

World-frames

A taxonomy of the foundations of sense making

19 CATEGORIES · 272 FRAMEWORKS · VERSION 1 · UPDATED OCTOBER 2026

This document maps the major world-frames through which human beings make sense of reality, morality, society, and the future. It is an incomplete catalogue of all the visible and hidden assumptions that serve as the cognitive foundations for thoughts, beliefs and opinions.

This is a tool for making the implicit explicit.

It's also a menu of world-frames that you can try on for size and use to find new perspectives.

The point is not to adopt any single world-frame, but to develop the cognitive flexibility to move between them: to use these world-frames as lenses to see through. Without getting enthralled by any one lens. The goal is *meta-rational fluency*: the capacity to recognize which framework is operating in any conversation, argument, or institution, and to consciously choose which lens to apply rather than being unconsciously bound by a prevailing frame.

Most of us run a composite of 3–5 of these frameworks as our default operating system, largely without knowing it. Making those defaults visible is an important first step toward intellectual freedom.

01 The Sensemaking Stack

All frameworks in this taxonomy occupy one or more layers of this stack. Read it top-down: each layer rests on assumptions from the layers above it. But in real life, the way we construct our own sensemaking stack varies— many of us build from lived experience (FOLK) upward, or from a core ethical commitment outward. This stack describes logical dependency, not how they take shape in people's lives.

1. Cosmology / Ontology

What is ultimately real? What exists? What is mind, self, cosmos?

2. Epistemology

How do we know? What counts as valid knowledge?

3. Paradigm

How is knowledge organized and collectively validated?

4. Psychological frame

What is the self? What drives us? How do we develop? How do we heal?

5. Ethics / Ecological ethics

What matters? What is right? What is our relationship to nature?

6. Power

How does power operate? Who has it and how is it exercised?

7. Ideology / Economic doctrine

How should society and resources be organized?

8. Temporal / Futures narrative

What is the shape of time? Where are we going?

9. Aesthetics

How is meaning made through form, beauty, and expression?

10. Worldview

Integrated bundles spanning multiple layers: full operating systems

11. Developmental models

How does the stack itself evolve in persons and cultures?

12. Folk worldviews

Lived composites, the everyday default OS, largely implicit and often riddled with contradiction

02 The aspiration: meta-rational fluency

This taxonomy exists in service of an aspiration: **the ability to see through every framework without being captured by any one.** This isn't relativism. Relativism says no framework is better than any other. This is different. Let's call it *meta-rational fluency*: the capacity to recognize which framework is operating, to consciously adopt or release it, and to dance between perspectives as the situation calls for.

In practice, this means developing several capacities:

- 01 **Making the implicit explicit.** Most of us operate from 3–5 frameworks we absorbed from family, education, culture, and temperament. The first move is simply to see what you're already running. If you grew up in a Western secular household, you may be running some combination of scientific-materialist ONTology, empiricist EPIstemology, liberal IDEOlogy, meritocratic FOLK worldview, consequentialist ETHics, and autonomous individualism (SELF). Naming these doesn't reject them; rather, it helps you use each one with more dexterity.

- 02 **Perspective-taking without perspective-collapsing.** Truly understanding a framework means being able to think *from within it*, not just *about it*. This requires temporarily setting aside your default commitments— you don’t have to abandon them, just park them for a moment so you can genuinely inhabit another way of seeing. The test: can you make the strongest case *for* a framework that you don’t hold, in terms its adherents would be happy with? I.e., can you *steelman* the perspective and preferences of a world-frame even if you don’t fully endorse all the premises?
- 03 **Recognizing cross-level arguments.** Most intractable disagreements are cross-level: one person is arguing about ethics while the other is arguing about ontology; one is arguing about policy while the other is arguing about epistemology. When you can name the level, you can either go upstream to address the actual disagreement or accept that the gulf is at the level of foundational commitments.
- 04 **Holding multiple frameworks simultaneously.** The seasoned “world-frame practitioner” doesn’t just switch between lenses sequentially, they can hold several simultaneously, seeing how each illuminates and obscures different features of the same situation. A political crisis looks different through a Marxist POWER lens, a systems-thinking EPIstemology lens, a Confucian ETHics lens, and a collapsist FUTure lens. All four perspectives taken together paint a bigger picture. The ability to see them all at once, without collapsing into any one, is the skill.
- 05 **Knowing when to commit.** Meta-rational fluency is not eternal detachment. At some point you have to *act*, and action requires a decision. The difference is between commitment chosen after seeing a bigger landscape and commitment arrived at with narrow examination. The big-picture decision is always stronger for having arisen out of a bigger context.

03 The categories

01 **Cosmologies**

COS · 22 ×

Metaphysical Worldviews

Primary accounts of ultimate reality: what fundamentally exists? How is the cosmos structured? What's humanity's place in it? Is the universe alive or inert? Is there purpose built into reality or not? Are humans central, peripheral or just one thread among many? What is the relationship between the visible and invisible? Is time linear, cyclical or illusory? These are the deepest orienting frames.

Note: many entries here (Buddhist, Hindu, Daoist, Indigenous, Islamic) are full-stack worldviews with their own EPIstemology, ONTology, ETHics, and social visions. They appear under COS because cosmology is their *most distinctive* contribution to the taxonomy, but they are not reducible to cosmology.

AXIS immanent ↔ transcendent; personal deity ↔ impersonal ground; embodied ↔ other-worldly

Animism

Everything is alive. Rocks, rivers, storms, animals, forests. Not metaphorically. They actually have spirit, agency, and some sort of interiority. The world is not a collection of inert objects with one conscious species walking around on top. It's a community of beings, most of them non-human. This is the oldest recorded cosmology, and arguably the most common one in human history.

Shamanic / Spirit Ecology

Reality has layers: a visible world and one or more spirit worlds running alongside it. Specialist practitioners (shamans, healers, medicine people) can move between them, negotiating with spirit beings on behalf of the community. The cosmos is relational and conversational; human and more-than-human are in ongoing dialogue.

Polytheism

The divine isn't singular. It's plural, messy, and in conflict with itself. Multiple gods with personalities, domains, rivalries, and agendas. Humans don't worship from below so much as negotiate between competing powers. The cosmos has politics (Greek, Norse, Hindu pantheons)

Monotheism

There is one God: personal, transcendent, and involved. This God is the source of moral law, the ground of meaning, and the author of history. The universe isn't indifferent; it was made on purpose, by someone, for a reason. The dominant cosmology on Earth by population (Christianity, Islam, Judaism)

Deism

God built the Universe and walked away. The cosmos was created by an intelligent designer, but that designer does not intervene. No miracles, no revelation, no answered prayers. Reason, not scripture, is how you figure out what God intended. A huge influence on Enlightenment thought and the architecture of secular democracy (Voltaire; many American founders)

Pantheism

God and the universe are the same thing. There's no separate creator looking down. The divine *is* the cosmos, and the cosmos *is* the divine. Every rock, every star, every organism is a face of God. No personal deity, no prayer, no intervention, just the sacred totality of what exists (Spinoza)

Panentheism

God contains the universe but exceeds it— so the cosmos is *inside* God the way a thought is inside a mind, but God is more than the cosmos. Distinct from pantheism (God = Nature) because here God is also beyond nature, evolving with it (Whitehead, process theology)

Abrahamic Covenantal WV

God and humanity are in a binding relationship— a covenant with mutual obligations. History isn't random or cyclical; it's going somewhere, driven by that relationship. This narrative spine (creation → fall → redemption → culmination) is shared across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, though each tells it differently.

Islamic Cosmology

God is radically one (tawhid). Not a trinity, not divisible, not comparable to anything; humanity's role is stewardship (khalifa) of creation; and every action faces ultimate accountability (akhira). A complete moral-metaphysical architecture, not just theology.

Buddhist Worldview

Nothing is permanent, nothing is separate, and there is no fixed self. Suffering arises from clinging to things that are always already changing. Liberation (nirvana) comes not from getting what you want but from seeing through the craving itself. A complete system. (also EPI, ONT, ETH)

Hindu / Vedantic Worldview

Ultimate reality (Brahman) is one, and your deepest self is identical with it — the sense of separation is the illusion. Right action (dharma), universal consequence (karma), and liberation from the cycle of rebirth (moksha) form the orienting structure; richly pluralistic, with room for many paths (also ONT, ETH)

Daoist Worldview

The Tao is the source and process of everything, but the moment you name it, you've missed it. The highest skill is wu wei: effortless action, moving with the grain of reality rather than forcing against it. Don't push the river. The wise person is like water: yielding, persistent, finding the lowest place. A worldview organized around harmony with natural flux rather than mastery over it (also ETH, EPI)

Karmic / Reincarnation COS

Consciousness doesn't end at death. It continues across multiple lives, carrying the consequences of prior actions forward. What you did matters not just in this life but across lifetimes. The playing field is much longer than one biography. Shared across Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, though each tradition frames the mechanism differently.

Nondualism

The split between you and the world, between subject and object, observer and observed, isn't ultimately real. It's a useful fiction that consciousness constructs. At the deepest level there's no separation to bridge. You're not looking *at* reality. You're reality experiencing (Advaita Vedanta, Zen, Dzogchen)

Aboriginal / Dreaming COS

Ancestral beings shaped the land— and are still shaping it now; the Dreaming is not the past but a living present. Time is a web of relationships all present at once. The land (country) is a community you belong to, not a resource you own, and you have moral obligations to it (diverse traditions across Australia)

Andean / Pachamama COS

Earth (Pachamama) is a living being, not a resource; reciprocity is the fundamental law of the cosmos; the good life means balance and right relationship, not accumulation (Ecuador, Bolivia have written this into constitutional law)

African Traditional COS

A living force or energy runs through everything: people, ancestors, animals, rivers, objects. Maintaining this flow is the central task. Ancestors remain active participants in the community, not gone; the cosmos is deeply social, with obligations running between the living, the dead, and the not-yet-born (Yoruba, Bantu, and many others)

Zoroastrian Dualism

The cosmos is a battlefield between truth (Asha) and deception (Druj), and every human choice tips the balance. You're not a spectator— your moral life is cosmically consequential. This is one of the oldest monotheistic-adjacent traditions and it directly shaped Christian, Jewish, and Islamic ideas about heaven, hell, judgment, and the end of the world.

Esoteric / Occult Worldview

Reality has a hidden architecture— patterns that repeat at every scale (as above, so below); the cosmos is layered with concealed meaning accessible through practice and initiation, not ordinary perception (Hermeticism, Kabbalah, alchemy, Freemasonry)

Simulation Hypothesis

What we call physical reality is actually a computed substrate: a simulation running on something else's hardware. Not just a thought experiment anymore; it increasingly functions as a genuine cosmological commitment for a growing subculture, complete with its own theology (who are the programmers?) and eschatology (can we break out?) (Bostrom)

Secular Sacred

Meaning, awe, and moral depth are real and available without any supernatural claims. A sunset can be sacred. A birth can be holy. The universe can inspire reverence. You don't need God to feel the weight of existence. The material world, honestly encountered, is more than enough (Sagan, Goodenough)

Scientific Naturalism

The cosmos is governed by natural laws discoverable through science. There are no supernatural agents, no hidden purposes, no cosmic plan. What you see, properly investigated, is what there is. The default cosmology of secular modernity, so pervasive that most people holding it don't realize it's a cosmology at all (also ONT)

Every entry carries a primary code (COS, ONT, EPI, etc). Secondary roles are noted parenthetically. Many frameworks are genuinely cross-category. The primary code reflects where the framework does its most distinctive work.

02 Ontologies

ONT · 14 ×

What Exists and What Is It Made Of?

Fundamental claims about what categories of things exist and how they relate. Ontology underpins epistemology since what you think exists shapes what you think can be known.

AXIS material ↔ idealist; reductive ↔ emergent; substance ↔ process/relational

Materialism / Physicalism

Only matter and energy exist. Consciousness, meaning, love, and moral conviction are ultimately physical phenomena. There's nothing else going on. If it can't be reduced to physics, it either doesn't exist or we just haven't reduced it yet. The default ontology of modern science.

Eliminative Materialism

The everyday categories we use to describe our inner lives (beliefs, desires, feelings) don't actually refer to real things in the brain. They're folk stories we tell about

ourselves. Neuroscience will eventually replace them entirely, the way chemistry replaced alchemy (Churchland)

Dualism

Mind and matter are fundamentally different kinds of stuff. Consciousness is not physical and never will be. This is Descartes' position, and it's where the 'hard problem of consciousness' lives: if the brain is just matter, how does a subjective experience pop out of it?

Idealism

Consciousness is what's fundamental, and matter is derived from it, not the other way around. The physical world doesn't produce mind; mind produces the physical world. Sounds exotic, but it's one of the oldest positions in philosophy and it's making a comeback (Berkeley, Hegel, Kastrup)

Panpsychism

Consciousness isn't something that magically appears when matter gets complex. Rather, it's baked into reality all the way down. Every particle has some flicker of experience, however faint or different from our own. Brains don't create consciousness from non-conscious stuff; they're built from components that already have experiential properties (Chalmers, Goff)

Information Ontology

Reality is fundamentally made of information, not matter — physical structure arises from information processing. The physicist John Wheeler called it 'it from bit': every particle, every force, every feature of the physical world derives from yes/no answers to binary questions (Wheeler, Floridi)

Process Philosophy

Nothing “*is*”, everything is *becoming*. Reality is made of events and processes, not static objects or substances. A river isn't a thing; it's a happening. So is a person. So is an atom. So is a mountain. Nouns only happen in human minds, where we endeavour to freeze a process with language. Nouns are abstractions not actuals. Stability is the illusion; flux is what's real (Whitehead)

Relational Ontology

Nothing exists independently. Things are constituted by their relationships, not prior to them. An electron has no properties outside of its interactions. A person has no identity outside of their relations. The 'individual thing' is an abstraction; the relationship is what's real. Shows up in both quantum physics and Indigenous thought (Barad)

Object-Oriented Ontology

Every object (a rock, a pixel, a corporation) has a reality of its own that can never be fully accessed by anything else, including humans. We don't get a privileged view of reality just because we're conscious. Everything withdraws from everything else. A 'flat' ontology where humans are no more central than dust (Harman, speculative realism)

Social Constructionism

Race, gender, money, nations, corporations: these aren't natural features of the world. They're human inventions that we collectively maintain, often so successfully that they feel inevitable and discovered rather than made. Not a claim about how we *know* (that's constructivism in EPI), this is a claim about what *exists*.

Emergentism

Life is real. Mind is real. Culture is real. And none of them can be fully explained by just describing their parts. A cell isn't just chemistry. Consciousness isn't just neurons firing. Emergent properties are genuinely new; they arise from lower-level interactions but can't be reduced back down to them.

Holons/Holarchy

A holon is something that is simultaneously a complete whole and a part of a larger whole. An atom is a whole. It's also part of a molecule. A molecule is a whole. It's also part of a cell. A cell is a whole. It's also part of you. You're a whole. You're also part of a family, a community, an ecosystem, a biosphere. This nesting runs in both directions without terminus. Nothing is purely a whole (with nothing above it) and nothing is purely a part (with nothing below it). Reality is not a collection of things or a single undifferentiated unity; it is a holarchy: nested levels of wholeness, each one including and transcending the level below. Each level is real, irreducible, and complete on its own terms while also serving as a component of something it could not have predicted. Dissolves the false choice between reductionism and holism by showing that both are half right. (Koestler, Wilber)

Naturalism

Everything that exists is part of the natural world. No supernatural entities, no separate spiritual plane, no miracles that break the causal order. But this is a bigger tent than materialism: you can be a naturalist and still think consciousness, emergence, or process are fundamental. The commitment here is 'no magic'.

Nondualism (also COS)

The split between you and the world, (between subject and object, observer and observed, inner and outer) isn't ultimately real. It's a useful fiction that consciousness constructs, but at the deepest level there's no separation to bridge. You're not looking *at* reality. You're reality experiencing (Advaita Vedanta, Zen, Dzogchen)

03 Epistemologies

EPI · 16 ×

How We Know

Theories of knowledge: what counts as knowledge? What are the sources of knowledge? What are the limits of knowledge? And what perspective is epistemically authoritative? Your EPIstemology shapes which arguments feel compelling.

AXIS certainty ↔ fallibilism; individual reason ↔ social/collective; context-free ↔ situated

Revelation / Authority

Truth comes from above through sacred texts, prophetic lineage, or unbroken tradition. You don't reason your way to it or discover it through experiment. You receive it. The authority of the source *is* the epistemology (scripture, papal authority, guru lineage)

Rationalism

Some truths can be known through reason alone, without needing to check them against experience. Mathematical truths, logical necessities, and certain foundational principles are accessible to the mind directly. Thinking, done rigorously enough, can get you to reality (Descartes, Leibniz, Kant)

Empiricism

All knowledge ultimately comes through the senses through observation, experience, and contact with the world. If you can't trace a claim back to some experience, it's not knowledge. The philosophical foundation beneath modern science, even if most scientists don't name it (Locke, Hume)

Positivism

Only claims that can be tested against evidence count as real knowledge. Moral claims, aesthetic judgments, and metaphysical questions aren't knowledge, they're just expressions of preference. Hugely influential in the sciences; widely rejected in the humanities (Comte, Vienna Circle).

Scientific Realism

Science doesn't just make useful predictions, it describes what's actually there, including things we can't directly observe. Electrons, dark matter, natural selection—these aren't convenient fictions. They're real structures of the world that our best theories have uncovered.

Instrumentalism / Pragmatism

Theories don't need to be 'true', they need to be useful. 'Truth' just means what works, what solves problems, what lets you navigate reality effectively. If a model makes good predictions and guides good action, that's all you can ask of it. Stop worrying about whether it mirrors reality (James, Dewey, Rorty)

Bayesian / Probabilistic EPI

You don't 'know' things, you hold beliefs with varying degrees of confidence, and you update those degrees as new evidence arrives. Nothing is ever 100% certain or 0% certain; everything is a probability that shifts. The dominant epistemology in the rationalist, effective altruism, and AI safety communities (also PARA)

Constructivism

Knowledge isn't sitting out there waiting to be found, it's built. Your culture, your language, your cognitive wiring, your social context all shape what you can know and how you know it. There's no raw, unmediated access to 'the way things are.' Distinct from social constructionism (which is an ONT claim about what exists); this is about how knowing works.

Phenomenology

Start with experience itself; not theories about experience, not brain scans, not physics, but the raw fact of what it's like to perceive, think, and exist. Bracket all your assumptions about what's 'really' happening and describe what's actually showing up in consciousness. The method is rigorous attention to first-person experience (Husserl, Heidegger)

Hermeneutics

All understanding is interpretation. There's no view from nowhere. You can only understand a part (a sentence, an event, a person) in the context of the whole, and the whole only through its parts. This circle never closes. You're always interpreting from somewhere, and acknowledging that is the beginning of honest knowing (Gadamer, Ricoeur)

Systems Epistemology

You can't understand anything by isolating it. Knowing requires seeing relationships, feedback loops, and context— the web of connections that makes any individual thing what it is. Rip something out of its system to study it and you've already distorted it. The map must include the territory's interconnections (Bateson)

Embodied / Enactivist

Knowing isn't something that happens in your head— it happens through your body, in action, in the world. You don't think your way into understanding a bicycle; you ride it. Cognition is not brain-bound, it's distributed across body, environment, and activity. The mind doesn't stop at the skull (Varela, Thompson)

Feminist Standpoint EPI

Where you stand shapes what you can see. Knowledge is always situated— your gender, race, class, and social position don't just colour your perspective, they determine what's visible to you and what's invisible. The view from nowhere is a fiction, and pretending otherwise usually means you're looking from the most privileged perspective (Harding, Collins)

Indigenous Epistemologies

Knowledge is relational, place-based, and often carried orally across generations. Much of it is empirical in ways Western epistemology doesn't recognize— millennia of direct observation, ecological knowledge, and pattern recognition embedded in story and practice. (diverse traditions)

Apophatic / Negative EPI

Some things can only be known by saying what they're *not*. God is not finite. Consciousness is not reducible. The Tao that can be spoken is not the true Tao. This is a serious epistemological stance — not vagueness, but the claim that the deepest realities systematically exceed what language can capture. Central to most mystical traditions.

Participatory EPI

Knowledge isn't extracted from a passive world by a detached observer — it's co-created in the encounter between knower and known. The act of knowing changes both you and what you're knowing. Reality meets you halfway (Heron, Skolimowski)

04 Research & Knowledge Paradigms

PARA · 9 ×

Paradigms are shared frameworks that define what questions are worth asking, what methods are valid, and what counts as a good answer within a knowledge community. Distinct from your personal EPIstemology stance, paradigms are institutionalized, collective, and they shape disciplines.

AXIS objectivist ↔ interpretivist; value-neutral ↔ value-laden;
consensus ↔ critical

Positivism / Post-Positivism

There's a real world out there and you can study it objectively. Form a hypothesis, test it against data, quantify the results. Post-positivism softens this slightly: objectivity is an ideal you pursue, not something you perfectly achieve, but rigorous method still gets you closer to truth than anything else. The backbone of most natural and social science as practiced.

Evidence-Based Practice

Knowledge has a hierarchy, and the top is occupied by randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews. Expert opinion sits at the bottom. This paradigm dominates medicine and increasingly shapes education, policy, and management. Its power is real: it has saved countless lives by replacing intuition with data. Its shortcoming is that it struggles with anything that can't be randomized or measured, which is a lot.

Interpretivism

Social reality isn't like physical reality. People make meaning, and that meaning is what matters. You can't understand a culture, a practice, or a life by measuring it. You have to interpret it: thick description, lived experience, qualitative methods. Multiple valid interpretations can coexist because the subject matter is inherently perspectival.

Critical Theory

Knowledge is never neutral. Every research question, every method, every institution that funds inquiry carries political assumptions. The job of scholarship isn't just to describe the world but to expose how power and ideology operate from within it, and to contribute to emancipation. If your research doesn't ask 'who benefits and who suffers?', it serves the status quo (Frankfurt School)

Pragmatist Paradigm

Start with the problem, not the method. Whatever approach that works for this particular question is the right approach. Truth isn't about mirroring reality; it's about producing useful results. Mixed methods, pluralism, and a refusal to get stuck in paradigm wars. The most practical researchers often operate here without labeling it (Dewey, James)

Complexity / Emergence

Linear causality is the exception, not the rule. Most real-world phenomena involve feedback loops, tipping points, sensitive dependence on initial conditions, and emergent properties that can't be predicted from the parts. This isn't a confession of ignorance; it's a different model of how causation works. Requires its own analytical vocabulary: attractors, phase transitions, self-organization, path dependence (Prigogine, Santa Fe Institute)

Participatory Action Research

The people being studied should be co-designing the research. Not as subjects, not as informants, but as partners who shape the questions, the methods, and the use of findings. Research is a democratic practice, not an extraction. Knowledge produced this way is often more actionable because the community already owns it.

Integral / Transdisciplinary

No single method captures the whole picture. This paradigm integrates multiple methodologies, seeking a synthesis that transcends disciplinary boundaries without collapsing them. Ambitious and sometimes accused of overreach, but at its best it addresses the fragmentation that hyper-specialization creates (Wilber, Morin)

Design Paradigm

You learn by making. Knowledge isn't only found through observation or analysis; it's produced through the act of creating things that didn't exist before. The artificial, the designed, the built environment are legitimate objects of study in their own right. Reflective practice: you design, you observe what happens, you redesign (Schön, Simon)

05 Psychological Frameworks

PSY · 14 ×

Models of Self, Mind & Healing

How do you understand the individual psyche? Its structure, drives, development, pathology, and healing? These frameworks shape everything from education to criminal justice to how we talk about ourselves at dinner.

AXIS individual ↔ relational; mechanistic ↔ meaning-making;
pathology-focused ↔ growth-focused

Psychoanalytic

Most of what drives you is invisible to you. Beneath your conscious mind lies a whole architecture of repressed desires, childhood wounds, unresolved conflicts, and symbolic patterns that shape your relationships, your choices, and your suffering without your awareness. Therapy is the process of making the unconscious conscious. A sprawling tradition with many rooms: Freud's drives, Jung's archetypes, Lacan's language, Winnicott's relational self.

Behaviorist

Forget the inner life. What's real is what's observable: behaviour. Stimulus in, response out. The environment shapes you through reinforcement and punishment, and everything else (thoughts, feelings, the unconscious) is either irrelevant or a story you tell yourself after the fact. Radical in its refusal to speculate about interiority. Built the foundations of modern experimental psychology, even if almost nobody is a pure behaviourist anymore (Skinner, Watson)

Cognitive / Computational

The mind is an information processor. Perception is input, thinking is computation, behaviour is output. We navigate reality using mental shortcuts (heuristics), stored patterns (schemas), and systematic errors (cognitive biases). The dominant paradigm in clinical and experimental psychology today. If you've ever heard someone say 'that's just your confirmation bias,' you're hearing this framework talk.

Humanistic / Existential

You are not a machine processing inputs, and you are not a bundle of unconscious drives. You are a person seeking meaning, authenticity, and growth. The deepest human motivation is self-actualization: becoming who you actually are. Therapy isn't about fixing pathology; it's about creating conditions where a person can unfold. The philosophical backbone of most modern coaching, personal development, and 'be your best self' culture (Maslow, Rogers, May)

Contemplative / Mindfulness

Awareness itself is therapeutic. By training attention (through meditation, mindfulness, contemplative practice), you can change your relationship to your own thoughts and emotions without changing their content. Draws heavily on Buddhist psychology but increasingly integrated into clinical settings: MBSR, MBCT, ACT. A framework that says the observer is as important as what's being observed.

Attachment Theory

Your earliest relationships create a template that shapes every relationship after. If your caregivers were reliably responsive, you develop a secure base: the felt sense that the world is safe enough to explore. If they weren't, you develop strategies (anxious, avoidant, disorganized) that persist into adulthood and colour how you love, fight, parent, and trust. The most influential framework in modern parenting and couples therapy (Bowlby, Ainsworth)

Trauma-Informed / Somatic

Trauma isn't just a bad memory. It lives in the body: in the nervous system, in muscle tension, in the startle response, in the way you breathe. Healing can't happen through talk alone because the body is holding what the mind has tried to forget. This framework has reshaped therapy, education, and criminal justice by insisting that 'what happened to you?' is a better question than 'what's wrong with you?' (Van der Kolk, Levine)

Evolutionary Psychology

Your mind was built for a world that no longer exists. The psychological equipment you're running, your fears, your mating preferences, your tribal instincts, your status anxiety, was shaped by selection pressures in ancestral environments over hundreds of thousands of years. Modern life is a mismatch. Powerful at generating hypotheses about human universals; controversial when it slides into just-so stories that naturalize the status quo.

Moral Foundations Theory

Moral intuitions are not derived from a single principle (utility, duty, fairness) but from multiple evolved foundations that different people and cultures weigh differently. Care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression. Conservatives tend to draw on all six roughly equally. Progressives tend to weigh Care and Fairness heavily and discount the others. Most political arguments that feel like disagreements about facts are actually disagreements about which moral foundations matter most. The framework explains why people talking past each other on moral questions are often not reasoning badly; instead, they are reasoning from different moral taste buds (Haidt)

Narrative Psychology

You are the story you tell about yourself. Identity isn't a fixed thing you discover; it's a narrative you construct, edit, and revise across your lifetime. Therapeutic change happens when you re-author the story: find a different meaning in the same events, shift who the protagonist is, rewrite the ending you assumed was inevitable. If you've ever felt trapped by 'the story of your life,' this framework says: you're the author, not just the character.

Transpersonal Psychology

There are states of consciousness and stages of development beyond the ordinary ego, and they're not pathological. Mystical experiences, ego dissolution, peak states,

encounters with the numinous: these are legitimate psychological phenomena, not symptoms to be medicated away. A framework that takes spiritual experience seriously as data, not delusion (Grof, early Wilber)

Positive Psychology

Psychology spent a century studying what goes wrong. This framework asks: what goes right? What makes people flourish, not just survive? Strengths, flow states, gratitude, meaning, resilience. Empirical, not sentimental: it wants to measure wellbeing with the same rigour that clinical psychology measures depression. (Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi)

Relational-Cultural Theory

Growth happens through connection, not through independence. The Western ideal of the autonomous self is a fiction that causes real damage, because when people can't live up to it, they isolate, and isolation is the primary source of psychological suffering. Healing means restoring mutual empathy: relationships where both people can be affected by each other. A corrective to every framework on this list that centres the individual (Miller, Stiver, Jordan)

Developmental Psychology

The mind doesn't arrive fully formed. It develops in stages, each building on the last. Children think differently from adults, not just less. Piaget mapped the cognitive stages (sensorimotor through formal operations). Vygotsky showed that learning is scaffolded socially: you grow into understanding through interaction with people who are slightly ahead of you. Erikson traced identity formation across the whole lifespan. The most institutionally powerful framework in education (Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson)

06 Ethical Frameworks

ETH · 16 ×

Moral Reasoning Engines

What makes actions right or wrong. What makes something good or bad? And what do we owe each other? These are the engines that convert worldview commitments into practical moral judgment.

AXIS individual ↔ relational/collective; rule-based ↔ outcome-based; universal ↔ contextual

Virtue Ethics

The central question isn't 'what should I do?' but 'what kind of person should I be?' Morality lives in character, not in rules or calculations. The virtues (courage, justice, temperance, wisdom) are excellences cultivated through practice over a lifetime. A good person, properly formed, will tend to act well. The oldest Western ethical tradition, and the one most people actually rely on when they aren't philosophizing (Aristotle, MacIntyre)

Care Ethics

Morality begins in relationships, not in abstract principles. The right thing to do depends on who is in front of you, what they need, and what your relationship to them demands. This framework corrects the bias in most Western ethics toward impartiality, universality, and detachment. Sometimes the moral response is precisely to be partial: to attend to this person, in this situation, with everything you have (Noddings, Gilligan)

Utilitarian / Consequentialist

The right action is the one that produces the best outcomes for the most people. Intentions don't matter. Rules don't matter. What matters is the net result: more wellbeing, less suffering. (Bentham, Mill, Singer)

Deontological

Some things are wrong regardless of the consequences. You don't lie even if lying would produce a better outcome. You don't use people as instruments even if it would benefit the majority. Morality consists of duties and rights that hold unconditionally. Persons are ends in themselves, never merely means. The philosophical architecture behind human rights, legal protections, and every instance of 'you cannot do that, even if it works' (Kant)

Contractarianism

Morality is what rational people would agree to under fair conditions. Rawls' thought experiment: imagine designing the rules of society without knowing what position you'll occupy in it. What would you choose? Most likely, rules that protect the most vulnerable, because you might be one of them. A framework that grounds justice in rational agreement rather than divine command or natural order (Hobbes, Rawls, Scanlon)

Natural Law Ethics

There are moral truths built into human nature, and reason can discover them without the aid of scripture or revelation. Murder is wrong not because God said so, but because it violates what human beings fundamentally are and need. Universal, pre-political, and independent of any particular culture. The philosophical foundation beneath most human rights discourse, whether or not anyone credits it (Aquinas, Finnis)

Human Rights Framework

Every human being has certain inviolable rights simply by virtue of being human. These rights are not granted by governments; they exist prior to any political arrangement, and they set a floor below which no state, culture, or institution may go. The dominant global moral language, and the thing people reach for when they need to say 'this is unacceptable, everywhere, for everyone.' Enormously influential.

Ubuntu / African Communitarian

'I am because we are.' Personhood is not a given; it is constituted through relationship and participation in community. You become a person through others. Morality is about maintaining and restoring right relationship, not about individual rights or maximizing outcomes. A fundamentally different starting point from every Western framework on this list (Mbiti, Tutu)

Confucian Ethics

Morality lives in relationships, and each relationship carries its own obligations. Parent-child, ruler-subject, husband-wife, elder-younger, friend-friend: these five relationships structure the moral universe. Ren (benevolence), li (ritual propriety), and yi (righteousness) are cultivated through practice, study, and self-correction. Ethics is not about finding the right principle; it's about becoming the kind of person who acts well within their web of roles.

Stoic Cosmopolitanism

A rational order (logos) runs through the universe, and every human being participates in it. This makes all people moral equals regardless of tribe, nation, or status. Your obligations extend to all of humanity, not just your community. Virtue is the only genuine good; everything else (wealth, health, reputation) is indifferent. A framework that produces both radical acceptance of what you cannot control and radical responsibility for what you can (Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Seneca)

Pragmatist Ethics

Morality is not a fixed code handed down from above. It is an ongoing inquiry, tested against experience and revised when it stops working. Values are hypotheses about how to live well, and like all hypotheses, they should be updated when the evidence changes. No eternal rules, no final answers: the continuous work of figuring out what actually serves human flourishing in this situation, right now (Dewey, James)

Effective Altruism

If you are going to help people, do it as effectively as possible. Use evidence and reason to determine where your time and money will prevent the most suffering, then act accordingly, even if the cause is unglamorous and the beneficiaries are strangers on the other side of the world. A life saved in Malawi counts the same as a life saved in your neighbourhood.

Longtermism

The future is vast. If humanity survives, billions or trillions of people will eventually exist, and their lives matter morally even though they don't exist yet. This means the most important work we can do now is reduce the risk of extinction or civilizational collapse. The logical extension of utilitarian thinking across deep time. Controversial precisely because of how much present suffering it is willing to deprioritize in favour of existential risk reduction.

Moral Anti-Realism

There are no moral facts. When you say 'murder is wrong,' you are not describing a feature of the universe; you are expressing an attitude, endorsing a social convention, or projecting your feelings onto a world that is, at bottom, indifferent. This does not necessarily lead to amorality. Most moral anti-realists still behave ethically; they simply reject the claim that morality has an objective foundation (Mackie, Blackburn)

Stewardship

You do not own what you have been given. You are a caretaker: of land, of institutions, of resources, of the conditions future generations will inherit. The moral weight falls on your responsibilities, not your rights, and those responsibilities extend beyond the human and beyond the present. Shows up across religious traditions, environmental ethics, and Indigenous thought.

Deep Ecology (also ECO)

Humans are not more valuable than any other living being. Every organism, every ecosystem has intrinsic worth that exists independently of its usefulness to us. This is not soft environmentalism. It is a radical ontological claim: the biosphere has value in itself, and human interests do not automatically take precedence. Most people find this either obviously true or obviously absurd, which is a good indicator that it is touching something foundational (Naess)

07 Political Ideologies

IDEO · 21 ×

How Society Should Be Organized

Programs for organizing political power, rights, and collective life. Ideologies differ from pure ethics in that they include a theory of the state and a program for action.

AXIS left ↔ right (redistribution); libertarian ↔ authoritarian (power concentration)

Conservatism

Inherited institutions carry more wisdom than any individual or generation can articulate. Societies are complex, evolved structures; radical change is more likely to destroy what works than to improve it. Prefer gradual reform over revolution, the tested over the theorized, and continuity over disruption. Conservatism is sceptical of utopian projects from any direction (Burke, Oakeshott)

Classical Liberalism

Individual liberty is the foundational value. The state exists to protect rights (life, property, free expression), not to engineer outcomes. Government should be limited, law should apply equally, and markets should be free. Rights are negative: they protect you from interference rather than guarantee you provision. The intellectual architecture of modern Western democracies, even when those democracies have moved well beyond it (Locke, Mill, Hayek)

Neoliberalism

The systematic extension of market logic into every domain of life: education, healthcare, prisons, personal identity, governance itself. Not just an economic policy

(see ECON) but a political project that restructures the state to serve markets rather than regulate them. Competition as the organizing principle of human relations. The individual as entrepreneur of the self. Arguably the most influential political project of the last fifty years, and so pervasive that it functions less as an ideology people consciously hold and more as the water everyone is swimming in. Often unnamed by its beneficiaries, which is part of how it works (also ECON)

Progressive Liberalism

Formal equality is not enough. If structural barriers prevent people from exercising their rights, then the state has an obligation to actively remove those barriers. Rights are not just protections from interference; they include positive entitlements: education, healthcare, a living wage. Freedom means having the real capacity to act, not just the legal permission to.

Social Democracy

Keep capitalism, but tame it. A market economy is the best wealth-generating mechanism we have, but left unregulated it produces inequality that undermines democracy itself. The solution is a strong welfare state, progressive taxation, labour protections, and robust public services. Not a transitional stage on the way to socialism; a stable position that accepts markets while insisting they serve society (Scandinavian countries)

Democratic Socialism

Capitalism is the problem, not just its excesses. When productive assets are privately owned, wealth concentrates, labour is exploited, and democracy is hollowed out by economic power. The solution is social or public ownership of key industries, achieved through democratic means. Distinct from Marxism-Leninism: the commitment is to democracy first, socialism through democracy, not despite it.

Marxism (also analytic lens)

History is driven by class struggle. Those who own the means of production (capital) extract surplus value from those who don't (labour), and this relationship structures everything: politics, culture, law, even consciousness. Historical materialism: material conditions determine ideas, not the other way around. Alienation, exploitation, and the abolition of capital as core concepts. Functions both as a political programme and as an analytic lens applied across the taxonomy.

Anarchism

All coercive hierarchy is illegitimate until proven otherwise, and it almost never can be. The state, capitalism, patriarchy, organized religion: these are structures of domination, not coordination. The alternative is voluntary association, mutual aid, and prefigurative politics: building the world you want inside the shell of the world you reject. More serious and intellectually rigorous than its popular reputation suggests.

Libertarianism

You own yourself. No one has the right to compel your labour, confiscate your property, or dictate your choices, including the state. Government should be minimal: protect against force and fraud, enforce contracts, and otherwise stay out of the way. Taxation is coercion. Regulation is paternalism. Individual freedom is not one value among many; it is the value from which all others derive.

Nationalism

The political unit should reflect a shared national identity: common history, culture, language, or ethnicity. Collective self-determination is paramount. A people has the right to govern itself, in its own territory, according to its own values. Enormously powerful as a mobilizing force; responsible for both liberation movements and some of the worst atrocities in human history. Not a single ideology but a container that can be filled with almost any content.

Civic Republicanism

Freedom is not just the absence of interference; it is the absence of domination. A person who lives at another's mercy is unfree even if that mercy is currently benign. Self-governance, civic virtue, and active participation in public life are not optional extras; they are the conditions of genuine liberty. The common good takes priority over private interest, and citizenship carries obligations, not just rights (Arendt, Pettit)

Communitarianism

Liberalism gets the self wrong. We are not atomistic individuals who choose our values from nowhere. We are embedded in communities, traditions, and relationships that constitute who we are. Morality and meaning are found within those contexts, not abstracted from them. A critique of liberal individualism that insists community is not just a nice addition to personal freedom; it is the ground from which freedom becomes meaningful (Sandel, MacIntyre)

Cosmopolitanism

All human beings belong to a single moral and political community. National borders are morally arbitrary. Your obligations to a stranger in another country are not fundamentally different from your obligations to your neighbour. International institutions, global justice, and universal human rights are the political expressions of this commitment. The tension with nationalism is direct and unresolved.

Technocracy

Governance should be guided by expertise and evidence, not by ideology, popularity, or tradition. Complex systems require technical knowledge to manage well, and democratic opinion is not a substitute for understanding how things actually work. Influential in public health, central banking, and regulatory agencies. The tension with democracy is real: who decides what counts as expertise, and what happens when the experts are wrong?

Fascism

The nation (or race) as an organic body that must be purified, unified, and mobilized under authoritarian leadership. Violence is not a regrettable necessity but a regenerative force. Anti-liberal, anti-Marxist, anti-democratic. Mythologizes a glorious past and promises rebirth through strength. Not a historical curiosity; its patterns and rhetoric are operationally alive in contemporary politics and recognizable once you know what to look for.

Theocracy / Political Theology

Legitimate governance derives from divine authority. Religious law is not merely a personal matter; it is the proper basis for civil law, social order, and political authority. Exists across traditions: Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu. Not identical to religious conservatism; theocracy specifically claims that the state should enact and enforce divine will.

Political Islam

Islamic law and values should inform political order. This is not a single position but a diverse family: it includes movements committed to democratic participation within an Islamic ethical framework, movements seeking a reformed Islamic state, and movements pursuing theocratic governance. Reducing this entire spectrum to a single narrative (in either direction) is one of the most common errors in Western political commentary.

Feminism as Political Program

Patriarchy is a political structure, not just a cultural attitude. It operates through law, economy, institutional design, and the organization of private life. The political programme is its dismantling. Internally diverse: liberal feminism seeks equal access within existing structures; socialist feminism locates gender oppression in economic systems; radical feminism identifies patriarchy as the foundational power structure. These schools disagree profoundly with each other.

Libertarian Municipalism

Governance should be decentralized to the community scale. Direct democracy, not representative democracy. Citizens participate in assemblies, not through proxies. Confederations of self-governing municipalities replace the nation-state. Oriented toward bioregional boundaries rather than arbitrary political borders. A serious and detailed alternative to both state socialism and market liberalism (Bookchin)

Rights of Nature (also ECO)

Ecosystems, rivers, and species have legal standing. Rights-based politics extended beyond the human. Not a metaphor: the Whanganui River in New Zealand and Ecuador's constitutional provisions grant legal personhood to natural entities. A direct challenge to the assumption that rights are exclusively a human category, and one of the few frameworks on this list that has already been written into law.

Authoritarianism

Concentrated executive power, limited political pluralism, and obedience valued over participation. Not the same as totalitarianism (which seeks to control all of life); authoritarianism allows private life to continue largely undisturbed as long as political power is not challenged. Increasingly the global norm: more people now live under authoritarian governance than at any point since the end of the Cold War.

Populism is a political style, not a standalone ideology. It attaches to any of the above as an anti-elite rhetorical mode.

Accounts of how economic life should be organized, resources allocated, and wealth distributed. Economic doctrines make assumptions about human nature, freedom, and what the economy is for.

AXIS market ↔ state; growth-imperative ↔ post-growth; private ↔ commons

Shareholder Capitalism

The firm exists for one purpose: to maximize returns to its shareholders. Social responsibility, employee welfare, environmental stewardship are not the corporation's job. Its job is to make money for its owners. Everything else is either a means to that end or a distraction from it. Milton Friedman's doctrine, and still the dominant orthodoxy in most corporate boardrooms and business schools.

Neoliberalism

Free markets, privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity as a universal prescription applied everywhere, regardless of local context. The Washington Consensus: the package of reforms imposed on developing economies by the IMF and World Bank from the 1980s onward. Not just an economic theory but an institutional programme that reshaped the global economy. Its defenders say it lifted billions out of poverty; its critics say it concentrated wealth and hollowed out public institutions.

Austrian Economics

Markets work because no central authority can know what millions of individuals need, want, and value. Prices are signals that coordinate this distributed knowledge spontaneously, without planning. Government intervention distorts those signals and makes everyone worse off. Sound money, entrepreneurial freedom, and minimal regulation. Intellectually rigorous and deeply suspicious of any institution that claims to manage complexity from above (Mises, Hayek)

Keynesianism

Markets are powerful but unstable. Left to themselves, they produce cycles of boom and bust that cause enormous unnecessary suffering. The state has a legitimate and

necessary role: stimulating demand during downturns, managing employment, and stabilizing the system that markets alone cannot stabilize. Not anti-capitalist; pro-capitalist in a way that takes capitalism's structural weaknesses seriously (Keynes, Minsky)

Modern Monetary Theory

A government that issues its own currency can never run out of money. It can always pay its debts, fund its programmes, and employ its citizens. The real constraint is not the deficit; it is inflation. This reframes every political debate about government spending: the question is never 'can we afford it?' but 'do we have the real resources, and will spending cause inflation?' Radical in its implications, even if the underlying mechanics are descriptive rather than prescriptive (Kelton, Mosler)

Ordoliberal / Social Market

Markets need rules, and rules need strong institutions. Neither laissez-faire nor central planning: a regulated market economy embedded in social institutions that prevent monopoly, protect workers, and maintain competition. The intellectual foundation of the postwar German economic model, and arguably the most successful synthesis of market dynamism and social stability actually achieved at scale.

Stakeholder Capitalism

Firms are responsible not only to shareholders but to employees, communities, the environment, and the broader society they operate within. Profit is one purpose among several, not the only one. ESG (environmental, social, governance) frameworks are a partial expression of this idea. Critics on the left say it is cosmetic; critics on the right say it dilutes the firm's proper purpose. The debate is about whether capitalism can reform itself from within.

State Capitalism

The state guides markets toward national development goals, picking strategic sectors, directing investment, protecting domestic industries, and managing competition. Not socialism: private enterprise is permitted and even encouraged, but within a framework of state priorities. China, Singapore, and South Korea are the usual reference points. Challenges the Western assumption that markets and state power are inherently opposed.

Cooperativism

Workers or communities own the enterprise and govern it democratically. One member, one vote. Profit is shared or reinvested rather than extracted by external shareholders. Mondragón in the Basque Country is the most cited large-scale example: a federation of cooperatives employing tens of thousands. A quiet, functioning alternative to shareholder capitalism that receives far less attention than its track record warrants.

Commons-Based Economics

Some resources are best governed neither by the state nor by the market, but by the communities that depend on them. Fisheries, forests, irrigation systems, digital knowledge: these can be managed through shared rules, mutual monitoring, and collective decision-making. Elinor Ostrom won the Nobel Prize for demonstrating that communities regularly solve the 'tragedy of the commons' without privatization or state control. Her principles remain the most practical alternative to the market/state binary (Ostrom)

Gift Economy

Reciprocity and generosity as the organizing logic of economic life, rather than exchange and accumulation. Wealth flows through giving, not hoarding, and social bonds are strengthened in the process. Embedded in many Indigenous cosmologies and visible today in open-source software, academic peer review, and mutual aid networks. Not a utopian fantasy; it is one of the oldest and most widespread economic forms in human history.

Degrowth / Post-Growth

The pursuit of endless GDP growth on a finite planet is not just unsustainable; it is irrational. Wellbeing should be deliberately decoupled from economic expansion. Reduced material throughput is the goal, not a sign of failure. This is not austerity: it is a positive vision of sufficiency, shorter working hours, stronger communities, and an economy that serves life rather than the other way around.

Doughnut Economics

Imagine a doughnut. The inner ring is the social foundation: the minimum conditions for a good life (food, health, education, housing, political voice). The outer ring is the ecological ceiling: the planetary boundaries that must not be breached. The goal of economics is to operate in the space between: meeting everyone's needs without overshooting the Earth's limits. A replacement for GDP as the measure of success (Raworth)

Circular Economy

The linear model (extract, produce, use, discard) is broken by design. A circular economy eliminates waste by keeping materials in use: products designed for disassembly, components remanufactured, biological materials composted back into living systems. Industrial ecology, product-as-service models, and closed-loop supply chains. Not recycling in the conventional sense; a fundamental redesign of how production works.

Islamic Economics

An economic system grounded in Sharia with its own distinct internal logic. Riba (interest) is prohibited because money should not generate money without productive activity. Zakat (obligatory giving, roughly 2.5% of wealth) is a structural redistribution mechanism, not charity. Risk must be shared between parties, not offloaded onto the vulnerable. A complete alternative architecture, not just conventional finance with restrictions added on.

Crypto-Economics

Decentralized coordination through blockchain protocols, without trusted intermediaries. Code replaces institutions. Smart contracts replace legal enforcement. Disintermediation as organizing principle: no banks, no brokers, no central authorities. The promise is trustless cooperation at scale. The reality so far is a volatile mix of genuine innovation, speculative excess, and unresolved questions about governance, energy, and who actually benefits.

Platform Capitalism

The dominant economic form of the early twenty-first century. A small number of platforms (Google, Amazon, Meta, Uber) extract value by controlling the infrastructure through which everyone else transacts. Network effects create monopolies. Data is the raw material. The user is both customer and product. Not a deviation from capitalism but its current evolutionary form (Srnicek)

Marxist Economics

Labour is the source of all value, and capitalism is structured to extract surplus value from workers and direct it to owners. The rate of profit tends to fall over time, driving crises of overproduction, financialization, and imperialism. Distinct from Marxism as political ideology (see IDEO): this is the analytical engine, not the revolutionary programme. Still the most developed critique of capitalism's internal dynamics.

Eco-socialism

Capitalist growth imperatives are structurally incompatible with ecological stability. The profit motive compels endless expansion; the planet does not expand. The solution is democratic control of production, oriented not toward accumulation but toward meeting human needs within ecological limits. Neither green capitalism (which eco-socialists consider an oxymoron) nor authoritarian state planning, but democratic coordination of the economy in service of life.

Bioregional Economics

Economic life should be rooted in the ecological realities of place. Organize production and exchange around watersheds, ecosystems, and natural boundaries rather than arbitrary political borders. Emphasize local resilience, shorter supply chains, and reduced dependence on distant extraction. Not isolationism; a reorientation toward the land and community you actually live within.

Developmentalism

The state should actively guide industrial upgrading, protect strategic sectors, and coordinate investment to accelerate national development. Markets alone do not produce industrialization; they need to be directed. The historical path of every successfully industrialized nation, including those that now preach free markets to everyone else. The gap between what developed countries did and what they tell developing countries to do is one of the great hypocrisies of international economics.

Market Socialism

Markets are useful allocation mechanisms, but the productive assets behind them should be socially or publicly owned. Let markets set prices and coordinate supply and demand, but ensure that the profits, governance, and strategic direction of major enterprises serve the public rather than private capital. An attempt to capture the efficiency of markets without the inequality of capitalism.

Value frameworks governing the moral status of nature, non-human life, and ecosystems. Distinct from environmental policy, these are the foundations that policy either expresses or betrays.

AXIS anthropocentric ↔ ecocentric; reform ↔ radical transformation; separation ↔ embeddedness

Anthropocentrism

Nature matters because humans need it. Clean air, fresh water, stable ecosystems: these are valuable because they serve human interests. The moral universe has humans at the centre, and environmental protection is justified by what it does for us, not by any intrinsic worth nature possesses independently. The default position of most policy and most people.

Stewardship (also ETH)

Humans have a responsibility to care for the natural world, but that responsibility flows from our role, not from nature's intrinsic rights. We are caretakers, not owners, and we have obligations to manage wisely what has been entrusted to us. Distinct from ecocentrism: nature deserves care because stewardship is our duty, not because a river has standing. Common across religious traditions, conservation movements, and intergenerational ethics.

Land Ethics

The moral community does not stop at the human boundary. It includes soils, waters, plants, and animals: the land as a whole. Aldo Leopold's foundational claim: a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, and wrong when it tends otherwise. One sentence that redrew the boundary of moral consideration for an entire discipline.

Biocentrism

Every living organism has intrinsic worth, regardless of its usefulness to humans. A beetle has value not because it pollinates crops or feeds birds but because it is a living being with its own good. Moral consideration is extended to all life, not just the charismatic or the useful. The question is not 'what can this species do for us?' but 'what does it mean to be a living thing?' (Paul Taylor)

Ecocentrism

Value resides not just in individual organisms but in whole ecosystems and species. A forest has moral standing that is not reducible to the sum of its trees. A species has value beyond the individual animals that comprise it. This shifts the unit of moral concern from the organism to the system, and it raises hard questions: what happens when the health of the ecosystem conflicts with the welfare of individual beings within it?

Bioregionalism (also IDEO)

Political and cultural life should be organized around ecological realities, not arbitrary political borders. Watersheds, ecosystems, and natural boundaries define the relevant community. You belong to a place, and that place has its own logic, limits, and needs. Governance, economy, and identity should be rooted in the land you actually inhabit rather than in abstractions drawn on a map.

Deep Ecology (also ETH)

Humans have no greater intrinsic value than any other living being. This is not a soft preference for nature; it is radical biocentric egalitarianism. The flourishing of non-human life has value in itself, and current human interference with the non-human world is excessive. A deep restructuring of human societies is required. (Naess)

Ecofeminism

The domination of women and the domination of nature are not separate problems. They share the same logic: a hierarchical dualism that places culture over nature, mind over body, male over female, and then uses the 'inferior' term as raw material. Liberation requires undoing both structures simultaneously, because they reinforce each other. (Plumwood, Warren)

Eco-Modernism (also FUT)

Technology and urbanization can decouple humanity from nature, and that is a good thing. Concentrate people in cities, intensify agriculture, develop nuclear and renewable

energy, and let large tracts of land rewild. The path to ecological health runs through modernization, not away from it. A deliberate rejection of the 'back to the land' impulse, and a provocation to most other entries in this section (Nordhaus, Lynas)

Regenerative / Permaculture

The goal is not merely to sustain but to restore. Human design should work with natural patterns rather than against them: building soil, increasing biodiversity, closing nutrient loops, healing degraded landscapes. Permaculture applies this principle to food systems, architecture, and community design. The premise is that humans can be a net positive presence in ecosystems, not just a less damaging one.

Rights of Nature (also IDEO)

Ecosystems, rivers, and species have legal personhood. Not metaphorically: the Whanganui River in New Zealand has the legal rights of a person. Ecuador's constitution grants rights to nature. These are not symbolic gestures; they create enforceable legal standing and shift the burden of proof. One of the few frameworks in this taxonomy that has already been written into constitutional law.

Indigenous Relational Ecology

Humans are kin within a living community, not managers standing above it. Obligations flow in all directions: from humans to animals, to plants, to waterways, to land, and back again. Ecological knowledge is relational, place-based, and carried across generations through practice, ceremony, and story. Not a single framework but a diverse family of traditions that share a common refusal to separate the human from the rest of the living world.

Dark Ecology

Nature is not pure, harmonious, or innocent. Ecological awareness, taken seriously, requires confronting the strange, the uncanny, and the uncomfortable. We are entangled with the non-human world in ways that cannot be resolved into a clean narrative of stewardship or harmony. The mesh of ecological interconnection is vast, weird, and includes things we would rather not face: parasites, decay, our own complicity. A philosophical corrective to romanticism about nature (Morton)

Solarpunk (also WV/FUT)

Ecological abundance is possible, and it can be beautiful. Technology in service of community and nature, not in opposition to them. Solar panels on living rooftops, food

forests in cities, cooperative economies, democratic governance, and art that makes the future feel worth building. Not naïve optimism; a deliberate political stance that treats hope as a form of resistance and imagination as a strategic resource.

10 Power Analysis Frameworks

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How Power Operates

One of the most fundamental axes along which we make sense of the world is *how power works*: who has it, how it's exercised, whether it's legitimate, whether it can be challenged. These frameworks cut across IDEOlogy, ETHics, and EPIstemology. Power analysis is never neutral; your theory of power determines what you see as oppression and what you see as order.

AXIS power as diffuse ↔ concentrated; legitimate ↔ dominating;
structural ↔ agential

Liberal Pluralism

Power is distributed among competing groups: parties, unions, corporations, NGOs, interest groups. No single faction dominates permanently. Democratic competition, institutional checks, and the free press produce an approximate, self-correcting balance. The optimistic story liberal democracies tell about themselves. Whether it describes reality or obscures it is one of the central debates in political theory.

Weberian Authority Analysis

Raw power is unstable. It becomes durable only when people accept it as legitimate. Weber identified three forms: traditional authority (it has always been this way), charismatic authority (this leader is extraordinary), and legal-rational authority (the rules say so). Each organizes obedience differently, and each has its own mode of breakdown. Understanding which form of legitimacy an institution relies on is one of the most useful diagnostic tools in political analysis (Weber)

Republican Non-Domination

The deepest unfreedom is not interference but subjection to arbitrary power. A slave with a kind master is still unfree because the kindness can be revoked at any moment. Freedom means not living at another's mercy, not merely being left alone. This reframes

the entire liberal conversation about liberty: it is not enough to be uninterfered with. The question is whether anyone *could* interfere with impunity (Pettit, Skinner)

Anarchist Power Analysis

Domination is the problem wherever it solidifies: in the state, in capital, in patriarchy, in bureaucracy, in the church, in the family. All coercive hierarchy must justify itself, and the anarchist wager is that it almost never can. Power should be decentralized, voluntary, and continuously contestable. Not chaos; a principled insistence that authority which cannot be justified should be dismantled.

Elite Theory

Power concentrates inevitably in the hands of organized minorities. Democratic institutions may provide the appearance of popular control, but actual decisions are made by small, cohesive elites: economic, political, military, cultural. The 'iron law of oligarchy' holds that even organizations founded on democratic principles tend to develop ruling cliques. Democracy is real but perpetually compromised by this structural tendency (Pareto, Mosca, C. Wright Mills)

Realist/Power Politics

Power is ultimately about coercive capacity, strategic position, and the ability to compel outcomes. Moral language in politics is real, but it frequently masks contests for dominance. States, institutions, and individuals pursue interests; the question is not whether power operates but whether it is acknowledged honestly. A framework that is either admirably clear-eyed or corrosively cynical, depending on who is holding it (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Morgenthau)

Bureaucratic/Administrative Power

The most consequential power often lives not in visible sovereign command but in procedures, classifications, forms, credentialing systems, and the decisions of administrators. Who designs the categories on the census? Who decides what counts as a disability? Who sets the eligibility criteria? Bureaucratic power shapes lives without dramatic confrontation, which is precisely what makes it so difficult to see and to contest.

Marxist Class Analysis

Power follows ownership of the means of production. Those who own capital (factories, land, technology, platforms) extract surplus value from those who sell their labour. This

relationship is the engine of history: class struggle between owners and workers drives political change, shapes culture, and determines the distribution of resources. Everything else, law, ideology, religion, is superstructure built on this economic base.

Gramscian Hegemony

Ruling groups maintain power not primarily through force but by shaping culture, common sense, and consent. Hegemony is achieved when the interests of the powerful are accepted as natural, inevitable, or universal by the people they dominate. The most effective power is the kind nobody notices because it has become 'just the way things are.' This is why cultural production, education, and media are political battlegrounds, not sideshows (Gramsci)

Foucauldian Power/Knowledge

Power is not a thing held by some and lacked by others. It is diffuse, productive, and embedded in discourse, institutions, and everyday practices. Power does not just repress; it produces: it creates categories of knowledge, norms of behaviour, definitions of sanity and deviance. The prison, the clinic, the school, the confession: all are sites where power operates by producing subjects who regulate themselves. The question is never simply 'who has power?' but 'how does power work through us?' (Foucault)

Feminist Power Analysis

Patriarchy is not just an attitude or a cultural residue. It is a power structure that operates through law, economic arrangements, institutional design, cultural norms, and the organization of intimate life. It shapes who speaks and who is heard, who is paid and who works for free, whose experience counts as knowledge and whose is dismissed. Internally diverse: liberal, socialist, radical, and postcolonial feminisms analyse patriarchal power through different lenses but agree that it is structural, not incidental.

World-Systems Analysis

The global economy is structured as a system of core, periphery, and semi-periphery. Wealthy nations (the core) extract value from poorer nations (the periphery) through trade relations, debt structures, and institutional arrangements that appear voluntary but are systemically coercive. Exploitation is not an aberration; it is how the system functions. Development and underdevelopment are produced together, by the same processes (Wallerstein)

Network Power

In a networked world, power resides not primarily in resources or territory but in connectivity and protocol control. Whoever sets the standards controls the network: technical standards, financial protocols, platform architectures, linguistic norms. You are 'free' to opt out, but opting out means exclusion from the systems everyone depends on. The power is in the architecture, not in any single actor within it (Castells, Grewal)

Surveillance/Algorithmic Power

Power increasingly operates through data collection, predictive algorithms, and automated decision-making. Who gets a loan, who gets policed, who sees which information, who is flagged as a risk: these decisions are made by systems that exercise authority without appearing to. The algorithm presents itself as neutral, but it encodes the assumptions and interests of its designers. State surveillance systems like social credit formalize obedience through scoring. The defining power formation of the current moment, and one that most existing power analysis frameworks were not built to see.

Decolonial Power Analysis

Colonialism did not end when the colonies gained independence. Coloniality persists as an ongoing structural reality: in knowledge systems that treat Western thought as universal, in economic arrangements that perpetuate extraction, in racial hierarchies that survived the formal end of empire. The coloniality of power, knowledge, and being shapes the present, not just the past. Decolonization is not a metaphor; it is an unfinished material and epistemic project (Quijano, Mignolo)

11 Temporal Frameworks

TEMP · 11 ×

How Time & History Are Understood

How you understand time shapes everything: your cosmology, your politics, your sense of urgency, your relationship to ancestors and descendants. This is a missing dimension in most sensemaking taxonomies. People who disagree about climate policy often agree on the science but differ on the TEMPoral framework.

AXIS linear ↔ cyclical; progressive ↔ degenerative; human-scale ↔ cosmic-scale

Linear-Progressive

History moves forward and upward. Things are getting better: more knowledge, more freedom, more prosperity, more justice. The past is inferior, the present is an improvement, and the future will be better still. The Enlightenment default. Underpins liberalism, techno-optimism, and most institutional planning. So deeply embedded in modern Western culture that many people hold it without realizing it is a framework rather than a fact.

Cyclical / Eternal Return

History repeats. Civilizations rise, flourish, decay, and fall, and new ones rise in their place. Patterns recur across centuries. The Hindu yugas cycle through golden and dark ages. Spengler saw civilizations as organisms with lifespans. Strauss-Howe see generational turnings that repeat roughly every eighty years. (Spengler, Nietzsche, Strauss-Howe)

Dialectical

History moves through contradiction. Every established order (thesis) generates its own opposition (antithesis), and the collision between them produces something new (synthesis), which becomes the next thesis. Progress is real but it is driven by conflict, not by smooth improvement. Hegel applied this to ideas and consciousness. Marx applied it to material conditions and class struggle. The insight is that opposition is not a breakdown of history; it is the engine of history (Hegel, Marx)

Apocalyptic / Eschatological

History is heading toward a decisive rupture: a final judgment, a rapture, a singularity, a great transition. The present is not ordinary time; it is the prelude to an ending that will transform everything. This is the dominant temporal framework for billions of people across Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and it has secular descendants in AI eschatology, collapsism, and certain strands of environmentalism. The feeling that we are living in the last days is not new; it is one of the most persistent structures in human consciousness.

Deep Time / Geological

Humans have existed for roughly 300,000 years. The Earth is 4.5 billion years old. The universe is 13.8 billion. In deep time, all of recorded history is a thin smear on the surface of an incomprehensibly long story. This framework does not make human

concerns trivial, but it recontextualizes them profoundly. It is the temporal frame behind climate science, evolutionary biology, and any serious reckoning with extinction.

Kairos vs. Chronos

Two kinds of time. Chronos is clock time: measurable, sequential, indifferent to what happens within it. Kairos is qualitative time: the right moment, the opportune instant, the fullness of time. Chronos asks 'what time is it?' Kairos asks 'what kind of time is this?' Theological traditions emphasize kairos as the moment of divine action.

Existential traditions use it to describe moments of authentic decision. The distinction matters because chronos can be managed while kairos can only be recognized.

Presentism / Eternal Now

Only the present moment is real. The past exists only as memory, the future only as anticipation. Both are constructions of the mind. Radical attention to what is actually happening, right now, is the deepest form of engagement with reality. Central to contemplative traditions (Zen, Dzogchen, Christian mysticism) and resonant with certain interpretations of quantum physics. Not escapism; a claim that presence is where everything actually happens.

Ancestral Time / Dreamtime

The past is not behind you. It is here, active, co-present. Ancestors are not gone; they continue to participate in the community, in the land, in the obligations that bind the living. In Aboriginal Australian frameworks, the Dreaming is not a historical period but a dimension of the present. In many African traditions, the recently dead remain active social agents. This is not nostalgia or ancestor worship in the dismissive Western sense; it is a fundamentally different architecture of time in which relationship, not sequence, determines what is present.

Accelerationist Temporality

Time is speeding up. Technological change is compounding exponentially. A singularity or phase transition of some kind is approaching, and the central question is whether to accelerate toward it or resist the acceleration. Left accelerationism wants to push through capitalism to something beyond it. Right accelerationism embraces technological disruption as inherently liberating. Both share the premise that the pace of change is the defining feature of the present moment.

Degrowth Temporality

Speed itself is a pathology. The acceleration of production, consumption, communication, and experience is not progress; it is dumb violence against the living world and against human wellbeing. Slowing down is an ethical and ecological imperative. Time for care, time for attention, time for relationships that cannot be optimized. A deliberate counter-temporality to the accelerationist default of modern life.

Spiral / Developmental Time

History does not repeat and it does not simply progress. It spirals: recurring themes reappear at higher levels of complexity and integration. What looks like repetition is actually development. Gebser's structures of consciousness (archaic, magical, mythical, mental, integral) and Spiral Dynamics' value systems both follow this logic. The spiral allows for the partial truth of both cyclical and linear frameworks while transcending the limitations of each (Gebser, Spiral Dynamics)

12 Aesthetic-Expressive Frameworks

AES · 12 ×

Sensemaking Through Form & Feeling

Often overlooked in intellectual taxonomies, but for many of us the primary sensemaking mode is aesthetic rather than propositional. Romanticism, for instance, is a full-stack worldview organized around *feeling* and *expression* rather than argument. These frameworks shape what feels true, what feels beautiful, and what feels worth fighting for—often prior to any reasoning about it.

AXIS order ↔ expression; sincerity ↔ irony; universal ↔ particular

Classical / Apollonian

Order, proportion, harmony, and restraint are the highest aesthetic values. Beauty is not subjective; it is a feature of the world, discoverable through reason and expressible through form. The golden ratio. The balanced sentence. The symmetrical façade. Art serves civilization by giving chaos a shape. At its best, it achieves something timeless. At its worst, it becomes rigid, exclusionary, and hostile to anything that doesn't fit the template.

Romantic / Dionysian

Feeling over reason. Expression over restraint. The sublime over the beautiful. Nature is not a resource but a source of revelation, and authentic self-expression is both an aesthetic and a moral imperative. The Romantic worldview is genuinely full-stack: it carries a cosmology (nature is sacred), an epistemology (intuition and emotion are ways of knowing), and an ethics (be true to yourself above all). It is the headwater of most contemporary assumptions about artistic authenticity.

Modernist

Rupture with tradition. The shock of the new. Art is not decoration or entertainment; it is an experiment in form, and the experiment is the point. Abstraction, fragmentation, stream of consciousness, the deliberate difficulty of making the audience work. Modernism insisted that the old forms could not contain the new reality, and it built new ones: cubism, atonal music, free verse, the unreliable narrator. The most creatively productive crisis of confidence in Western cultural history.

Postmodernist Aesthetic

Sincerity is naïve. Originality is a myth. The boundary between high culture and low culture is a power move, not a real distinction. Pastiche, irony, quotation, and self-reference replace authenticity and depth. Meaning is not discovered; it is played with. At its best, postmodernism liberates art from pretension and opens it to voices previously excluded. At its worst, it becomes a pose of knowingness that cannot commit to anything.

Afrofuturism

Speculative futures imagined through Black cultural production. A reclamation of time itself: if the past was stolen and the present is contested, then the future is the space where identity, technology, and possibility can be reimagined from scratch. Sun Ra relocated Black identity to outer space. Octavia Butler rewrote the future of the species. Afrofuturism insists that imagination is not a luxury but a survival strategy, and that who gets to envision the future is a political question.

Wabi-Sabi / Mono no Aware

Beauty lives in impermanence, imperfection, and incompleteness. The cracked bowl is more beautiful than the flawless one because it tells the truth about existence. Mono no aware is the bittersweet awareness of passing: the cherry blossom is moving precisely because it falls. A direct counter to Western perfectionism and the cult of the new.

Not resignation but a form of attention that finds depth in what is fleeting, worn, and unfinished.

Minimalism

Less is more, and this is not just an aesthetic preference. It is an ethical, ecological, and spiritual commitment. Strip away the unnecessary and what remains is sufficient. Voluntary simplicity as a practice of freedom: fewer possessions, fewer distractions, fewer obligations, more presence. Runs from Zen gardens through Bauhaus through contemporary lifestyle movements. The risk is that it becomes its own form of consumption: minimalism as curated brand.

Metamodern Sensibility

Neither the earnestness of modernism nor the irony of postmodernism. Both at once. Informed naïveté: you know the reasons for cynicism and choose sincerity anyway. Oscillation between hope and awareness of absurdity, without collapsing into either. The sensibility behind much contemporary art, architecture, and cultural production that tries to hold complexity without succumbing to paralysis or posturing. A tone more than a programme.

Sublime / Kantian Aesthetic

Some experiences overwhelm the capacity to comprehend them: vast landscapes, violent storms, the scale of the cosmos, the fact of death. The sublime is the aesthetic of being exceeded. Kant argued that this experience is not merely terrifying but revelatory: in encountering what exceeds us, we discover something about the structure of consciousness itself. The sublime is where aesthetics touches the limits of human understanding and finds that the limits are themselves meaningful.

Psychedelic / Visionary

Art organized around non-ordinary states of consciousness: altered perception, synaesthesia, ego dissolution, and the dissolution of boundaries between self and environment. The claim is not just that these states produce interesting visuals but that they reveal something about the structure of reality that ordinary perception screens out. Runs from Blake's visionary cosmology through Art Nouveau's organic forms, 1960s counterculture, Alex Grey's sacred anatomies, and contemporary digital art. Treats perception itself as a practice— the aesthetic of seeing more, not differently.

Indigenous Aesthetics

Beauty is relational balance and right relationship, not individual expression. Form is ceremony. Art is responsibility: to community, to land, to ancestors, to the beings depicted. The maker is not a genius expressing an inner vision but a participant in a web of obligations. Aesthetic quality is inseparable from ethical quality: a beautiful object made in violation of relational duties is not, in this framework, actually beautiful. A fundamentally different account of what art is for.

Solarpunk Aesthetic

Lush, green, cooperative, technologically integrated futures made visible and tangible. Solar panels on living rooftops, food forests in urban spaces, architecture that grows rather than dominates. Not illustration of a political programme but an aesthetic commitment that *is* a political act: making the desirable future vivid enough that people can orient toward it. Hope rendered in colour, form, and narrative. The insistence that imagination is infrastructure.

13 Full-Stack Worldviews

WV · 13 ×

Integrated Operating Systems

Genuine full-stack worldviews span COSmology/ONTology + EPIstemology + ETHics/ECOflogy + social vision + identity + relationship with history. These function as complete lived operating systems. A WorldView is what you get when someone integrates commitments across multiple layers of the stack into a coherent (or at least functioning) whole. Note: many COSmology entries (Buddhism, Islam, Daoism) are also full-stack worldviews. They appear under COSmology because their cosmological contribution is their most distinctive feature; their WorldView-nature should, nonetheless, be recognized.

AXIS individual ↔ collective; immanent ↔ transcendent; reform ↔ rupture

Humanism

Human reason, dignity, and flourishing are the centre of the moral universe. No supernatural authority is required to ground meaning, ethics, or purpose. Science is the best tool for understanding reality; democratic institutions are the best framework for organizing collective life. Both individual rights and collective responsibility matter.

This is the operating system of most educated secular Westerners, often held without being named.

Existentialism

You are radically free, and that freedom is terrifying. There is no predetermined essence, no script, no cosmic purpose waiting to be discovered. Existence precedes essence: you are thrown into the world and must create yourself through your choices. Authenticity means confronting this freedom honestly, including the confrontation with death, absurdity, and the temptation to hide behind roles, conventions, and bad faith (Sartre, Heidegger, de Beauvoir)

Absurdism

Life is meaningless. That is not a tragedy; it is a starting point. The universe offers no answers, and the honest response is not despair but revolt: live fully, freely, and passionately in the face of the silence. Sisyphus pushes the boulder up the hill knowing it will roll back down, and Camus insists we must imagine him happy. Distinct from nihilism, which stops at the meaninglessness. Absurdism starts there and chooses to live anyway (Camus)

Stoicism (as full WV)

Nature is rational, and virtue is the only genuine good. Everything else, wealth, health, reputation, even life itself, is indifferent. This is not coldness; it is a complete operating system: accept what you cannot control with equanimity, take full responsibility for what you can, recognise all human beings as moral equals, and do your duty regardless of consequences. Radical acceptance and radical responsibility, held together without contradiction (Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, Seneca)

Romanticism (as full WV)

Feeling, nature, authentic self-expression, and creative imagination as an integrated ethical-aesthetic-spiritual system. Not just an art movement but a full-stack worldview: nature is sacred (COS), intuition is a way of knowing (EPI), authenticity is the highest moral value (ETH), and the creative individual is the agent of meaning. The source code for most contemporary assumptions about art, love, individuality, and what it means to 'be yourself.'

Indigenous Relational WVs

Humans embedded in a living, relational cosmos. Land is not property but identity. Time is not linear but cyclical or relational. Ethics is reciprocity: obligations flow between humans, animals, plants, ancestors, waterways, and the not-yet-born. Community is not a collection of individuals but a web of mutual belonging. Listed in the plural because this is a diverse family of traditions, not a single system, but they share a common architecture: the self is constituted by relationship, not prior to it.

Religious Orthodox WV

Revealed doctrine as total framework. Metaphysics, ethics, social order, identity, purpose, and eschatology integrated into a coherent whole, grounded in divine authority and maintained through tradition, scripture, and institutional continuity. Not a relic; this is the functioning operating system for billions of people. Its coherence is its strength: every question has a place, every role has a meaning, every event fits within a larger narrative. Its vulnerability is rigidity when the world changes faster than the tradition can absorb.

Metamodernism

An attempt to move beyond the impasse between modern sincerity and postmodern irony. Both are partially true: earnestness without self-awareness is naïve; irony without commitment is paralysing. Metamodernism oscillates between them deliberately, holding complexity without collapsing into cynicism or false certainty. Informed naïveté. A developmental sensibility that tries to metabolize the insights of every preceding worldview family without regressing to any single one (Freinacht, Vermeulen & van den Akker)

Transhumanism (also FUT)

Technology is the continuation of evolution by other means. Biological limits, ageing, cognitive constraints, suffering, even death, are engineering problems, not existential givens. The desirable future is one in which human beings transcend their current form. Not science fiction but an active research programme and a genuine worldview held by a growing community, with its own ethics (morphological freedom), its own eschatology (the singularity), and its own internal debates about risk and access.

Solarpunk (also ECO/FUT)

Ecological abundance, community technology, aesthetic joy, and mutual aid as an integrated vision of the future and a practice in the present. Not just optimism but a political commitment: hope as something you build, not something you wait for. Solar

panels on living rooftops, food forests in cities, cooperative governance, and art that makes the desirable future vivid enough to orient toward. The insistence that beauty, justice, and ecological health belong together.

Regenerative Worldview

Human flourishing understood not as extraction from living systems but as contribution to them. The question shifts from 'how do we sustain what we have?' to 'how do we restore what has been degraded and participate in the ongoing creativity of life?'

Reciprocity with the Earth as a civilizational task, not just an environmental policy.

Agriculture, economics, culture, and governance all redesigned around the principle that humans can be a net positive presence in the living world.

Scientific Naturalist WV

Empirical reality, material causation, and evolutionary context as a total frame for understanding everything: consciousness, morality, meaning, society, the self. No supernatural dimension. Meaning is made, not given, and the tools for making it are reason, science, and honest confrontation with what the evidence shows. The most widely held worldview among educated secular people, often so deeply assumed that it is invisible to those who hold it.

Pragmatist Worldview

Pluralism, fallibilism, and experimentalism as an integrated orientation toward life. No final truths, no fixed foundations, no permanent answers. Values are hypotheses, tested against experience and revised when they stop working. Democracy is not just a political system but a way of life: the continuous, collaborative inquiry into how to live well together. The most philosophically modest worldview on this list, and arguably the most resilient because it is built to adapt (Dewey)

Nihilism is a transitional stance or critique, not a full operating system. It is acknowledged as a phase many pass through but not listed as a WV.

Maps of How the Stack Evolves

Models that describe how worldviews, consciousness structures, or cultural capacities unfold over time in individuals, cultures, and history. These are maps of the map-making process itself. Handle these ones with care: developmental models can be used for genuine insight or for self-congratulatory hierarchy.

AXIS individual ↔ cultural/civilizational; linear stage ↔ non-linear emergence

Piaget / Vygotsky / Erikson

The foundational models that made developmental thinking possible. Piaget mapped how children think: not as miniature adults but through qualitatively different cognitive stages (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational), each with its own logic. Vygotsky added the social dimension: development happens not in isolation but through interaction with others who are slightly ahead of you. The 'zone of proximal development' is the space between what you can do alone and what you can do with help, and that space is where learning lives. Erikson extended the developmental arc across the entire lifespan, from trust vs. mistrust in infancy through identity vs. role confusion in adolescence to integrity vs. despair in old age. Together, these three established the premise that every subsequent model on this list depends on: the mind unfolds in stages, the stages are sequential, and each one restructures the world.

Spiral Dynamics

Human value systems develop in a spiralling sequence, each stage responding to the life conditions that the previous stage created but could not resolve. From survival instincts through tribal belonging, individual power, order and purpose, achievement, egalitarian sensitivity, systemic integration, and holistic awareness. Each stage is a worldview, not just an idea: it shapes what you notice, what you value, and what you dismiss. The spiral is not a ladder of superiority; later stages are more complex, not more worthy. The most commonly encountered developmental model in coaching, organizational development, and integral circles (Graves, Beck, Cowan)

Integral Theory (Wilber)

The most ambitious attempt to map everything: consciousness, culture, behaviour, and systems in a single framework. AQAL (all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types) integrates developmental stages with interior/exterior and individual/collective dimensions. At its best, it provides a genuinely useful meta-map for seeing how different disciplines and traditions illuminate different facets of the same reality. Ambitious, influential, and controversial in roughly equal measure (Wilber)

Kegan Constructive-Dev

What you can see depends on where you stand, and development means expanding where you can stand. Kegan maps orders of consciousness: at each stage, what was previously invisible (because it was the lens you were looking through) becomes visible (something you can now examine and reflect on). The movement from 'subject' to 'object.' From impulsive, through imperial, interpersonal, and self-authoring, to self-transforming. The self-authoring mind constructs its own values; the self-transforming mind can hold and interrogate the system it built. One of the most practically useful developmental models in leadership and adult education (Kegan)

Gebser Structures

Consciousness does not simply develop; it mutates. Gebser identified five structures: archaic, magical, mythical, mental, and integral. Each is a fundamentally different way of experiencing reality, not just a more sophisticated version of the last. Crucially, the earlier structures are not superseded; they remain present and active. The 'ever-present origin' means all structures are available simultaneously. The integral structure is the one capable of recognising and integrating all the others. A model that resists the temptation to treat development as simple progress (Gebser)

Loevinger / Cook-Greuter

Ego development from pre-conventional through conventional to post-conventional stages, traced through how people actually make meaning in their lives, not just what ideas they hold. Action logics: each stage has a characteristic way of interpreting experience, handling complexity, and relating to authority (Loevinger, Cook-Greuter)

Cultural Evolution

Human uniqueness is not primarily genetic; it is cultural. We accumulate knowledge, tools, practices, and institutions across generations in ways no other species does. Gene-culture coevolution: our cultures shape our biology, and our biology shapes our cultures. This is not teleological; there is no predetermined endpoint or direction.

Cultures evolve in the Darwinian sense: they vary, they are selected, and they are transmitted. What looks like progress is often just adaptation to new conditions (Henrich)

Memetics

Ideas replicate, mutate, and compete for attention the way genes replicate, mutate, and compete for survival. The 'meme' (coined by Dawkins) is the unit of cultural transmission: a catchy tune, a political slogan, a religious belief, a fashion trend. Suggestive as a metaphor, limited as a science. Influential far beyond its scientific credentials, partly because memetics is itself a successful meme.

Vervaeke's Relevance Realization

The mind's deepest function is not reasoning or computing but determining what is relevant. Relevance realization is the process by which consciousness selects, from an overwhelmingly complex environment, what matters right now. Meaning crises arise when this process breaks down: when nothing feels relevant, or when relevance is captured by narrow loops (addiction, ideology, obsession). Integrates 4E cognition (embodied, embedded, enacted, extended) with insights from ancient contemplative traditions. A framework that treats the meaning crisis not as a philosophical abstraction but as a cognitive science problem with practical implications (Vervaeke)

Plotkin's Eco-Soulcentric Dev

Human development has a downward arc as well as an upward one. Most developmental models map ascent: growing up, gaining complexity, expanding perspective. Plotkin maps descent: the journey into soul, into the depths of your particular ecological niche in the world, into the unique gift that you are here to give. The stages (Innocent in the Nest, Explorer in the Garden, Wanderer in the Cocoon through Elder) are nature-based and imaginal, not cognitive. Soul is not spirit: spirit ascends toward the universal; soul descends toward the particular. A corrective to every developmental model that only looks up (Plotkin)

Telos & Trajectory Stories

Stories about where civilization is heading. These are not mere predictions, they are normative frames that motivate action in the present by making certain futures feel inevitable, desirable, or necessary to prevent. Our FUTures Narratives influence our politics, our career, and our relationship to hope.

AXIS optimist ↔ pessimist; continuity ↔ rupture; technological ↔ ecological

Religious Eschatology

History is heading toward a divinely ordained conclusion: judgment, resurrection, paradise or damnation, the return of a messiah, the final triumph of good over evil. This is not a peripheral belief; it is the dominant futures narrative for billions of people across Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and beyond. It shapes political decisions, attitudes toward war, environmental policy, and the willingness to sacrifice the present for the promise of what comes after. Any analysis of how people relate to the future that ignores eschatology is ignoring the largest constituency.

Cornucopianism

Human ingenuity always outpaces scarcity. Every resource limit we have ever faced has been overcome by innovation, substitution, or efficiency. Population bombs didn't detonate. Peak oil didn't arrive on schedule. The pattern holds: abundance is the default trajectory, and scarcity is always a temporary problem awaiting a technical solution. The most optimistic futures narrative available, and genuinely supported by certain historical data. Its blind spot is that past performance does not guarantee future results, particularly when the constraints are ecological rather than technical.

Techno-Optimism

Faster technology solves all problems. Speed, disruption, and innovation are not just strategies; they are virtues. The future is bright as long as we do not slow down: regulate less, build faster, deploy sooner. The implicit faith of Silicon Valley and venture capital culture. Distinct from cornucopianism (which is about abundance) in that techno-

optimism treats the *process* of technological acceleration as inherently good, not just its outcomes.

Eco-Modernism (also ECO)

Technology and urbanization can decouple humanity from nature, and this decoupling is desirable. Concentrate people in dense cities, intensify agriculture, develop clean energy, and let vast tracts of land return to wild nature. A good Anthropocene is possible if we modernize harder, not less. A deliberate provocation to environmentalists who see technology as the problem. The bet is that human flourishing and ecological recovery are not in tension if you get the engineering right (Nordhaus, Lynas)

Transhumanism (also WV)

The defining features of the human condition (ageing, cognitive limits, disease, suffering, death, are engineering problems) are not existential givens. The future is one in which we transcend biological constraints through technology: genetic modification, neural interfaces, radical life extension, mind uploading. Not speculation but an active research programme with its own ethics, institutions, and internal debates about access, risk, and what it means to remain human after the upgrades.

Longtermism (also ETH)

The future is astronomically large. If humanity survives and spreads, the number of people who will eventually exist dwarfs the current population by orders of magnitude. Their lives matter morally. This means reducing the risk of extinction or civilizational collapse is the most important work anyone can do, because the stakes are not millions of lives but trillions. Everything else, however urgent it feels in the present, is small by comparison. The logical terminus of utilitarian thinking extended across deep time, and controversial precisely because of what it asks you to deprioritize.

Post-Scarcity

Technology makes material scarcity obsolete. Energy becomes too cheap to meter. Manufacturing becomes local and on-demand. The basic material needs of every human being can be met without anyone needing to labour for survival. The question then shifts from economics to politics: not how to produce abundance (that problem is solved) but how to distribute it justly and what people do with their lives when survival is no longer the organizing principle. A futures narrative that is either approaching fast or a dangerous fantasy, depending on whose models you trust.

Solarpunk (also ECO/WV)

Ecological, democratic, and joyful futures are achievable with knowledge and technology that already exist. The obstacle is not technical but political: entrenched power, extractive economics, and a failure of imagination. Solarpunk insists that the future worth building is one where ecological health, social justice, beauty, and community technology go together. Build it now, in the present, at whatever scale you can. Hope is not a feeling; it is a practice.

Resilience / Adaptation

Disruption is inevitable. The question is not whether shocks will come but whether systems, communities, and individuals can absorb them and adapt. The task is not to prevent collapse but to build the capacity to reorganize after it. Redundancy, diversity, modularity, and local self-reliance are the design principles. A futures narrative that is agnostic about whether things will get better or worse and focuses entirely on the capacity to respond.

Collapsism / Decline

Industrial civilization is in terminal decline. The converging pressures of resource depletion, ecological overshoot, financial instability, and institutional decay are not problems to be solved but symptoms of a system reaching its structural limits. The question is not whether collapse will happen but what form it takes, how fast it unfolds, and what comes after. Distinct from doomer nihilism in that collapsism takes the 'after' seriously: the work is to prepare, to preserve what matters, and to seed what comes next (Tainter, Greer, Hagens)

Techno-Skepticism

Technology is not neutral. Every technology embodies values, distributes power, and forecloses certain futures while enabling others. Some technologies should be actively refused, not because they don't work but because what they do to individuals, communities, and ecosystems is not worth the gains. Selective rejection is not Luddism; it is discernment. The framework asks a question that techno-optimism systematically avoids: just because we can, should we?

Doomer Nihilism

Nothing meaningful can be done. The systems are too large, the damage too advanced, the political will too absent, and the timeline too short. Hopelessness as rational assessment rather than emotional failure. Distinct from collapsism, which still imagines

an 'after' worth preparing for. Doomer nihilism sees no after, or at least none worth investing in. Increasingly common as an ambient mood, particularly among younger generations, and worth taking seriously as a psychological and political phenomenon rather than dismissing as mere pessimism.

AI Eschatology

Superintelligent artificial intelligence as the decisive event in human history. Either it solves everything (disease, death, scarcity, climate) or it destroys everything (misaligned goals, loss of human control, extinction). There is no middle ground: the arrival of superintelligence is a singularity beyond which prediction is impossible. The structure is explicitly eschatological: an event horizon that divides all of history into before and after, with salvation and damnation as the two possible outcomes. The newest entry in a very old pattern of apocalyptic thinking, now dressed in technical language.

16 Self Ontologies

SELF · 14 ×

What Kind of Thing Am I?

The question beneath all other questions. Every section in this taxonomy touches the self, but Self really clarifies the different positions taken in response to “what kind of thing am I?”. Your self-ontology shapes your psychology, your ethics, your politics, your spiritual practice, and your relationship to death. Two people can agree on policy, on cosmology, even on epistemology, and still be operating from fundamentally different assumptions about what kind of thing they are. Most of these assumptions are invisible to the people holding them.

Note: many of these positions are held simultaneously by the same person in different contexts.

AXIS substantial ↔ processual; bounded ↔ relational; discoverable ↔ constructed

Self as Soul / Substance

There is a real, enduring 'you' beneath the flux of experience: a soul, an essence, a metaphysical core that persists through change and survives death. Your body ages,

your opinions shift, your memories fade, but *you* remain. This is the dominant self-ontology across most religious traditions and most of human history. In Hinduism, it is the atman: your deepest self, identical with ultimate reality. In the Abrahamic traditions, it is the immortal soul accountable before God. To Descartes, it is the thinking thing, the one certainty that survives radical doubt. The self is not a process, not a construction, not an illusion. It is the most real thing about you.

Self as Role

You are not something behind your roles. You *are* your roles, properly inhabited. Son, mother, citizen, elder, servant, ruler: the self is defined by its position in an order larger than itself. Your name, your duties, your place in the family and the community are not costumes you put on over a 'real self' underneath. They are the self. This is the dominant self-ontology for most of human history and remains so for billions of people. It is the self of Confucian ethics, of caste systems, of military identity, of religious vocation. The modern Western assumption that there is an authentic individual self hiding beneath social roles would strike most humans who have ever lived as strange.

Self as Autonomous Individual

You are a rational, self-directing agent. The author of your choices, the owner of your body, the bearer of rights and responsibilities. You have preferences, values, and goals, and the task of life is to identify them clearly and pursue them freely. This is the Enlightenment self: the self that signs contracts, votes, builds a career, and chooses its own beliefs. The legal person. The default self of modern Western institutions, liberal democracy, market economies, and most contemporary psychology. So deeply assumed that it feels less like a self-ontology and more like an obvious description of reality.

Self as Psychological Ecosystem

The self is not a unified agent. It is a population: parts, patterns, defences, conditioned responses, and competing impulses operating simultaneously. One part wants approval. Another wants freedom. Another is performing competence while a fourth is terrified. Not a single voice but a committee, often in disagreement with itself. The question shifts from 'who am I?' to 'what in me is active right now?' Internal Family Systems, psychoanalytic models, and trauma-informed approaches all converge on this claim: the self is multiple, and treating it as singular is a simplification that causes clinical harm (IFS, Schwartz, psychoanalytic traditions)

Self as Narrative

You are the story you tell about yourself. Identity is not a fixed thing waiting to be discovered. It is an ongoing act of narration: selecting events, sequencing them, interpreting them into a plot, and revising the plot as new events arrive. You are the protagonist of a story you are also writing. Change the story, change the self. Therapeutic change often works this way: not by discovering a hidden truth about who you 'really are,' but by finding a different way to tell the same events (Ricoeur, McAdams, narrative therapy)

Self as Social Construction

The self is produced by forces largely outside your control: discourse, power, culture, history, language, institutions. Your sense of who you are, your gender, your inner voice, your feeling of being a distinct individual, all of it was assembled by social processes you did not choose and largely cannot see. You don't discover your self; it is constructed for you. It could have been constructed differently. One implication is that deconstructing the self is a political act, not just a philosophical one (Foucault, Butler, Mead)

Self as Relational

You do not become a self on your own and then enter relationships. The relationships come first, and the self emerges from them. You are constituted through care, mutual recognition, dialogue, and belonging. The infant becomes a person through the responsiveness of its caregivers. The adult remains a person through the web of relationships that hold identity in place. Sever the web and the self does not simply suffer; it begins to dissolve. 'I am because we are' is not a metaphor. It is a claim about what the self is. A fundamentally different starting point from any framework that begins with the individual (Ubuntu, Buber, Care Ethics, Relational-Cultural Theory)

Self as Embodied Organism

The self is not a ghost in a machine. It is a living body: a nervous system, a metabolism, an immune system, a sensorimotor loop with the environment. You do not *have* a body. In a meaningful sense you *are* a body. Cognition does not happen in a control room behind the eyes; it happens in the body's engagement with the world. Your gut influences your mood. Your posture influences thought. Your breath influences attention. The Western habit of treating the self as a mind that happens to be housed in a body is, from this view, a fundamental error with consequences that run through philosophy, medicine and education (Merleau-Ponty, Varela, enactivism)

Self as Computational Self-Model

There is no self in the brain. There is only a self-model: a representation the nervous system constructs in order to navigate the world, predict outcomes, and coordinate action. The feeling of being someone, of having a unified perspective and a continuous identity, is a process, not a thing. A useful hallucination, selected for by evolution because organisms with self-models outcompete organisms without them. Hume looked for a self and found only a stream of impressions. Neuroscience explains why the stream feels like a someone: the model is transparent, meaning you cannot see it as a model. You look through it and mistake it for reality (Metzinger, Dennett)

Self as Witness / Awareness

The self is not any particular thought, feeling, identity, or experience. It is the awareness in which all of those arise. Strip away your opinions, your memories, your body image, your name, your roles: what remains is the witnessing presence, the seer rather than the seen. This is the atman of Advaita Vedanta: pure consciousness, identical with ultimate reality, untouched by the changing content of experience. Distinct from the Buddhist no-self in a crucial way: here, awareness *is* the self, the one thing that cannot be removed because it is the precondition for anything appearing at all. Not the contents of experience but the space in which experience happens (Advaita Vedanta, contemplative traditions, Rupert Spira)

Self as No-Self / Emptiness

Even the witness is not a self. The Buddhist claim goes further than any other entry on this list: not only is there no enduring soul, no autonomous agent, no fixed essence, there is also no pure awareness standing behind experience watching it happen. Look carefully at experience and you find sensations, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, all arising and passing. But the one to whom they are supposedly happening? Not there. This is not merely a philosophical observation but a liberatory one: the belief in a separate self, in any form, is the root cause of suffering, and seeing through it is the path to freedom. What remains is seamless happening without an observer standing apart from it. The self is not denied. It is de-solidified: real as convention, empty of inherent existence. Functional but ungraspable (Anattā, Madhyamaka, Zen, Dzogchen)

Self as Totality / Unitive

The boundary between self and world is not a real boundary. It is a mental construction that dissolves under investigation or in certain states of consciousness. The reveal is that the self and the cosmos are one event, one continuous appearance, one beingness. This is not the claim that you are *nothing* (that's the Buddhist no-self). It is the claim that you are *everything*. The drop discovers it was always the ocean. Distinct from the

witness position, which still maintains a subtle duality between awareness and its contents. Here, that duality collapses entirely. What remains is not an observer and not an absence but a fullness without edges (Advaita Vedanta at its culmination, Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, Sufi mysticism, Tantric traditions)

Self as Developmental Achievement

The self is not a given. It unfolds through stages of increasing complexity and perspective-taking capacity. At each stage, what was previously invisible (because you were looking *through* it) becomes visible (something you can now examine and reflect on). The self is not an essence but a centre of gravity that develops. A child embedded in impulse differs from an adolescent embedded in role, who differs from an adult capable of holding many perspectives. The question is not 'what is the self?' but 'what stage is the self currently at?' (Kegan, Loevinger, Gebser, Piaget)

Self as Ecological / Place-Based

The self does not stop at the skin. It includes your place, your watershed, your ancestors, the non-human beings you live among, the land that shaped your body and your imagination. You are not a thing *in an* environment. You are a pattern of relationship *with* an environment. Sever that relationship and you do not simply lose a context; you lose what you are. This is the self-ontology implicit in most Indigenous traditions, in deep ecology, and in Plotkin's eco-soulcentric developmental model. The modern Western self, bounded at the skin and portable across locations, is, from this view, an impoverished abstraction (Indigenous traditions, Plotkin, deep ecology)

17 Everyday Folk Worldviews

FOLK • 18 ×

The Default Operating System

These are the lived, largely unreflective worldviews: the “common sense” most of us operate from. A construction assembled from culture, media, family, and experience without explicit philosophical reflection. These drive more behavior than any of the above. Make these visible.

Note: every folk worldview carries an implicit self-ontology (see SELF).

Meritocratic Achievement runs on Self as Autonomous Individual.

Therapeutic Self-Actualization runs on Self as Narrative. Honor Culture runs

on Self as Role. Making the self-ontology visible often reveals why two people holding different FOLK worldviews cannot have a conversation.

AXIS individually ↔ collectively oriented; traditional ↔ progressive; trusting ↔ conspiratorial toward institutions

Meritocratic Achievement

Hard work and talent produce deserved success. Failure is primarily personal. The system is basically fair, and those who succeed have earned their position. The most widely held folk worldview in market democracies, and one of the hardest to see from the inside because it flatters its holders. Functions as both a motivational engine and a justification for inequality: if success is earned, then poverty must be too.

Consumerist Lifestyle

Identity is expressed and fulfilled through what you acquire: possessions, experiences, brands, upgrades. Growth is natural. Aspiration drives meaning. The good life is a life of more. Not a philosophy anyone consciously adopts, but the ambient operating system of consumer capitalism, absorbed through advertising, media, and the built environment from childhood. So pervasive that opting out of it feels eccentric rather than rational.

Therapeutic Self-Actualization

Life is an ongoing project of inner fulfilment, authentic self-expression, and personal growth. The task is to discover and become your 'true self.' Psychology has replaced theology as the framework for understanding suffering, purpose, and transformation. Downstream of Humanistic Psychology (see PSY) but operating as a folk worldview: therapy-speak as common language, self-care as moral duty, emotional authenticity as the highest value. The secular salvation narrative of the educated middle class.

Traditional Family/Role

There is a natural order to human life, expressed through fixed roles: gender roles, generational roles, communal roles. These are not arbitrary conventions but reflect something real about how human beings are designed to live. Stability, continuity, and clear expectations are more important than individual expression or experimentation. Deeply held by billions of people and routinely underestimated by progressive commentators who treat it as mere ignorance rather than a functioning worldview with its own internal logic.

Identity-Pluralist

Your group identities (race, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality) are the primary lens through which you understand yourself and society. Politics, culture, and personal meaning are organized around the recognition, representation, and liberation of identity groups. The folk version of a set of academic frameworks (intersectionality, standpoint theory) that has become the ambient operating system of progressive institutions, media, and much of higher education.

Civic Service

Meaning comes from duty, institutional participation, and contribution to the common good. You serve your community: through military service, public office, volunteering, showing up at town hall, paying your taxes without resentment. Legitimate authority flows from this kind of participation. A worldview that is more prevalent among older generations and in communities with strong institutional roots. Frequently invisible in cultural commentary that focuses on more dramatic worldviews.

Nationalist / Patriotic

The nation is your primary moral community. Its history is your history. Its interests are your interests. Its flag is your symbol. This is not an intellectual position; it is a felt identity, and for many people it is the deepest one they hold. Enormously motivational: people will sacrifice, fight, and die for it. Ranges from benign civic pride to aggressive ethno-nationalism, and the boundary between those is less stable than moderates would like to believe.

Religious Folk WV

The actual operating system most religious believers use, as distinct from formal theology. A blend of official doctrine, folk practice, cultural habit, family tradition, and personal improvisation. The person who prays before meals, celebrates religious holidays, holds a vague belief in an afterlife, and has never read a word of systematic theology is running this operating system. It is the numerically dominant worldview on Earth, and it bears only partial resemblance to what theologians describe.

Scientific-Materialist Folk

Unreflective scientism: 'what science says' as the ultimate authority on all questions, including questions that science does not actually address. A folk version of scientific realism that collapses the careful epistemic humility of real science into blunt certainty. Distinct from Scientific Realism (which is an EPI position) in that it is held as a default

assumption rather than a considered philosophical stance. Often accompanied by dismissiveness toward anything that cannot be measured, without recognising that this dismissiveness is itself a philosophical commitment, not a scientific finding.

Conspiratorial WV

Hidden forces manipulate visible events. Official accounts are never the full story, and frequently they are deliberate deceptions. Trust is a trap. The real power operates behind the scenes: in shadowy cabinets, secret societies, financial networks, or unnamed elites. This is not simply paranoia; it is a coherent epistemology that explains why the world feels out of the ordinary person's control. It fills a real gap: when institutions repeatedly fail or betray public trust, conspiratorial thinking offers a narrative that makes sense of the failure.

New Age / SBNR

Spiritual but not religious. An eclectic, syncretic personal practice assembled from meditation, astrology, energy healing, crystals, tarot, yoga, plant medicine, and whatever else resonates. Defined partly by what it rejects: institutional religion, dogma, hierarchy, and the claim that any single tradition has exclusive access to truth. A folk operating system, not a coherent cosmology: it borrows freely from traditions it often understands only superficially. The fastest-growing 'religious' category in many Western countries.

Hustle / Entrepreneurial Self

Life as a series of bets and pivots. The self as startup: always iterating, always optimizing, always seeking growth. Risk is not something to be managed; it is an identity. Failure is rebranded as learning. Productivity is a virtue. Rest is strategic, not restorative. The folk worldview of startup culture, influencer economy, and a growing segment of the professional class. A meritocratic achievement worldview accelerated and stripped of any communal obligation.

Wellness Culture

The body is a temple, and the world is full of threats to its purity: toxins, processed food, electromagnetic fields, pharmaceutical chemicals, unnatural substances. 'Natural' is good. 'Chemical' is bad. Health is achieved through vigilant consumption: the right supplements, the right diet, the right practices. Purity is the organizing logic, and the marketplace is the delivery mechanism. A folk worldview that borrows the authority of

science while frequently contradicting it, and that turns self-care into a full-time consumption practice.

Honor Culture

Reputation is everything. Loyalty, reciprocal obligation, and the willingness to defend your name and your people are the primary values. Respect is earned and maintained through conduct; shame is the deepest sanction. Globally prevalent across cultures, classes, and geographies, from rural communities to urban gangs to corporate boardrooms to international diplomacy. Often treated as 'primitive' by liberal observers who do not recognise how much of their own behaviour is governed by the same dynamics.

Networked-Self

Identity is curation. Life is content. The self is a brand managed across platforms. What you share is who you are, and attention is the currency that validates existence. Native to the first generation raised entirely within social media, but increasingly operative across all demographics. The distinction between the performed self and the 'authentic' self, which older worldviews treat as fundamental, is experienced as either irrelevant or incoherent within this framework.

Techno-Solutionist Folk

'There's an app for that' as implicit metaphysics. Technology is the default answer to every problem: political, ecological, social, personal. Climate change will be solved by engineering. Loneliness will be solved by better platforms. Education will be solved by AI. The deep assumption is that all problems are technical problems, and the only question is whether we have built the right tool yet. A folk worldview so widespread that it rarely recognises itself as a worldview.

Doomer / Resigned Folk

Lived resignation, distinct from philosophical nihilism. Not an argued position but an ambient mood: nothing matters, nothing will change, the systems are broken beyond repair, and anyone who says otherwise is naïve or selling something. Increasingly common among younger demographics. Worth taking seriously as a psychological and political phenomenon rather than dismissing as laziness or pessimism, because it is often a rational response to real conditions experienced by people with limited agency.

Authoritarian-Paternalist

A strong leader, clear hierarchy, and firm order are what society needs. Deference to authority is natural and good. Freedom without structure produces chaos. People need to be told what to do, and the right leader will tell them wisely. Not confined to any political wing: it shows up on the right as strongman nationalism, on the left as vanguardism, and in the centre as technocratic paternalism. One of the most durable folk worldviews in human history, and one that liberal democracies consistently underestimate.

18 Analytic Tools

TOOLS · 12 ×

Frameworks Primarily Used as Lenses

These frameworks are analytic tools that can be applied to any level of the stack. They don't claim to be complete world-frames. They are organized here not as a separate category type (since any framework can be used as a lens) but as a recognition that certain frameworks are primarily used as lenses.

AXIS structural ↔ interpretive; totalizing ↔ local; material ↔ discursive

Postmodernism

Every grand narrative is suspicious. Claims to universal truth, objective knowledge, and historical progress are not innocent descriptions of reality; they are power moves. Knowledge and power are intertwined: who gets to define what counts as true is itself a political question. Discourse does not just describe reality; it constitutes it. The lens asks: whose story is being told as though it were everyone's story, and what does that erasure accomplish? (Lyotard, Foucault)

Post-Structuralism

Meaning is never fixed. Every text, every concept, every identity contains internal tensions that deconstruction can reveal. Western thought is organized around pairs of opposing concepts (nature/culture, mind/body, rational/emotional), and these pairs are never neutral: one side is always quietly elevated above the other. Derrida's insight is that the 'superior' term depends on the 'inferior' one for its own definition, which means the hierarchy is unstable from the start. There is no stable foundation beneath language, no bedrock of meaning that interpretation finally reaches. The ground keeps moving.

The lens asks: what is this opposition hiding, and what falls apart when you pull at it? (Derrida)

Structuralism

Beneath the surface of human cultures, languages, myths, and kinship systems lie deep relational structures that generate them. The individual elements matter less than the system of relationships between them. A myth is not interesting for what it says but for how its elements relate to each other, and how that pattern recurs across cultures. The lens asks: what is the hidden structure beneath this surface, and what rules govern its variations? (Lévi-Strauss, Saussure)

Critical Realism

Reality exists independently of our knowledge of it, but our access to it is always mediated and fallible. Three layers: the empirical (what we experience), the actual (what happens whether observed or not), and the real (the underlying causal mechanisms that generate events). Most science operates at the empirical level. Critical realism insists on asking what deeper structures produce the patterns we observe. The lens asks: what causal mechanism, operating beneath the surface, is generating this outcome? (Bhaskar)

Dialectical Thinking

Look for the contradiction. Every position, institution, or system contains tensions that are producing something new, whether or not anyone intends it. A company that optimises for efficiency generates fragility. A movement for liberation develops its own orthodoxies. A technology designed to connect people produces isolation. The lens does not resolve contradictions; it treats them as the most informative feature of any situation. Distinct from dialectical temporality (see TEMP), which applies this to history. As a portable lens, it applies to anything: a relationship, an organisation, a policy, a self. The question is always: what is the internal contradiction here, and what is it generating? (Hegel, Marx, Adorno)

Systems Thinking

Nothing exists in isolation. Everything is connected through feedback loops, stocks and flows, delays, and emergent properties. Linear cause-and-effect thinking misses most of what is actually happening in any complex situation. The lens asks: where are the feedback loops? What is the system optimizing for? Where are the leverage points

where a small intervention could shift the whole dynamic? A way of seeing that, once adopted, makes linear thinking feel dangerously incomplete (Meadows, Forrester)

Complexity Theory

Most real-world systems are nonlinear: small causes can produce large effects, large interventions can produce nothing, and novel properties emerge that could not have been predicted from the parts. Chaos, self-organization, sensitive dependence on initial conditions, and the fertile zone at the edge of chaos are the core vocabulary. The lens asks: is this system complex rather than merely complicated, and if so, what does that mean for our ability to predict, control, or intervene? (Santa Fe Institute, Prigogine)

Game Theory / Rational Choice

People respond to incentives, and outcomes depend on the strategic choices of multiple interdependent actors. Every situation where your best move depends on what someone else does is a game in this sense. The prisoner's dilemma, the tragedy of the commons, the free-rider problem: these are not just thought experiments but recurring structures that show up in politics, economics, relationships, and everyday life. The lens asks: what is the incentive structure here, and what behaviour does it make rational? Dominant in economics and increasingly in political science and evolutionary biology.

Actor-Network Theory

Humans are not the only agents that matter. Technologies, documents, microbes, algorithms, buildings, and natural phenomena all act in networks alongside people, shaping outcomes in ways that cannot be understood by looking at human intentions alone. A speed bump is a moral agent: it enforces a norm without anyone deciding to obey. The lens asks: what are all the actors in this network, human and non-human, and how are they shaping each other? (Latour, Callon)

Perennialism

Beneath the surface diversity of the world's religious traditions lies a common esoteric core: the same fundamental truths, expressed in different cultural languages. Mystical experience across traditions converges on the same reality. The differences between religions are exoteric (surface-level, cultural, institutional); the similarities are esoteric (deep, experiential, universal). A meta-claim about religion, not a religion itself. Influential and contested: critics argue it flattens genuine differences to produce a false unity (Huxley, Schuon)

Cybernetics

The study of feedback, control, and communication in systems of all kinds: machines, organisms, organisations, ecosystems. How does a thermostat regulate temperature? How does a conversation self-correct? How does an organism maintain stability in a changing environment? First-order cybernetics studies systems from the outside. Second-order cybernetics recognises that the observer is always part of the system being observed. A meta-disciplinary framework that influenced systems thinking, cognitive science, family therapy, and ecology (Wiener, Bateson)

Semiotics / Discourse Analysis

Everything is a text that can be read. A photograph, a political speech, a menu, a building, a hairstyle: all are sign systems that produce meaning through their internal relationships and their cultural context. Meaning is not inherent in things; it is produced through the system of signs. The lens asks: how is this text producing meaning? What codes is it relying on? What does it naturalise, and what does it render invisible? A framework that makes the familiar strange by treating culture itself as something to be deciphered (Saussure, Barthes)"

Remember: every world-frame in this taxonomy can be *deployed as* a lens. This section lists frameworks whose primary home is lens-deployment.

19 Social Ontologies

SOC · 6 ×

What Kind of Thing Is Society?

Distinct from political IDEOlogy (how should society be organized), social ontologies ask, “what is society? These are the invisible assumptions that generate political positions. Two of us can agree on policy but disagree completely about why it works, because we hold different social ontologies.

AXIS individual ↔ collective; structure ↔ agency; static ↔ processual

Methodological Individualism

There is no such thing as 'society.' There are only individuals making decisions, forming beliefs, and taking actions. Every social phenomenon, from markets to revolutions to

culture, can and must be explained by the choices of individual people. 'Social facts' are a convenient shorthand, not a real category. If you can't trace it back to individual human beings, you haven't actually explained anything. The default ontology of economics and much of analytic philosophy.

Holism / Organicism

Society is real in a way that is not reducible to the individuals who compose it. A language is not just the sum of its speakers. A culture is not just the aggregate of individual beliefs. Social wholes have emergent properties, their own dynamics, their own logic, that cannot be explained by examining individuals in isolation. The organism metaphor: a body is not just a pile of cells. Society is not just a collection of people.

Relational Sociology

Society is not made of things (individuals or wholes) but of relationships. The relationship between two people is not a by-product of their individual properties; it is the primary reality, and their identities emerge from it. You are not a fixed entity who then enters relationships. You are constituted by the web of relations you are embedded in. The unit of analysis is not the person or the group but the connection (Emirbayer)

Institutionalism

Institutions are the primary social reality. Laws, norms, organisations, constitutions, bureaucracies, markets: these structures constrain what people can do and enable what they actually do. Individuals act, but they act within channels carved by institutions. And institutions are sticky: path dependency means that decisions made decades or centuries ago continue to shape the present, often in ways no one intended or can easily reverse.

Practice Theory

Society is not held together by ideas, rules, or rational agreements. It is reproduced through practices: habitual, embodied, largely unreflective patterns of doing things. How you eat, how you greet people, how you sit in a meeting, how you raise children. These practices carry social structure forward in time without anyone consciously deciding to maintain them. You don't follow the rules of your culture; you enact them with your body, usually without thinking about it (Bourdieu, Giddens)

Actor-Network Theory

The social is not exclusively human. Technologies, documents, algorithms, buildings, microbes, and natural phenomena all participate in producing and sustaining social order. A locked door is a social actor: it enforces a boundary without anyone deciding to comply. Society is not a pre-existing container that humans fill; it is assembled, moment by moment, through associations between human and non-human actors. The question is never 'what is society?' but 'what is currently holding this network together?' (Latour; see also POW and Analytic Tools)

04 World-frame families

The taxonomy above is organized by **content domain**: cosmology, ontology, epistemology, ethics, ideology, worldview, and so on. But there is another way to compress the landscape of world-frames. Many frameworks from all over the stack often cozy up together. I call these collections **world-frame families**—groups of frameworks that regularly hang out together. These families cash out in predictable opinions and truth claims about reality, identity, morality, society, and history.

The Relational/Indigenous Family

Legitimacy is rooted not in inherited hierarchy or sacred law but in reciprocal relationships: with land, ancestors, non-human beings, and the living cosmos. The intuition here is that human beings flourish when they are embedded in right relationship with a world that is itself alive, agentive, and morally significant. Its moral centre of gravity is reciprocity, kinship obligation, and the maintenance of balance across the human and more-than-human community. It tends to see crisis as broken relationship: severed connection to land, ancestors, community, or the natural order. Its characteristic self-ontology is Self as Ecological/Place-Based and Self as Relational: you are not a thing in an environment but a pattern of relationship with it. Specific world-frames you'll find in this family include Animism, Shamanic/Spirit Ecology, Aboriginal/Dreaming COS,

Andean/Pachamama COS, African Traditional COS, Indigenous Relational Ecology, Indigenous Relational WVs, and Gift Economy.

The Traditional Family

The traditional world-frame family roots legitimacy in inherited order: revelation, lineage, sacred law, ancestral custom, stable roles, moral authority. The intuition here is that human beings flourish when they are rightly situated within a larger order they did not invent. It tends to see crisis as moral breakdown— loss of duty, meaning, discipline, and social cohesion. Specific world-frames you'll find in this family include Religious Orthodox WV, Natural Law Ethics, Theocracy / Political Theology, Traditional Family/Role, Honor Culture, and Religious Folk WV.

The Modern Family

The modern world-frame family shifts legitimacy from inheritance to reason, evidence, institutions, rights, and progress. Its deep question is: what is true, and what system or method will solve the problem? It tends to see crisis as failure of rationality, design, education, or institutional competence. Its great strengths are science, rights, technical capability, and large-scale coordination; its characteristic pathologies are reductionism, disenchantment, and the fantasy that every human problem can be engineered away. Specific world-frames in this family include Scientific Naturalism, Materialism / Physicalism, Empiricism, Positivism, Humanism, Classical Liberalism, Social Democracy, Technocracy, Keynesianism, Meritocratic Achievement, and Techno-Optimism

The Postmodern Family

The postmodern world-frame family turns critique back on the modern story. It asks: whose rationality, whose universal, whose progress, and who pays the cost? It foregrounds perspective, language, power, identity, exclusion, and situated knowledge. It tends to see crisis as metastatic power dynamics: domination, universalism, and unexamined power. Its great contribution is sensitivity to plurality and hidden structure; its risk is fragmentation, performative skepticism, and difficulty adjudicating between truths once every narrative has been destabilized. Specific worldviews in this family include

Postmodernism, Post-Structuralism, Critical Theory, Feminist Standpoint EPI, Intersectionality, Decolonial Power Analysis, Identity-Pluralist worldviews, and Ecofeminism.

The Metamodern Family

The Metamodern world-frame family tries to metabolize the truths of all the earlier families without collapsing back into any one of them. It foregrounds complexity, development, systems, reflexivity, plural methods, and planetary interdependence. It tends to see crisis as metacrisis: a web of interlocking breakdowns with shared roots. Its strength is synthesis without simple regression; its risk is vagueness, self-congratulation, or premature integration. Specific world-frames in this family include Critical Realism, Systems Thinking, Complexity Theory, Integral/Transdisciplinary paradigms, Metamodernism, Regenerative Worldview, Solarpunk, and participatory or developmental approaches.

Each family also carries a characteristic self-ontology (see SELF). The Relational/Indigenous Family runs on Self as Ecological constituent and Self as Relational: you are constituted by your relationships with land, ancestors, community, and the more-than-human world. The Traditional Family runs on Self as Soul and Self as Role: a person is an enduring essence embedded in a divinely or socially ordained position. The Modern Family runs on Self as Autonomous Individual: a rational agent who authors their own life. The Postmodern Family runs on Self as Social Construction: identity is produced by power, discourse, and culture, not discovered. The Metamodern Family draws on Self as Developmental Achievement and Self as Relational: the self is a centre of gravity that grows in complexity through relationship and reflexivity.

Cultures, institutions, and individuals are spread across these families, and this spread explains much of the social and political chaos we see today. People entrenched in different world-frames aren't just disagreeing about policy. They are operating from different assumptions about what is real, what is good, what the self is, and what counts as evidence. No wonder the conversations break

down. World-frame entrenchment is an under-recognized driver of audience capture, echo chambers, our shattered information space, and the pandemic of tribalism.

05 A final note

Get to know more world-frames. Spend time learning the assumptions, values, and constraints of each one. Once you get to know one, use it as a lens and look through it at an issue, a problem, or yourself.

Know the world-frame you're standing on, and hold it lightly. These are lenses you can look through, not identities you have to stake your life to. You'll be less certain, but you'll realize that your former certainty was naïve. That's a trade worth making.

The aspiration is fluency across many world-frames without capture by any single one. From that position you see a bigger picture, and you tend not to get tangled in the blind spots and traps that come with any one lens held too tightly.

And notice the world-frame you're standing on when you look at yourself. The self you take yourself to be is the most invisible world-frame of all, and it shapes everything downstream. Are you an autonomous individual? A relational being? A narrative in progress? A witness? An embodied organism? A soul? The answer you assume without giving determines which lenses feel natural and which feel foreign. Making that assumption visible may be the most powerful move this document can offer.