describe events and everyone else must believe in the whole. Errors can then persist precisely because participants conscientiously perform their parts.

Imagine shared research into an urban environment. A specialist reports measurements. A resident notes that the report omits the time when the problem is most evident. An organizer sees that the proposed measure is inaccessible to some. These objections need not have identical scientific status, yet each can expose a significant gap. A general demand to trust the grand goal cannot resolve them.

Distributed correction means a clear route from observation to checking. Who receives messages? How is the subject clarified? Where is the decision recorded? How are changes reported? Without these connections, participation may mean merely compulsory labor. Someone helps implement the project without influencing its mistaken direction.

Two kinds of trust help here. We trust others' skills where we cannot repeat their whole work. We also trust relationships in which significant objections are not suppressed. The second

does not replace the first, but supports it. Knowing one's limits should make specialists attentive to verification conditions rather than demand unconditional loyalty.

A common task can remain common despite differing convictions. Agree on actions, acceptable consequences, and exit possibilities rather than one cosmic worldview. Limited agreement sometimes seems poorer than exalted unity. It nevertheless shows which work people actually accepted. Participation becomes an understandable, verifiable promise, and differing views generate new questions rather than grounds for excluding inconvenient interlocutors.

X. A conception's scale does not replace the next step's quality

After discussing the cosmos, the next step can seem too small. Recording testimony, checking calculations, or changing discussion procedures—can these compare with universal transformation? Here, however, a broad horizon meets concrete life. If a goal's greatness devalues every available action, the project can leave someone between enthusiasm and helplessness indefinitely.

Not every small act helps. It too needs meaning and checking. A hypothetical archive project decorates covers for months while documents deteriorate. Conservation efforts hold ceremonies while overlooking a problem's source. Scale alone determines neither large nor small steps' quality. A connection is needed: what does this step preserve, discover, or change?

The reverse danger is calling immediate work final fulfillment of all hope. A preserved letter does not return the dead. Corrected wastewater arrangements do not prove rational humanity historically inevitable. A successful trial does not settle every philosophical question about life. Acknowledging boundaries values results without appropriating another scale.

Read this way, Russian cosmism does not become an everyday management manual. It remains a space of difficult questions about past, future, nature, and human participation. Fedorov prevents forgetting common benefit's recipient. Tsiolkovsky prompts scrutiny of imagined perfection's moral price. Vernadsky returns thought to labor and Earth's material transformation. These are different conversational directions, rather than three proofs of one formula.

Readers may retain great hope while refusing unsupported promises, participate without surrendering control over their entire lives, and acknowledge future responsibility without depriving present people of dignity. The next honest step then gains particular meaning. It does not replace the broad horizon, but tests whether movement toward it can keep real participants visible.

What this means in practice

Choose a project you participate in or are invited to join: family, research, community, or work. Cosmic scale is unnecessary. Connecting several people and promising an outcome beyond today's convenience is enough.

First write its goal without exalted words. What should change, and for whom? If it says “humanity,” “common good,” or “future,” add at least one specific recipient. Have they been replaced by people with whom results are easier? Does project success mean disappearance of those promised help?

Then separate four lines: value, assumption, established knowledge, and accepted action. Preserving memory is a value; desired future access an expectation; document condition verifiable information; storage method an action. Mark a transition resting only on hope or authority. Calling it open is more useful than hiding it in a confident formula.

Examine participation separately. Who decides, works, pays, and bears risk? Who can object or leave? Who is absent but affected? If representing the dead or future people, record the grounds of representation and what cannot be known on their behalf.

Choose a step preserving correction: clarify a promise, check data, speak with an affected person, preserve a document, or change responses to observations. State an observable outcome and when to revisit it. Great hope remains nearby; evaluate the step by what it actually does.

Afterward, return to two questions: is what we know clearer, and are the people we act for still visible? A negative answer need not immediately end the entire project. It identifies where participation needs changing. This exercise examines decisions; it neither proves historical teachings nor promises general agreement.

Key quotation

> *“Thought is not a form of energy.”*

Vladimir Vernadsky, A Few Words about the Noosphere, §12. Our English translation of the Russian original verified in the electronic publication. The author next asks how thought affects material processes; the short quotation neither denies such effects nor confirms a special physical field of consciousness.

Connections between traditions

Tradition and text	Substantive connection	Comparison's boundary
Christianity: 1 Corinthians 12	Different participants retain importance within a whole; a part should not disappear for an image of unity.	Paul discusses a community and spiritual gifts, rather than technical cosmic reconstruction or Fedorov's program.
Kant: Groundwork II, 4:429	Human dignity limits using someone as a means to a beautiful future.	The principle supplies no scientific answer about cosmic population; it offers a different moral discussion of ends and means.
Confucianism: Analects 13.23	Affability without flattery raises questions about participation permitting objections.	The brief saying about the superior person contains no noosphere theory or contemporary participation procedure.
Solovyov: The Justification of the Good, Chapter X	The relationship between personality and the whole helps evaluate promised common benefit.	All-unity is not identical to three distinct cosmic conceptions; a question is compared, rather than unity of systems asserted.

Primary sources and research

1. N. F. Fedorov, Supramoralism, or Universal Synthesis, opening of the main text: duty toward ancestors, resurrection, and the relation between moral task and action. Primary text in a library's electronic publication; selected passage studied.

2. K. E. Tsiolkovsky, Cosmic Philosophy, 1935: cosmic habitation, elimination of imperfect life, and future existence. Primary text; date and first-publication information taken from the website's introductory note.

3. V. I. Vernadsky, A Few Words about the Noosphere, 1944, §§1–3, 9–13: empirical framing, labor, human material impact, and future generations. Primary text electronically published from the 1991 edition.

4. Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 12, especially 12:12–27. KJV read for comparison; table formulations paraphrase meaning without directly quoting a translation.

5. I. Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, II, 4:429. Relevant passage studied in Thomas Kingsmill Abbott's English translation; meaning paraphrased.

6. Analects XIII.23. Primary passage in James Legge's translation on affability without flattery; the Russian formulation paraphrases meaning.

7. V. S. Solovyov, The Justification of the Good, Chapter X, opening: personality and society. Primary passage for limited philosophical comparison.

Tags

Russian cosmism; Fedorov; Tsiolkovsky; Vernadsky; common task; noosphere; biosphere; future; ancestors; memory; resurrection; human participation; responsibility; hope; knowledge; research; technical progress; moral goal; dignity; perfection; differences; consent; freedom; generations; common good; nature; labor; material consequences; critical reading; project boundaries

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