

The Academic Synopticon

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Part Ten.

Reality and the Worldviews

“In some remote corner of the universe poured out into countless flickering solar systems there was once a star upon which some clever animals invented knowledge. It was the most arrogant and untruthful minute of ‘world history’; but still only a minute. When nature had drawn a few breaths the star solidified and the clever animals died. – One could invent such a fable, but one would still not have sufficiently illustrated how pathetic, how shadowy and volatile, how useless and arbitrary the human intellect seems within nature. There were eternities in which it did not exist, and when it is gone nothing will have happened. For this intellect has no further mission leading beyond human life. It is human, and only its owner and creator treat it as solemnly as if the hinges of the world turned upon it.” F. Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” 1873 (*Writings from the Early Notebooks*, Cambridge UP, p. 253)

1. Social Verity and Actual Reality

We speak about what is real or what isn’t real in various ways. Typical concerns about what is real are actually about truth rather than reality. As Nietzsche points out, we believe that our knowledge is truly something special, at least for us.

“Is that a real A?” – We are asking if this thing is a genuine A, or something else instead. The reality of the thing itself is not questioned, but only whether it is an A, or maybe a B instead. “Is that a robin?” “No, it is a wren.” This kind of question is about *identification*.

“Is that B really a B?” – We are asking if this thing labeled as an B is actually a B, or something else instead. The reality of the thing itself is not questioned, but only whether it should or should not be classified as a B. “Is that painting a Picasso?” “No, it is a forgery.” This kind of question is about *authenticity*.

“Is that thing really C?” – We are asking if this thing has property C or not. The reality of the thing is not questioned, but only whether C should be credited to it. “Is that thing heavy?” “No, it is not heavy.” This kind of question is about *attribution*.

“Can that thing really D?” – We are asking if this thing has capacity D or not. The reality of the thing is not questioned, but only whether it can reliably do D. “Can it conduct electricity?” “No, it is a poor conductor of electricity.” This kind of question is about *functionality*.

Questions about identification, authenticity, attribution, and functionality all presuppose (a) that we accept the reality of something and (b) we can assess it together. These questions are therefore about social criteria for our accurate assessments – these questions concern *verity*, not reality. For those four kinds of questions, the term ‘truly’ could substitute for ‘really’ without changing the meaning or point of the question. However, our original topic is about reality, not truth, although the two are easily conflated together. During most of ordinary life, the reality of whatever is around us for observation and usage is entirely taken for granted and we only need guidance about how to properly deal with all these things.

We only start to question the reality of something if it cannot serve as a candidate thing for pursuing those four verity questions.

“Is that a bird?” “We can’t see something there, so how could you think you saw something in the tree?” Whatever is up in that tree, this was just a deception.

“Is that misty shape a ghost?” “We didn’t see what that mist was doing, so what do you think you actually saw?” Whatever you may have seen, it was just an illusion.

“Is that voice speaking to me?” “We aren’t hearing a voice, so there isn’t anyone talking to you.” Whatever you might have experienced, it was just a hallucination.

“Can my trance contact a dead ancestor?” “We don’t use trances for messages, so there are no dead ancestors for communication.” Whatever you want a trance to do, such contact is a delusion.

A thing can be real (for us) if it is identifiable, authenticatable, stable, and/or functional. Something unable to undergo any of our verity tests can’t even be “a thing” in the first place because it isn’t actually anything in the first place, and so it stays unreal for us. If we can’t experience and test it too, and if you alone persist with believing in it, then you are suffering from a deception, an illusion, a hallucination, or a delusion (or some combination). Where criteria for verifiability and verity are discussed, we enter the philosophical field of epistemology.

This criterial method of deciding the reality of something through the tests of *social verity* does not in fact entirely determine *actual reality*. Many things can be quite real even though a society is unprepared for experiencing them or appreciating how to ascertain what is going on. Even what gets encountered in experience always outruns familiar knowledge. On the other hand, allowing individuals to determine reality on their own would admit many false and fallacious things into reality that do not belong there, since personal experience is hardly reliable or trustworthy at all times.

Confrontations with unrealities may imply a weakness or deficiency of mentality. A child gets corrected constantly but improving discernment gradually accords with social judgment. By adulthood, a person has mastered a few skills of discrimination for one’s household, craft, trade, hobby (and so on) while relying on other experts for innumerable mundane affairs. Most anyone still disagreeing with mass opinion only displays stubborn naivete, but a few individuals of acute perception and intelligence are hardly just anybody. If their philosophical spiritedness is given expression, such a confident intellect appeals to principles diametrically

opposed to the four tests of social verity. Society has its social knowledge, but my own subjective judgment is also a kind of knowledge, and perhaps better knowledge.

Whatever I am thinking of in that moment, having that thought is not something I could be deceived about, for it is fully formed for as long as I am thinking it. No one else could inspect my mind to find that specific thought missing instead. I must at least know the identities of my own thoughts; no deception there is possible. Thoughts are self-identifying.

Whatever I am perceiving in that moment, having that phenomena is not something I could be mistaken about, for it is completely present for as long as I am sensing it. No one else could perceive it differently to find that particular appearance lacking. I must at least know the qualities of my own perceptions; no illusion there is possible. Phenomena are self-authenticating.

Whatever I am apprehending in that moment, having that apprehension is not something I could be mistaken about, for it is firmly compelling for as long as I am attending to it. No one else could attend to that singular apprehension to understand it differently. I must at least know the basis of my own apprehensions; no hallucination there is possible. Apprehensions are self-supporting.

Whatever I am believing in that moment, having that belief is not something I could be mistaken about, for it is entirely credible for as long as I am believing in it. No one else could state a different belief to show that my conviction is insincere. I must at least know the strength of my own personal beliefs; no delusion there is possible. Beliefs are self-fulfilling.

These four criteria of *subjective verity* allow an individual to raise a defense of idiosyncratic ideas against social discrediting. One's errant notions will still get judged untrue, but one's mentality may not be lost in unreality.

That comforting perspective is followed by another: if not unreal, such encounters – those self-identifying, self-authenticating, self-supporting, or self-fulfilling matters – have a different sort of reality than that of social verity. Their trust-worthiness lies in their self-evident nature, in a double-sense – being both evident *to* a self while evident *in* itself. Two subjective paths into alternative worlds lay open: let the thoughtful belief dominate (more cognitive and *ideal*), or emphasize the phenomenal apprehension (more non-cognitive and *experiential*). For its part, the objective world preferred by social verity is more experimental and *practical*. Already, these three paths – ideality, experientiality, and practicality – lie open and beckon onwards towards the metaphysical standpoints of idealism, phenomenism, and realism.

Which path is best? These philosophies can converse and compare their worlds, but outcomes vary: accommodation or condemnation? Social objectivism can be conciliatory by saying, "Subjectivity admittedly exists for each individual, but private feelings have little merit when social life should prevail." Genuine accommodation would admit at least two co-equal realities, replacing objectivism with dualism. If threatened with derision and dismissal instead, subjectivism reacts with its own reversal of priorities: the subjective world actually has more reality, not less, than the social world. That elevation of subjectivism requires a subjectivist principle for knowledge: that which is most self-evident is knowledge of what is most real. The irrefutable is the irreplaceable.

Does science fail to explain consciousness? That is no surprise for subjectivism, since consciousness not only has its own indubitable nature, it also bears its own irreducible character, so science's struggle to fit mind into matter is just futility. Science must reply that consciousness lacks any verity worthy of its own sort of reality, so its sheer epiphenomenality can be absorbed into all the natural phenomena accountable to scientific explanation. A third viewpoint here raises its voice. Both natural science and subjective mysticism actually depend on the mental resources of cognitive intellect, itself the supreme reality, so objectivism and experientialism are its inferior manifestations.

For three thousand years social objectivism, and personal experientialism, and cognitive mentalism have philosophically compared their principled stances. Their standoff seems irreconcilable, since each one is propped up by particular views about verity that oppose much of the others' views. Cognitive mentalism and social objectivism agree on the supremacy of shared cognition over private experience, but they divide over the fallibility of the intellect. Cognitive mentalism and personal experientialism agree that self-evidence illuminates reality, but they disagree whether that evidence is basically conceptual or not. Personal experientialism and social objectivism agree that the intellect is our human capacity rather than a transcending mind, but they disagree whether the best evidence for reality is private or public.

The philosophical key to adjudicating among these standpoints is to notice how all three appeal to joint confirmations among honest inquirers into new truths. None are content with knowledge handed down, second-hand and threadbare, from fable and lore. Intelligence is communal, whatever else we expect to be verifiable. Humanity is designed for somehow working together to gather knowledge.

The collective efforts of intelligent inquiry (whether socially or individually) to comprehend reality as far as possible is the philosophical field of cosmology (which encompasses reasoning, science, phenomenology, mysticism, and much more). Cosmology should have no hesitancy about admitting its limitations, since it is grounded upon experience, exploration, and experiment. Humanity, like any intelligence anywhere in the universe, has no other basis to determine reality. Here, us humans are all we have for consultations, and Nietzsche's warning to not take ourselves too seriously is a wise admonition. All the same, philosophy does possess impressive resources for discerning reality.

2. Speaking of What is Real

All can agree that where there is verity, there is reality. There is no final rest in the search for knowledge, which is the avoidance of unreality and the endless quest for the complete realization of reality. The obvious initial answer to the question of "what is real" is to say, "All of It." There is nothing that not real: the unreal does not exist. That abstract principle, while clear, does not illuminate much. Whether something specific exists or not must be the concrete question. If ghosts do not exist, then they aren't real – but do ghosts actually exist?

To answer a question like that, we need more precise questions, such as: "Does a ghost really do that?" or "Is a ghost really encountered there?" or "Is that report of a ghost really true?" or "Does a ghost really mind me?" These are reasonable questions that one would ask after one's curiosity has been aroused. I would need to

first understand the role(s) of a ghost, the foray(s) of a ghost, the proof(s) of a ghost, or the intent(s) of a ghost. If I lack such understandings, I have no way to judge the reality of ghosts. Where can I get such understandings? Simply meeting a ghost directly cannot suffice: how would I realize that a ghost is indeed in front of me? Even if a spooky shape spoke to me, "Yes, of course I'm a ghost," like in the movies, can I trust such a strange apparition? Deceptions, decoys, hallucinations, or dreams can't be ruled out so easily. Only if I already knew some criteria (e.g. of behavior, appearance, intent) for a "ghost" could I get a better grasp on what is actually happening. Where would such knowledge of criteria be obtained? It appears that we must first inquire elsewhere besides those ghosts.

Other people who do not think ghosts are real cannot guide me, for they either define "ghost" with criteria never met, or they reject all proffered criteria. Only people who think ghosts are real could be consulted for an understanding of valid criteria for ghosts. Furthermore, any of those "ghost believers" would be precisely in your situation if they haven't criterially confirmed an actual ghost either. A million people, all agreeing on some criteria for 'ghost', know nothing of real ghosts if none of them have confirmed a ghost too. This is why the listing of a word in a dictionary for a language spoken by millions or billions cannot ensure that this word refers to anything real. "Vampire" is in a dictionary too. Such "empty words" won't be referential (referring to a real thing) but they can still be meaningful, either fancifully or historically. Thus, "ghosts" have roles in fictional stories from the imagination, and "ghosts" are mentioned by surviving tales from past observers. Distrust of past hearsay places the entire meaning for "ghost" into the fanciful (unreal) category.

To speak of what is "really real," as opposed to whatever people happen to like saying is truly real, next enters the arena of language. A preliminary distinction comes first:

Discursive entities: If people ceased talking and thinking about them permanently, they would depart from all existence and reality.

Non-discursive entities: Their reality is unaffected by whether people speak or think of them.

A non-discursive entity is real regardless of whether any group notices or speaks of them, or has any idea at all about it. Plenty of non-discursive things in the world do get noticed by people, of course. However, to be spoken of realistically, a non-discursive entity must at minimum be socially acknowledged to have any credibility.

There are four kinds of discursive entities:

1. Fictional entities = *only* have their reality within people's thoughts when they speak of them hypothetically as imaginable: X can interest and motivate people, but X has no efficacy of its own. A fictional entity is always dependent on people thinking about them, and people can alter or forget them.
2. Conventional entities = *only* have their reality within a social group that speaks of them practically as efficacious: X can do things for people and people can do things with X. A discursive entity is always dependent upon a social group, and a social group can modify it. Examples: a money currency, a music lyric, a political government.

3. Historical entities = *only had* their reality as discursive entities for a social group of the past. A historical entity no longer has any social efficacy. Academic disciplines such as history can study them.

4. Academic entities = *only* have their reality as conventional for one or another academic discipline postulating them. Some disciplines study societies and want their academic entities to also be recognized as discursive entities by wider society. Some disciplines study nature and want their academic entities to also be recognized as non-discursive entities. Philosophy and Theology study absolutes and want their intellectual entities to also be recognized as non-discursive entities. Which academic entities can be demonstrably independent of the human world? Each discipline is responsible for attempting to prove human-independence, and the account of their methodologies is part of the story of the Academic Disciplines (told elsewhere).

Some illusory things are non-discursive entities. For example, dreams during sleep do exist regardless of whether one remembers a dream or talks about it; they happen due to our animal natures. Dreams are more like mountains than like mirror images. Some of the most materialistic things are just discursive entities. For example, legal properties have no existence unless people kept records and assented to what they say. If a society burned all property records, or simply ignored archives, what counts as property would dramatically change. Properties are more like fanciful tales than like trees.

Can a community of people sharing an idea with a word (like 'ghost') and using that word referentially (they all presume that 'ghost' refers to actual ghosts) be responsible for making ghosts real? In short, do minds create and determine reality?

3. Knowing What is Really Real

We ordinarily expect minds to be *knowing* reality. Now we are also asking whether minds are additionally *making* reality. Here we have a terminology difficulty. The view that mind is responsible for all reality has been called "idealism" in both Eastern and Western philosophy, but that view is a sort of realism about mind since idealism presumes that mind is ultimately real. On the other hand, the view that mind is not responsible for most reality has been the view labeled as "realism". So we shall speak of *metaphysical idealisms* and *metaphysical realisms*. They concern fundamental reality rather than unreality or falsity.

The view that reality consists essentially of just generic mentality (thought, consciousness, etc.) takes the metaphysical position of *ontological idealism*. The view that all reality consists of an aggregate of separate minds (individual selves), is the position of *personal idealism*, with a partner in *panpsychism* finding sentience elementarily within everything. Unless those minds exchange knowledge, each mind knows only its own existence (I am God!), which is the position of *solipsism*. The view that cessation of thought (no-self) allows the emptying of mentality (no-mind) and unifying with ultimate consciousness takes the metaphysical position of *nihilistic idealism*. Nihilism denies any reality, truth, or value to the self, others, and the world. Preventing solipsism and nihilism preoccupies idealistic metaphysics. The view that all reality consists of a supreme mind that generates individual selves knowing each other is the position of *theistic idealism*. (A related view, that a supreme mind creates a material world for individual minds to inhabit is a *realism* instead.) The view that a supreme mind individuates into finite minds inhabiting an immaterial world is *non-dual idealism*. The view that

all reality consists of communal minds sharing mentality and knowledge about each other and the experienced world takes the position of *objective idealism*.

Idealisms typically struggle to maintain monism (there is only one fundamental kind of reality) because they must explain how particular minds are so different from each other, yet inherently similar or identical. Minds see the world differently, but where does so much worldly phenomena come from? Do minds somehow “make” the external world of things around them? In short, why would mental reality generate illusory unreality? Answering that it is not genuine reality generating illusion, because only ignorant minds create deceptive appearances, does relieve supreme reality of responsibility. However, that simplistic answer (a) avoids explaining why reality permits deceived minds to exist in the first place, (b) fails to explain how different minds observe matters of the same external world around them all, and (c) admits that the apparent world somehow persists without the involvement of supreme reality. That view awards a degree of independence to the world around perceiving minds, taking a large step towards realism.

Standing in between idealism and realism is the view that a special condition of non-conceptual no-minding (achieved in naive ignorance or rigorous meditation) leaves the surrounding world precisely as it phenomenally always is, unmediated and unsorted by concepts, categories, meanings, values, etc. Being unconditioned, quite expected of an absolute, is attributed to plain experience so that it escapes conditioning. Thinking with distinctions, perspectives, or orientations is optional in that mode of experiencing rather than habitually compelled. Pyrrhonian skepticism, David Hume’s empiricism, William James’s “radical” empiricism, and Zen Buddhism’s “satori” are illustrations. This metaphysical position is not just about mystical trances, solipsism, or utter mindlessness. Ordinary awareness proceeds, yet no “subject” is involved, nor any “object”, during this detached condition where the observer *is* the observed within this unified phenomenal realm. The label of *phenomenalism* can serve, so long as no knowing, no mental observer, and no enduring consciousness is thereby implied.

Moving past phenomenalism, the tenet that one can perceive something without noticing or knowing one’s perception of that thing takes a stance on the entryway towards realism. Whatever is so perceived, without minding it, must be something having an existence situated partially beyond consciousness’s attention. Does a perceived thing entirely depend on its appearance for mentality, or not? Idealism requires that if something can depart one’s mind awareness and keep existing, that can only be possible due to another mind’s awareness of it. To walk through the doorway into realism, more independence for phenomena apart from mind must be granted.

The view that something can completely depart all awareness of it, remain the self-same thing in its absence from any mind or sort of mentality (etc.), and then re-enter awareness/knowing as the self-same identical entity (rather than two numerically distinct things created by mind to seem as the same thing all along) is the minimal position taken by *objective realism*.

Objective realism splits off into specific sorts of realisms. A simple sort of realism is the common sense view that we observers inhabit and explore a vast cosmos of real energies and entities following out their own patterns and ways. This *primal naturalism* tries to account for all mentality and knowledge in terms of the same sort of natural cosmic powers. Without science and its knowledge, that attempt relies on analogies with

animals around us, since they similarly navigate and enjoy the world through their endowed traits, from amoebas and fungi to bees, birds, and bears. However, humans acquired two extraordinary abilities unknown to the animal realm due to our capacious memory and imagination: we think about deeper powers behind evident phenomena and we think about essential spirits inhering within persons. It is entirely possible to halt metaphysics at the position of primal naturalism by neglecting and dismissing thoughts of hidden powers or unnatural beings and admitting only what can be observed. This strict empiricism, being more realistic than phenomenalism, is called *positivism*, and it fits with primal naturalism.

Four more kinds of realism are left, each arising due to a dissatisfaction with positivism. Positivism's strictness seems unsatisfactory and somewhat inhuman too. Forbidding the curious mind from postulating deeper and greater matters behind observable phenomena seems to be placing an "unnatural" restriction on human cognitive capacities. Religion went further than primal naturalism with two sorts of reality: God (supreme spirit) and God's creation (the world). When philosophy and theology arose to intellectually investigate this religious dualism, they agreed that supernaturalism is more realistic than idealistic, since the world is surely real thanks to God making the world materially real. It would instead be idealistic to view the cosmos as just a God-generated illusion (extreme Gnosticism), or as a manifestation of God (panentheism), or simply as God itself (pantheism).

Rather than trusting religion, the kind of realism following modern science is called *naturalism*. Naturalism covers a range of specific views, depending on how much priority is assigned to the physical sciences over other sciences. There are two major sorts of naturalisms. *Physicalism* is the narrowest sort of naturalism, holding that only the entities known by physical sciences are fully real. Physicalism, while repudiating dualism, becomes nihilistic by denying truth to beliefs about values, morals, or persons. The broadest sort of naturalism, accommodating all of experimental experience and every life, social, and physical science, is *pragmatism*. Pragmatism, while acknowledging the reality of values, remains realistic by disallowing axiology to override science. Naturalism gets abandoned by burdening metaphysics with requirements about perfections of absolute reality and unnatural ways for knowing it, which are expectations favoring idealistic absolutes.

Metaphysical options can be arranged from the most idealistic to the most realistic.

IDEALISMS				REALISMS			
nihilistic Id.	personal Id.	theistic Id.	non-dual Id.	positivism	objective R.	supernaturalism	physicalism
solipsism	ontological Id.	objective Id.	phenomenalism	primal R.	naturalism	pragmatism	

These metaphysical options sort themselves apart on the question of mindful knowledge, managed by the philosophical subfield of epistemology. Still, assessing reality only through the standard of the knowing mind brings reality down to the level of creaturely accessibility. What might reality be like for itself?

4. Absolute Reality

Humanity and its knowledge is not a bad place to begin. The tests of social verity allow us to scrutinize each other's experiences and observations of the world, to orient us towards knowledge. Things are more or less "real" for us according to how much credibility all of society places in them.

We can next philosophically ponder why our society should get to decide reality – surely there must be so much more that hasn't been explored. What is actually real must be credible in itself, beyond the meager tests that humans have invented so far. Reality, whatever it is like, must be out there, not just trapped within in our familiar bounds and speech.

Still, we wouldn't be able to just invent new tests from nothing. Our imaginations turn back to those four questions, for magnification beyond human-set limits. We are now moving into the subfield of cosmology called metaphysics. What do we expect reality to basically be?

Reality cannot be so deceptive, abruptly arriving and then departing from existence at random. Reality has to be *durable*.

Reality cannot be so illusory, shifting features to be classifiable one way and then another way. Reality has to stay *stable*.

Reality cannot be so subjective, having relevance only here or there depending on circumstances. Reality has to be *objective*.

Reality cannot be so unreliable, being one way and then another depending on circumstances. Reality has to be *unconditional*.

A conception of reality attributing all four characters – durability, stability, objectivity, and unconditionality – to an infinite or unlimited extent is able to assemble a conception presenting a candidate for an "absolute" mode of reality. As a whole, an absolute lacks duration, fragility, partiality, and conditionality. By surpassing worldly categories and ontologies, an absolute exemplifies 'eternality' (no time before or after it), its 'permanency' (it always must be), 'finality' (rests at the end of all inquiry while explaining everything else), and 'ultimacy' (all else depends on it while depending on nothing else).

Going forward, we are entering the area of philosophy known as cosmology: attempting to understand all of reality as a whole and how its nature can be known. If God really exists, philosophical cosmology addresses what God is like and how God relates to everything else. Philosophical cosmology does not overlook science, either, able to incorporate empirical findings about the world's workings. Ensuing debates, such as wondering whether religious cosmology and physical cosmology can be integrated (or not), are debates within philosophical cosmology. Cosmology and orthology (the philosophical study of values) are the two primary areas of philosophy, with all other subfields and areas of philosophy falling under their oversight. Cosmology is divided into paired subfields: metaphysics and epistemology. Metaphysics rationally assesses imaginative speculations about reality in general, while epistemology upholds high standards for knowledge and truth. Cosmology relies on both, since a philosophical worldview worth affirming must be compatible with methodical knowledge about it. (The root fallacy to be avoided asks us to affirm a worldview, which if real,

obstructs any knowledge of it. Philosophy discourages speculative views that prevent confirmation of them; religion lacks such modesty.)

For metaphysics, where the speculative imagination ponders the notion of an absolute as eternal, permanent, final, and ultimate, philosophy is only thinking about this “most wanted poster” or “new job description” as a hypothetical construct. The missing person or the ideal employee may never be found. Thinking in hypotheticals allows metaphysics to ensure that speculation is not a waste of time, pondering a notion that turns out to be impossible because it contains internally contradictory characters, or exceeds all attempts at minimally rational assessment. Could it be that reality actually is inherently contradictory, or transcends any rational limitation? Absolutely! If so, such a reality is no longer philosophy’s concern, and best left to mystics, poets, and artists for inspiring their creativities. However, as soon as some sort of notion of an absolute is supposed to have implications for what can be rationally comprehended, that suggestion gets referred to metaphysics for oversight assessments. When the mystic utters pronouncements about the soul, or the poet inspires sentiments about nature, or the artist depicts a vision of the sacred, then metaphysics is called onto the scene and rational conversations about real implications must proceed. To their everlasting credit, the mystic, poetic, and artistic are perennially inspirational in part to their capacity to get metaphysical.

Doesn’t metaphysics have plenty of other topics besides such a obscure “absolute” to think about? Fortunately yes, but an absolute is eventually unavoidable: getting philosophical about reality means that some sort of notion of an absolute is already on the agenda, whether vaguely or precisely conceived and regardless of whether named by that label of “absolute” or not. Philosophy cannot avoid absolutes (nor can theology) by simply avoiding the word “absolute”: that four-character job description identifies absolutes, not just the label. For example, two companies offering employment with the same work duties under different job titles are still offering the same job. It is true that labels are not unimportant, even in philosophy. Two philosophers advocating metaphysically identical absolutes, while one happily labels this sort of absolute as “God” while the other won’t, will have different careers and lasting legacies (and philosophers are not insensitive to such evaluations). However, metaphysics only assesses rational factors and implications of worldviews, not their perceived goodness or rightness. Evaluations of absolutes and worldviews keeps orthology invigorated.

Philosophy has the privilege of pondering distinctive types of absolutes in the mind, yet reality tolerates but one (which is the point of commending an absolute as real). An absolute by definition is singular; multiple absolutes are unreal. The correct number of actual absolutes cannot be zero according to metaphysics. Could ultimate reality be just ephemeral and inconceivable? No, since the sincere mystics do not even begin to try to describe void-like trances, and negative statements about the absolute’s *uncategorized* (surpasses worldly categories and concepts) status yet lends some *sensibility*, as theologians know well. Seeking the absolute need not be an exercise in nonsensical or anesthetized futility. Rationality isn’t even needed at this initial stage. A suggestive sensibility about an absolute presumes no particular sort of rationality from one philosophical tradition or a single civilization. What specifically counts as proper reasoning (or skepticism) varies somewhat across the world’s philosophies, but imaginative metaphysics in general (unlike epistemology) is not tied down to any of them.

Metaphysics needn’t start with reasoning alone, and a healthy imagination stays sensitive to mystery. Cognitively appreciating novel mystery is metaphysical as well as experiential. Even a proposition such as “It is

neither ‘not-this’ nor ‘not-that’ offers a ladder for the transcending imagination to peer into mystery. Words do not directly reach absolute reality, but poetry and prose can redirect reaches in wrong directions. The metaphysical without mysticism is meager; the mystical without metaphysics is mute. A mystic recounting an encounter with the real appeals to metaphysical criteria as affirmatively as any speculative metaphysician. That is why the absolute can be approached from either direction. The experiential and the intellectual coordinate each other while exploring the finite array of candidate absolutes.

The number of absolutes cannot be zero. The absolute cannot be mere nothingness (by definition) but it could amount to chaotic foaminess of more void than any form. Anaximander’s “apeiron” (the unbounded), Laozi’s “dao” (the undetectable way), Nāgārjuna’s “śūnyatā” (emptiness), and Peirce’s “firstness” (mere possibility) play similar roles. That manner of “anontology” (of no-things) pairs comfortably alongside “ontology” (of things) within metaphysics.

Could there be multiple independent absolutes? No, since that violates that character of an absolute’s ultimacy. Philosophy would have more work to do, to connect multiple ‘universes’ together into a singular absolute. Could there be different sets of final truths about absolutes? No, since that violates the character of an absolute’s finality. Philosophy has more work to do, to merge explanatory schemes together for a singular absolute. The final answer to the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is “The absolute.” Asking the question already admits the undeniability of somethingness, so candidates at hand for the absolute aren’t conjectural, but plentiful. Few reals could compete for “the” absolute, but that’s just a matter of philosophically sifting through candidates responsible for all the rest of somethingness. Reality already is.

Where is God in all of this? Letting philosophy build absolutes like model toys can understandably seem like a waste of time when religion and theology already worships a God. Know God rightly, know the Absolute. That attitude is parochial, not philosophical, and misses the point: which is *the* genuine God? Religions defend their deities by pointing to characters much like those already on our list, and theologies borrow from philosophy’s absolutes to raise intellectual justifications for their High God. Philosophy is unavoidable – the more you look around to basically explain why your God is so great, the more philosophical you become. And we cannot overlook how an absolute should be so inconceivably great that it may generate conceivable deities with extravagance.

Whether thinking of God or an absolute generally, one may be thinking about what must be “necessary” reality, or embodies “fundamental” reality, or has the “greatest” or “infinite” reality. Those attributions are imprecise unless one or more of the characters required for an absolute is specifically meant. Other popular capacities such as “omnipresence” or “omniscience” are not required, because some absolutes don’t quite fit those specific requirements. The absolute’s “perfections” are also spoken of, which either must refer to the four core characters or to additional axiological criteria, which get considered below after the main types of absolutes are delineated.

Two types of absolutes distinguish themselves right away. Absolute reality does not in any way depend on anything else for its reality, so its status as absolute is necessarily guaranteed by definition. However, that status as unconditioned from without does not mean that the absolute cannot moderate or diminish its

absoluteness from within. Hence, there are two kinds of absolute reality (at minimum) to metaphysically contemplate: (1) absolute pure reality, and (2) absolute differentiated reality.

Type (1) Absolute reality admits no differentiation within it, as everything about it as a whole and every portion within it are entirely indistinguishable and identical in every way in itself. Other than the abstraction imposed by our conception about a “whole” absolute and “parts” of it, which cannot pertain to this Type 1 Absolute itself, its pure identity throughout must be uncompromised. This Type 1 Absolute possesses by definition the four required characters for any absolute: eternity, permanency, finality, and ultimacy. What particularly distinguishes this Absolute is a fifth character, that of ‘purity’, which makes it more idealistic than realistic.

Type (2) Absolute reality allows degrees or intensities of differentiation. Within this absolute, such abstractions as “whole and part” or “place and perspective” are legitimately applied. Any portion, property, feature (etc.) is less permanent, less stable, less objective, and conditional. It would be a mistake to say that the Absolute “causes” inner parts to do what they do, since those parts are not external to the Absolute, but just ways of the Absolute proceeding in its particular manner. For example, a tree does not “cause” a leaf to sprout from its branch, because that leaf *is* of the tree developing as a tree. That is why the Type 2 Absolute similarly claims ‘eternity’ (time does not apply to it as a whole, but only for relations among parts and aspects), along with ‘finality’ (as a whole it accounts for the possibility of everything else) and ‘ultimacy’ (everything depends on it). Type 2 Absolutism does not claim ‘permanency’ since change occurs within it, but this Absolute has ‘permanence’ as a whole (its reality does not arise from, nor could it expire back into, nothingness). Nor does Type 2 Absolutism claim ‘purity’ but it does claim ‘plenitude’ (fostering infinite variety), which makes it more realistic than idealistic.

In general, an Absolute at minimum meets the metaphysical standards of ‘permanence’, ‘eternity’, ‘finality’, and ‘ultimacy’. The Type 1 Absolute additionally claims ‘unitary purity’ and ‘inner permanency’. The Type 2 Absolute instead claims ‘plenitude’. The field of metaphysics fosters debates over attempts to conceive an absolute, and about relationships among such “attributes”.

Conceiving an absolute is hazardous business. It must be emphasized again that none of these ‘characters’ are positively affirmed of an absolute, as if an absolute could be delimited by concepts and constructs. An absolute is not some thing among many conceivable limited things. We should not offer definitions for delimiting the unlimitable. However, to claim that an absolute is beyond intellectuality does not mean that nothing can be meaningfully conveyed about it. Mentality has more resources than just intellectual analysis and synthesis. It is evidently possible to indirectly distinguish an absolute from ordinary worldly matters, and employ metaphorical language to imaginatively convey those distinctions. Here, metaphysics (like religion before it) resorts to “meaning by negation” or “apophatic” meaning to direct thought far beyond ordinary thinking. The doorway to poetry and mysticism beckons, but metaphysics can also handle “not-conceiving” absolutes and indirectly comparing them. Inferential relations still obtain among ‘terms’ applicable to absolutes, and between absolutist terms and worldly terms. One type of Absolute may logically rule out certain views of the world and ourselves, while other types permit those views but forbid other views, and so forth. Accepting one or another absolute has vast implications for judging wisely among worldviews. Similarly, relationships among such “negative terms” are also treacherous to conceive. Does ‘permanence’ necessarily entail ‘eternity’?

Does 'finality' ensure 'ultimacy', or the reverse? And so on... We shall avoid such debates here, since there is no consensus for merging them and worldviews require distinguishing among them.

Before more types of absolutes are sketched, metaphysics itself can be challenged as being none of the intellect's proper business in the first place. Metaphysics makes its reply, that every philosophy has a metaphysical absolute, including philosophies denying it. (Unphilosophical opinions easily deny anything out of ignorance, incuriosity, or irrationality.) Philosophy is sufficient to refute doubts about an absolute. Let a worldview say, "No absolute needs to exist, since X exists instead," but this erects X as another absolute. Let a worldview say, "Only Xs cause Ys and so on, without anything lasting forever," but this sets up the whole set or series as absolute. Let a worldview say, "Nothing unconditioned is needed, since the endless cycle of things condition each other," yet the entire cycle is unconditioned by anything else beyond it, so that's an absolute. Let a worldview say, "Things just began by themselves and stop existing all on their own," but this violates the rational principle that nothing comes from nothing, as well as the scientific principle that energy cannot be created or destroyed. Science is entirely compatible with its theorized absolutes (although paradigms shift). Let a worldview say, "Indeed only nothing comes from nothing since nothing is real," but this is just word-play since the appearance of a speaker and the spoken are already absolute here. Further philosophical complaints target one or another type of absolute, but other types survive such critique and no philosophy (or science) refutes them all.

Every philosophical worldview includes an absolute of one sort or another. An affirmation of mysterianism, expecting an ultimate to surpass all knowledge in order to inspire awe and wonder, is a time-honored path towards an absolute. Pondering how one grand mystery lies behind all our particular mysteries elicits the thoughtful imagination for metaphysical speculation. Why not combine puzzles and paradoxes into a wondrous conspiracy of mystery? For example, as quantum phenomena and consciousness are both stubbornly mysterious matters despite all of knowledge's progress, it seems economical to propose their entanglement or commonality at some even deeper level. Playing with mysteries is thoroughly metaphysical in substance or spirit. Nor does a rejection of fundamentalism, either about truth or revelation, preclude all metaphysical absolutes. Philosophy's admittance of absolutism due to metaphysics (what is most real) is not the same as establishing foundationalism for epistemology (how to know truth). Nor does metaphysical absolutism dictate axiology (what has most value). Indeed, debates among advocates of this or that type of absolutism wield epistemological and axiological principles to display the advantages of their preferred absolute.

5. Metaphysics: Four Types of Absolutes

There seems to be a battle like that of the gods and the giants going on among them, because of their disagreement about existence. —Plato, *The Sophist*, 246a

Debates over reality ensue between advocates of these two initial types of absolutes.

Type 1 can go first, criticizing Type 2. “Where there is differentiation, there emerges conditionality, with one thing depending on another to exist. Conditionality implies the possibility of change, where A is modifying B, or even allowing B to cease to exist. This permits instability and impermanence, but the Absolute cannot possess instability and impermanence. Therefore, this Type 2 absolute is not a genuine Absolute.” The Type 2 advocate may be presuming that a property of a part does not automatically pertain to the whole (the part-whole fallacy), so that Type 2 Absolute itself remains permanent and stable. However, is this a satisfactory presumption? If a red barn receives a little yellow paint on one side, is it still an entirely red barn? If some milk inside a carton of milk goes sour, is the whole gallon of milk still wholesome? The part-whole fallacy is no fallacy for a complete absolute either, and the Type 2 Absolute lacks purity.

Type 2 goes next to reply. “Complete purity is not required for this Type 2 Absolute. Among its components and aspects, limited instability is an indication of larger stabilities and deeper permanencies, not a decay into chaos. No impermanent thing actually lapses into complete unreality, while getting transformed into something else, and so on. Those primary ways are in turn balanced and sustained by the Absolute’s permanence and stability. Furthermore, the Type 2 Absolute can account for things that are not as completely real as the Absolute. Such things, the ‘less-than-real’ matters, are explainable as limited and changing matters within the Absolute.” This raises a challenge to the Type 1 Absolute: how can it account for things that are less than fully real? Many matters are indeed fleeting, unimportant, and valueless, but some are not, such as the mind, personhood, and good actions. If all selves are completely unreal and lack any existence, what explains our belief in our own agency and our responsible deeds? The Type 1 Absolute seems impersonal, uncaring, and amoral – hence encouraging such views towards life and each other.

Type 1 makes its reply back. “There is no need to account for things that are less than real since they are unreal, and no explanation is needed for what does not exist in the first place. If something is impermanent, unstable, subjective, and conditional, it is unreal and empty of actuality. Only actuality explains actuality; only existence coheres with existence. Reality does not generate or manifest anything even so flimsy as illusions. Nothing real is responsible for the unreal. The realm of deceptive appearance does not arise *within* the absolute, such as “in” pure consciousness or awareness. Appearances *are* deceived awareness at most, but none of that inheres in absolute reality. If reality were held responsible for something unreal, whether of thought or of things, then a measure of existence would thereby be bestowed and credited to it, and then it would not be so unreal.” This reply should be expected from such a pure absolutism where there are only two classifications: the real and the unreal, without any intermediate or partial third classification. What falls short of being real lacks any existence whatsoever. Whatever else is spoken of beside the Real, that talk could only

be about deception and delusion, and has nothing to do with any degree of reality. The supposed meaningfulness of a word for a non-entity – such as “self”, “thought”, and “object” – is itself deception and delusion, and must instead be about emotional or imaginative expression.

Type 2 has a rejoinder. “Trying to avoid responsibility for ‘unrealities’ cannot meet intellectual demands and expectations. Something impermanent and unstable can still be identified, authenticated, and fairly objective. Clocks and clouds cannot be rightly classed as unreal. Even a hallucination can bring a familiar form and quality and make repeated visitations. Such matters cannot be included with or within the Type 1 Absolute (as we just heard from its advocate above) so what are they and where are they? If they must be entirely beyond the Type 1 Absolute, its advocates must admit that it is not unbounded (all-extensive) and not infinite (all-encompassing). The Type 1 Absolute does not include everything. By dividing the real from the unreal so sharply, Type 1 Absolutism offers “two truths” about such duality. Furthermore, since the Type 1 Absolute fails to be responsible for the less-than-real and must be unable to affect such matters, that Absolute is not all-potent (lacks infinite power). Since the Type 1 Absolute is not unbounded, not infinite, and not all-powerful, it is a poor metaphysical absolute. Type 2 Absolutism depicts reality as endlessly proliferating and diversifying with novelty, as each fresh entity promptly elicits reactions from surrounding matters that respond in turn with originality, and so on without ceasing. Type 2 Absolutism hence claims another absolute character of ‘plenitude’ for not falling short of yielding every possible kind of quality or form. By appealing to axiology (the field of philosophy about value), Type 2 Absolutism further claim that non-duality with unlimited plenitude is a valuable perfection, so the Type 2 Absolute is more perfect than the Type 1 Absolute.

Type 1 has its rejoinder back in response. “The Type 1 Absolute is not ‘bounded’ or ‘limited’ by the unreal, since any such matter is entirely the figment of desirous or deranged cognition, needing nowhere to exist and requiring no explanation. We only think that clocks exists because we want their functioning. We only think that clouds exist because they can be distracting. If we ceased to speak of them, halted talk of knowing them, and stopped noticing them, their unreality would cease to deceive the intellect, which would then focus on reality instead. Practical mentality regrettably attends to empty, phenomenal, and phantasmal matters, which preoccupy and perpetuate the busyness of an ordinary life devoid of reality.” With this rejoinder, it is clear how Type 1 Absolutism treats needs, purposes, values, and attachments as unrealities involved with illusions. Furthermore, it is impossible for one unreal thing to “cause” or “make” another unreal thing, because such relations attribute a measure of existence to them both, which is forbidden by their unreality. In reality there is no phenomenal world and no actual mind to observe it. Phenomena may appear to display patterns and trends, particular where delusions encourage further delusions, but nothing is really connected and nothing substantial is responsible for all that commotion. Unrealities have no potencies or powers, and assuming otherwise is further deception and delusion. By appealing to axiology too, Type 1 Absolutism claims that its neutral aloofness from deception and delusion is a perfection, so the Type 1 Absolute is more perfect than the Type 2 Absolute.

Type 2 wants one more rejoinder. “Type 1 Absolutism is indeed bounded and limited in extent and power, since it cannot reach the less-than-real realms. The phenomenal world and the observing agent (like us humans with minds) cannot be entirely unreal because they briefly interact, modify each other, and produce new results, which in turn generate even more interactivity, and so on. Type 2 Absolutism can account for those matters by treating them as limited knowable matters that are processes internal to the Absolute. That

is why the Type 2 Absolute is truly infinite and all-powerful, and more perfect too, by exemplifying boundless beauty in endless diversity. Although such unlimited profligacy offends the blank unity and 'purity' of the Type 1 Absolute, nothing could be left out from the kind of perfection that the Type 2 Absolute provides. Limited beings merit some respect. Since the Type 1 Absolute refuses to participate with a less-than-real realm, then that absolute is beyond intelligence, knowledge, and morality, and thus useless for our world and our lives. Perhaps it exists, but advocates of Type 1 Absolutism have to invent some thoughtless trance to mystically encounter it." With this rejoinder, we hear the accusation that Type 1 Absolutism advances a dualistic metaphysics (All is Two) rather than a monistic metaphysics (All is One), which goes against the original metaphysical point of knowing One Reality, not two realities. If the Type 1 Absolutism denies harboring a dualistic epistemology because it rejects all knowing about alleged phenomena, mentality, and so on, then it leaves itself open to denying the possibility of any knowledge at all, which results in total skepticism (it is impossible to have knowledge about anything) and total nihilism (it is impossible to say that anything is real).

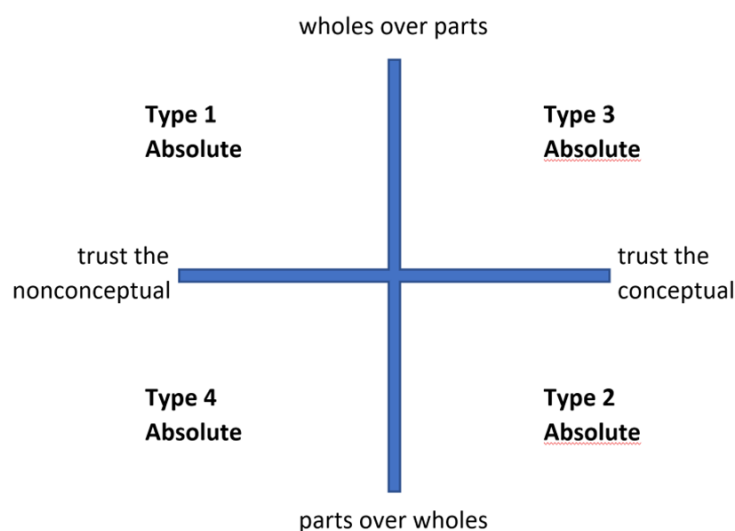
This debate between Type 1 Absolutism and Type 2 Absolutism can continue with fascinating subtopics and issues, but two more absolutisms want to join the conversation.

Type 3 Absolutism: "Type 1 Absolutism requires an amendment in order to satisfy the metaphysical requirement of accounting for everything while avoiding nihilism. Consider this amendment. Anything classed as 'somewhat real' is indirectly created *by* the Absolute but it is not inherently *of* the Absolute itself. Such matters come into existence from "nothingness" into "somethingness" due to the Absolute. There is nothing of the Absolute essentially within those new matters except for an implantation of pure reality (a spirit or soul or atman) into certain living creatures such as humans. Everything fully or partially real is the direct or indirect responsibility of this Type 3 Absolute. However, this Absolute remains purely good and innocent in itself, because so-called 'bad' or 'evil' matters only pertain to the created realm. Something 'less than real' must be finite and imperfect, and much of that created realm will be unavoidably imperfect and harmful for other fragile beings of that realm, who will label certain matters as 'bad' or 'evil'." For Type 3 Absolutism, matters judged as bad or evil are not attributable to the pure Absolute, nor is the Absolute responsible in a moral sense for worldly events. Type 3 Absolutism claims to be more perfect than Type 1 or 2 Absolutism because of such pure goodness. That goodness is reflected in creation's design for planned providence, which prevents the chaos of proliferating plenitude. Individual selves are simultaneously of the same spirit as the Absolute yet they operate independently without moral perfection, which explains much of the world's evils. The Absolute must remain the ultimate cause and "because" of existence, for nothing would be anything without the Absolute. However, Type 3 Absolutism establishes metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological dualisms by sharply dividing two distinct and non-overlapping sorts of reality, one pure (the creator) and one impure (the creation).

Type 4 Absolutism: "Type 2 Absolutism requires an amendment in order to meet expectations that the Absolute is faultless and free from imperfections. All modes and degrees of the 'somewhat real' are merely finite manifestations of the Absolute, not as essential or inherent components themselves, but rather as phenomenal accidents indirectly generated by the Absolute. If the realms of the 'less-than-real' such as the world and life were actually of the Absolute itself (as Type 2 Absolutism allows), then their own interactions and resulting productions would be about as real as the Absolute. However, among the interactions and productions of the phenomenal world are agents who think they interact with solid objects around them, but

nothing of that realm of plurality is substantially real. Thinking minds, thoughts about things, and things are all nothing but creations of finite mentality which isn't substantially real either. Although humans believe that they encounter 'deception', 'bad', and 'evil', there is nothing real corresponding to such labels." This Type 4 Absolutism guarantees both ontological and orthological purity by preserving the Absolute's aloofness from such faults while avoiding the metaphysical nihilism of Type 1 Absolutism. Those observed imperfections of the world are judgments attributed by agents from limited phenomenal perspectives, and lack full truth or reality. This kind of Absolute can be interpreted in either an idealistic or realistic direction.

An efficient way to discriminate basic sorts of metaphysical worldview is to ask about holism and conceptualism. Do wholes have priority over parts, or the reverse? And, does the conceptual, or the nonconceptual, get closer to reality?



In Western philosophy the four absolutes are exemplified by Parmenides and Eckhart (Type 1), Aristotle and Dewey (Type 2), Plato, Descartes, and Kant (Type 3), and Spinoza and Hegel (Type 4).

Each of these four primary absolutes is monistic (reality is One) by design. They are each non-dualistic, although in different ways. And yet each one, taken to an extreme, fosters a potential dualism of one sort or another. From the standpoint of one absolutism, another looks irredeemably dualistic.

Type 1 Absolutism staunchly denies any dualistic aspects, for this absolute lacks aspects or parts in its unitary purity. As a non-conceptualist system, its idealistic (mysticism) and sensory (phenomenalism) formats can be together labeled as *Unitism*. With most of humanity adrift in delusions, their acquaintance with unrealities calls for pragmatic terms to describe their activities. What language can convey some aid towards illumination? If such guidance has validity, its words are both true yet untrue, which sets up a linguistic dualism. Preventing that linguistic dualism is hence a preoccupation for this absolutism (unless it mystically ascends into silence), so those paired languages must be somewhat inter-translatable for comprehensibility. Examples: Svātantrika Buddhism's skepticism about appearances on the way towards nirvana; Zen koan exchanges with students for attaining satori; F.H. Bradley's logical arguments against external-world realism.

However, if mutual conceivability sounds more like inter-communality, then Type 2 Organicism can look plausible.

Type 2 Absolutism refuses to admit a dualistic ontology, since this absolute infuses and energizes everything ongoing within it. As a conceptualist system, both its idealistic (vitalism) and naturalistic (energism) forms can together be called *Organicism*. Nevertheless, that plenitude of variety, where so much has so little in common, threatens to disperse into complete disorder. What guidance can lend some organization for the cosmos? If such organizing powers have efficacy, their ways may be divisive too, which sets up generative dualisms and even pluralism. Preventing that ontological dualism is hence a preoccupation for this absolutism (unless it devolves into anarchic chaos), so those leading powers must be inherently balanced and coordinated. Examples: yin and yang principles in Taoism; attractive and repulsive forces in physics; the role of “god” in Whitehead’s process philosophy. However, if a coordinating principle is too controlling, this compromise looks more like Type 3 Formism.

Type 3 Absolutism refuses to admit a dualistic ontology, since this absolute creates and sustains everything dependent upon it. Varieties of this conceptualist absolutism (e.g. personal idealism, supernaturalism) may be collectively brought under the label of *Formism*. That inferiority of created things, engaging with matters all around them, establishes a second-tier reality. What categories apply to just the external world? If such worldly categories differ substantially from absolute reality’s characters, that sets up an ontological dualism. Preventing that ontological dualism is hence a preoccupation for this absolutism (unless it converts to theology), so basic worldly categories must be products of absolute reality. Examples: Samkhya Hinduism’s setting of *puruṣa* (consciousness) in a world of *prakṛti* (materiality); Deism’s definition of space and time as “God’s sensorium”. However, a categorial compromise may drift towards Type 4 Prakasism (below).

Type 4 Absolutism refuses to admit a dualistic ontology, since all phenomena are just illusory manifestations of this absolute. This system’s non-conceptualism has idealistic (emanationism) and realistic (physicalism) formats which share in what may be called *Prakasism*. Unlike Type 1 absolutism, this absolutism cannot avoid accounting for phenomenal activity. The field of manifest phenomena includes apparent relations, interactions, and causes that seem effective to a credulous mind. What criteria should set the standard for knowledge, of the worldly or of the transcendent? If our beliefs about such practical matters, including our self-knowledge as thinking beings, are necessary yet entirely mistaken, that sets up an epistemic dualism. Preventing that epistemic dualism is hence a preoccupation for this absolutism (unless it degenerates into eliminative reductionism), so any practical convictions must be extrapolatable or derivable from true knowledge of reality. Examples: Advaita Hinduism’s *atman* (self) as essentially *Brahman*; Spinoza’s dual-aspect theory about reality’s modes of mind and body; physicalism’s reductionist project to unify all theoretical and practical knowledge. However, if a singular reality holds all the credibility, that explanatory strategy ascends towards Type 1 Unitism.

In order to avoid dualistic tendencies to an absolute, metaphysical syncretism borrows from a neighboring absolute for corrective aid. Some examples:

<u>Mode of All-ness (Pan)</u>		<u>Dualism risk?</u>	<u>Compromise avoiding dualism?</u>
Pan-unist	the All is unitary	discourses for “two truths”	
Pan-plurist	the All is plurality	dispersals into “too much chaos”	
Pan-polarist	the All is polarity	dichotomies of “two realities”	
Pan-emanist	the All is emanatory	divisions for “two knowledges”	

There is another way to overcome potential dualistic tendencies for these four absolutisms. Metaphysics can permit Orthology to specify a singular value that aligns the principles of an absolute. Orthology prioritizes one value or another, and declares that the perfected idealization of that value must be the ultimate reality that is responsible for everything else.

Type 1 (Buddhism, Sufism) – the absolute is Bliss

That *satisfaction* for which all sentience strives IS that BLISS within each person able to shed one’s life.

Type 2 (Stoicism, Taoism) – the absolute is Harmony

That *reconciliation* for which all beings strive IS that HARMONY from which all beings vitally emerge.

Type 3 (Platonism, Kantianism) – the absolute is Reason

That *rationality* for which all minds strive IS that REASON through which each mind can think.

Type 4 (Hinduism, Scientism) – the absolute is Illumination

That *insight* for which all intelligences strive IS that ILLUMINATION behind all deceptive appearances.

Orthological Metaphysics can assist absolutes to overcome their internal dualistic tendencies, but it cannot adjudicate among rival absolutes to determine the “best” Absolute. Orthology by definition must take into consideration all relevant values for beings able to value. The way that Orthological Metaphysics eagerly advances this or that supreme value – such as bliss, harmony, reason, or illumination – and even shows how one supreme value can simultaneously fulfill the others, proves nothing. Any of the other supreme values can be shown, with sufficient ingenuity, to be able to perform that same function (that is why such idealizations rise to orthological “supremacy” for consideration). Furthermore, Orthological Metaphysics cannot appeal to the metaphysical merits of a preferred absolute to elevate it above the rest, since the four types of absolutes are already stalemated on those grounds already.

Cosmology (the validly real) and Orthology (the really valuable) are not wholly disconnected, as they both deal with the question of responsibility: what is ultimately responsible for what? Assenting to a fact that “A is

responsible for B” is not the same as agreeing that “A bears responsibility for B” or that “B should be responsible to A.” Supposing that B would not exist without A, does this mean that A has more value than B?

To properly choose among absolutes, deeper philosophical probing and testing is required to expose their merits and flaws. General Metaphysics and Orthology have had their say. Epistemology’s turn is next, to ask about the comprehensibility of these absolutes, followed by Axiology’s interrogations into the compatibility of absolute reality with finite individuality.

6. Metaphysics and Epistemology on the Absolutes

“The shades nowhere speak without blood, and the ghosts of Metaphysic accept no substitute. They reveal themselves only to that victim whose life they have drained, and, to converse with shadows, he himself must become a shade.”

– F.H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality* (1914)

These four primary types of absolutism are engaged in perennial debates over which one upholds monism and which one upholds dualism; which one is more deterministic or chaotic instead; which one is more reductionistic or not at all; which one can account for phenomena better; which one can account for knowledge better; and so on. For example, Type 1 Absolutism avoids metaphysical dualism at the price of either erecting an epistemic dualism or admitting skeptical nihilism. Type 2 denies dualism by admitting pluralism and relativism. Type 3 Absolutism avoids skepticism, relativism, and reductionism by affirming dualism. Type 4 Absolutism tries to avoid dualism and nihilism by pursuing reductionism. With various sorts of divisiveness and duality erupting for the absolutes, the original point of one ultimate knowable reality looks to be disintegrating.

While Type 4 Absolutism is the most sophisticated of the four types and tries to incorporate each one’s advantages for its own metaphysics, its characteristic difficulties are quite revealing. To make Type 4 Absolutism reasonable, anything seemingly solid and substantial of the world has to be deconstructed (taken apart chemically, linguistically, epistemically, and so on) and thereby shown to lack an abiding reality of its own, being at most an insubstantial and imagistic manifestation of ultimate reality. Idealistic absolutism reduces everything to phases of awareness/consciousness; materialistic absolutism reduces everything to interactions of matter/energy. (Of course idealism and materialism both complain about the other’s monistic reductionism, either mind down to matter or matter down to mind, but that is a separate debate.) Despite all reductionist efforts, Type 4 Absolutism’s combined metaphysical and axiological absolutism still tends towards dualism. There is not only a dualism between the truly real (for true knowledge) and mere appearance (for practical knowledge), but also a dualism of values. From the standpoint of this absolutism, a tragedy killing thousands of people isn’t a real event or a true evil, so the Absolute is innocently neutral. However, from the standpoint of axiology, those people (and the rest of us) would think that something evil really did happen to them. This divergence between reals and values raises an axiological dualism and an ethical dilemma.

Subtle distinctions among metaphysical options make it difficult to tell a Type 3 and Type 4 idealism apart. Consider the phenomena of color (the greenness of a tree or the blueness of the sky, for example). According

to Type 3 idealism, that color objectively exists because the absolute mind manifested the world to be colored, so that color quality is perceived by an existing finite mind. However, after realizing how worldly qualities and entities are all dependent on mind, the mind discovers its superior reality and realizes its individuated oneness (of the same spirit) with the absolute. According to Type 4 idealism, that color cannot objectively exist since it is just a manifestation within the realm of mere appearance where a manifested finite mind mistakenly credits it with objectivity. After relief from such pseudo-worldly illusions, that mind understands how it lacks substantial reality too, and realizes its non-individuated oneness (of the same substance) with the absolute. As for Type 1 absolutism, both appearance and mentality are delusions anyways, so dropping all notice of them takes a direct plunge into the pure absolute.

Type 4 physicalism has a parallel difficulty with less-than-real qualities such as colors. No color can exist objectively in the world because the physical reality of the world includes nothing colored. No color could be objectively within the perceiver because nothing within the reality of the perceiver (which is also physical) possesses that quality either. The color is only an illusion for the subject generated by perception functioning in a particular manner. The realization that all qualities are just subject-generated illusions permits the thinker to acknowledge that only physical properties are real. Likewise, thinking minds are not substantially real either, since all thought is just an apparent manifestation of brain processes. By contrast, if the color objectively exists within the subject's mind, that takes the position of Type 3 idealism. If the color objectively consists of certain worldly conditions which are noticed by perceivers, that takes the position of Type 2 naturalism.

We can now coordinate the various sorts of idealisms and realisms with these four types of absolutes.

Type 1 Absolutism should be neither idealistic nor realistic, since they encourage a dualism of thought/thing that cannot be absolutely real. A strict Type 1 absolutism should stay close to nihilism or phenomenism. A Type 1 Absolutism that insists that the absolute is like enjoying consciousness is more akin to an idealistic Type 4 absolutism.

Type 2 Absolutism can take either idealistic or realistic forms, such as objective idealism or pragmatic naturalism.

Type 3 Absolutism has two main forms, one more monistic and the other more dualistic. In theistic idealism, the supreme mind individuates into finite souls who inhabit a ideal world either generated by them or by the supreme mind. In supernaturalism, the supreme mind makes finite souls and a natural world for them to inhabit.

Type 4 Absolutism can take either non-dual idealistic or non-dual realistic forms. As Type 4 idealism, mentality/consciousness is absolute reality. If that ontological consciousness is denied any experiential/awareness content, then this absolutism is actually a Type 1 nihilism instead. If the consciousness of a finite mind possesses its own individuality, then this dualistic view is actually a Type 2 or Type 3 absolutism. As for Type 4 realism, energetic physicality is absolute reality. If anything more than that absolute physicality is admitted as real, such as ordinary objects or minds, then this pluralistic view is actually either a Type 2 absolutism or a Type 3 absolutism.

Nihilistic idealism	= a Type 1 absolutism
Solipsistic idealism	= a Type 1 absolutism
Personal idealism	= a Type 1 absolutism
Ontological idealism	= either a Type 2 or a Type 4 absolutism
Non-dualist idealism	= a Type 4 absolutism
Theistic idealism	= a Type 3 absolutism
Objective idealism	= a Type 2 absolutism
Phenomenalism	= a Type 1 absolutism
Objective realism	= either a Type 2 or a Type 4 absolutism
Primal naturalism	= a Type 2 absolutism
Positivism	= a Type 2 absolutism
Supernaturalism	= a Type 3 absolutism
Naturalism	= either a Type 2 or a Type 4 absolutism
Physicalism	= a Type 4 absolutism
Pragmatic naturalism	= a Type 2 absolutism

Metaphysical and axiological debates across the history of both Eastern and Western philosophy involve varieties of these four absolutisms. In the West, Supernatural Theism (a Type 3) and Scientific Physicalism (a Type 4) argue over the creation of the world. Aristotle, the Stoics, Pantheism, and Pragmatism (all Type 2) have sought a non-dualistic alternative to that theist-materialist deadlock. The idealistic systems of Spinoza and Hegel (both Type 4) attempt to integrate individual minds with a generative absolute. In India, schools of Vedanta Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism disputed varieties of idealisms and stood apart from Lokāyata realism (a type 2). Upanishad Hinduism was broad enough to harbor theistic idealism (a Type 3) as well as pantheistic idealism (a Type 4) where souls (of reality) generate a world (of appearance). Leibniz's panpsychist personalism was a similar Type 4 objective idealism consisting of only individuated minds. Getting less dualistic, Advaita Vedānta (a Type 4) moved towards Mādhyamika Buddhism (a Type 1) and away from Yogacara Buddhism (another Type 4), while they all regarded Viśiṣṭādvaita theism (a Type 3) and Theravāda Buddhism (a Type 4) as too realistic. In China, Hua-yan Buddhism (a Type 4) developed closer to pluralistic Daoism (a Type 2), while Chan Buddhism (a Type 1) monistically identified the phenomenal world with ultimacy.

Controversies among philosophies/theologies are typically rooted in the different ways that they coordinate cosmology and orthology. The general organization of Philosophy and its four main areas:

PHILOSOPHY:	COSMOLOGY		ORTHOLOGY	
	Metaphysics	Epistemology	Axiology	Ethics

Each area has (a) a *Core Concern*, (b) a <method> approaching that concern, and (c) a [criterion] used by that method.

	<i>What Is</i>	<i>How to Know It</i>	<i>Why It Matters</i>	<i>What's Its End</i>
PHIL	Arche <theoria> [ontic priority]	Principle <reason> [consistency]	Value <commensurability> [intrinsic worth]	Ideal <dignity> [inviolability]

Idealisms privilege epistemology and ethics, while realisms privilege metaphysics and axiology instead. Idealisms insist that the knower must take ontic priority – surely a knower knows better about knowing than about anything else) so knowing itself has supreme reality (mentality *is* reality). Some idealisms start from the ethical agent’s righteousness, so nothing amoral has greater or prior reality. Realisms aren’t so impressed by knowing’s omniscience, allowing most of reality to elude knowing and subsist without mentality. Some realisms start from axiology, noting how reality supports many values having little to do with cognitive needs, similarly demoting mentality’s place within wild nature.

Idealism denies any plausibility to an unknown and unknowable reality: by *definition* such a reality cannot be proven by any known evidence, and by *conception* it seems literally unthinkable. Furthermore, even if reality is replete with values unrelated to anything intellectual, the mere existence of a value implies a vital interest in that value, so minimal sentience must be involved and bare mentality gets implicated anyways (just as idealism expects). Realism responds by emphasizing mentality’s dependence on the non-mental for novelty and provocation: if all is known, what remains for any thinking to be doing?

Both idealism and realism take the risk of dualism as they attempt to account for whatever they denigrate in order to gain advantages over their rival. Thus, idealism must coordinate non-cognitive and non-human values with the supreme mentality, but such lesser matters do not integrate easily. And realism must account for the mind’s knowledge and righteousness embedded within a cruel and amoral world, but such ideals won’t emerge from chaos easily.

As we have seen in our comparisons of the four primary types of absolutisms, they argue over how much dualism is necessary, or avoidable. Absolutisms that are more dualistic uphold the purity and perfection of their absolute away from finitude and evil. These discriminations are axiological criteria, because finitude and evil are less valuable, at least for creatures like us. Our finitude – doomed to mortal lives and ignorant perspectives – leaves us fragile and vulnerable, and that fate seems less valuable (to us) than immortality, knowledge, and goodness.

7. Axiology: Is Individuality Real?

Metaphysics ponders what may be rationally conceivable, which epistemology then checks for what can be reasonably knowable. It is another question entirely what should be worthily affirmable. Philosophers speak reverently about the utter beauty or sublimity of their absolute, or the shining purity or supremacy of their absolute. Metaphysics by itself makes no guarantees that its primary types of absolutes seem superior or attractively aspirational. Reality in itself, as far as neutral rationality is concerned, could be basely crude, cruelly uncaring, or repugnantly dissolute. However, what is valuable is no less meaningful than what is rational, and philosophy can ponder how the rational and the valuable may cohere or conflict.

For example, individuality is a perennial candidate for meritorious status, surely because we enjoy a natural, social, and personal world of individuals. Our attachment to another as an individual is most intense with love and forgiveness: only that single other is my love; only that one I hurt can forgive. Theologians are in the business of expecting an absolute to be uplifting, caring, or even redemptive, so theologians pick and choose among absolutes carefully. The four metaphysical absolutisms treat individuals very differently. Explaining the

status and worth of individual selves – are selves entirely unreal, relationally real, independently real, or dependently unreal – occupies much debate among the types of absolutisms.

The nature of the relationship between the individual and the absolute is a central issue for both religion and cosmology. How important are we really, and how good can we ever be?

Type 1: Individuality is delusional and not valuable, because ‘the self’ obstructs unity with the All.

Type 2: Individuality is fragile and valuable, for contributing to the beautiful plenitude of the All.

Type 3: Individuality is essential and valuable, for enacting the providential plan of creation by the All.

Type 4: Individuality is illusory and not valuable, because ‘the self’ obscures the true nature of the All.

Individuality is one thing, but the essential nature of oneself may be another. The four absolutisms assess the worth of the person differently.

Type 1: The essence of each one purely identifies with the absolute and experiences its ultimacy as soon as the delusion of individuality is dispelled.

Type 2: The essence of each one participates in the absolute to an extent proportional to its own capacities and enhances the absolute’s perfection.

Type 3: The essence of each one possesses an limited version of the absolute which rejoins the absolute after annulling one’s egoism.

Type 4: The essence of each one partially manifests the absolute but fails to realize that commonality while believing in illusions.

Each absolute’s understanding of individuality offers a different portrait of human agency and moral responsibility.

Type 1: Individuality is servile and immoral: freedom from the self brings one’s liberation and peace.

Type 2: Individuality is natural and special: free creativity promotes our bountiful opportunities.

Type 3: Individuality is unnatural and precious: righteous obedience preserves one’s moral innocence.

Type 4: Individuality is intemperate and wasteful: collective commonality reveals our ethical conscience.

In turn, all these views on individuality and personal immortality have philosophical consequences for understanding individual responsibility.

Type 1: Individual responsibility is unreal, since no self actually does anything and nothing is truly moral or immoral.

Type 2: Individual responsibility is temporary: worldly results matter now but nothing endures to get blamed.

Type 3: Individual responsibility is guaranteed: personal souls can be morally judged for their own deeds.

Type 4: Individual responsibility is illusory: behavior always brings its consequences but free will is a myth.

After Axiology (what has value) has discriminated how the four types of absolutes treat individuality, the other subfield of Orthology, Ethics, has much to say about the rightness and righteousness of these approaches to individuality.

Type 1: Asking a person to be ethical is a stage of *preparation* on the way to transcending one's concern for particular responsibilities, leaving only generic compassion for all beings everywhere.

Type 2: Assisting a person to be ethical is the process of *cultivation* in the ways of embodying one's commitment to healthy relationships, fostering more inclusive cooperation among all areas of society.

Type 3: Admonishing a person to be ethical is the opportunity of *reformation* into the way of submitting one's will to authoritative regulations, enforcing one exclusive conciliation throughout all creation.

Type 4: Advising a person to be ethical is the awakening of *resignation* to the way of performing one's role of assigned responsibilities, securing an inner consolation for each individual anywhere.

Philosophy does not fail to notice how a worldview may harbor a tension between its metaphysical and ethical principles. For example, Upanishad Hinduism's Type 3 theistic idealism was compatible with the early Brahmanic hierarchical system of four Varnas (classes). However, India's further drift into a universal caste system by the 2nd century BCE diminished individuality, called for the Type 4 Ethics, and required the matching Type 4 Absolute as presented by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. As another example, Medieval Christianity's pairing of Type 3 supernaturalism with the Type 3 ethics of monarchy had to collapse after the rediscovery of the Type 2 ethics of classical Stoic humanism. As modern civic democracy developed its Type 2 ethos of corporate individuality during the 19th and 20th centuries, Christianity was challenged by a paired resurgence of Type 2 absolutism in the forms of transpersonal spiritualism, paganism, and eastern Taoism/Zen.

As for theology, its philosophical sensibilities are no less urgently aware of such tensions, as theological Gods of one sort or another are placed under pressure to adapt to new social conditions or go extinct. One symptom of such strain is the question of attaining immortality.

8. Theology: Is Immortality or Divinity Real?

These various views on individuality by the four absolutisms in turn yield divergent judgments about the opportunities and merits of personal immortality.

Type 1: Immortality is impossible: no enduring self is ever real and the absolute is impersonal. Desiring immortality and desiring immorality pull one down the same pathway.

Type 2: Immortality is impossible: the self entirely dissolves at death as the absolute endlessly transforms. Pursuing immortality leads one astray from living the moral life.

Type 3: Immortality is possible: the essential self survives death for an eternal afterlife (or afterlives) that one merits. Anticipating immortality keeps one centered on living the moral life.

Type 4: Immortality is possible: personality perishes but the impersonal inner life-force gets perpetually recycled. Realizing the essential oneness of all life restrains one from immorality.

For the Type 1 and Type 2 Absolutisms, no one would really want or could ever get personal immortality. Longevity of life isn't a bad pursuit, but people chasing immortality are doomed to frustration and suffering, and the absolute is entirely impersonal and uncaring anyways. For Type 1 Absolutism, nothing about the individual self or its components have substantial reality, so nothing personal survives death but reincarnation of the life-force is possible. For Type 2 Absolutism, the individual self is quite real as a dynamic developing process but it can only persist for a finite lifetime. Both Type 1 and Type 2 Absolutisms agree that relief from immoral conduct and fruitless suffering only comes from releasing one's attachment to the personal ego and enjoying the resignation of getting reabsorbed into the impersonal absolute.

For the Type 3 and Type 4 Absolutisms, excessive attachment to the personal ego risks both immoral conduct and an undesirable sort of immortality. Type 3 Absolutism holds that an individual person possesses a substantial core enduring throughout one's life, and one's righteousness merits personal immortality to accompany (not get absorbed into) the personal absolute. Type 4 Absolutism holds that an individual person is actually just a temporary aggregate of energies without anything substantial for a core, and one's ideal fate is complete re-absorption back into the impersonal absolute. The idealistic Type 4 Absolutism expects that the selfish ignorance of individuals merits their cyclical re-birth until enlightenment allows a dissolution and absorption back into impersonal absolute consciousness. The materialistic Type 4 Absolutism also expects that enlightened knowledge allows individuals to abandon the notion of enduring personhood and hence to anticipate their dissolution back into impersonal absolute matter.

When metaphysics blends with axiology, and rational and value criteria are weighed together, philosophy takes up religion's project at a more intellectual level. All three – religion, theology, and philosophy – can investigate central questions. Is one of these Absolutes actually God? Can people become just like God?

The different absolutes offer divergent visions about how an individual may be able to experience the absolute for themselves.

Type 1: An individual can experience the absolute but it lies beyond all conception and description so no information is obtained. The few can *be* the absolute right now.

Type 2: An individual can experience the absolute by communing directly with nature to feel its deeper energies and rhythms. The many can *become* naturally perfect in their lifetimes.

Type 3: An individual can experience the absolute by communications arriving from it or by interpreting signs evident in creation. The many can *resemble* what the absolute ideally prefers.

Type 4: An individual can experience the absolute but that requires eliminating one's sense of agency and selfhood. The few can *transcend* to oneness with the absolute gradually.

Theologically, the different religions disagree over whether a living person can presently be divine. Some religions are not interested in humans becoming gods or being identical with God. Other religions teach that one unique person was God while having a human life. Those religions may also respect chosen prophets to convey revelations from God. Still other religions expect a few holy people to be manifestations of divinity walking among us each generation.

Theology is not just philosophy or metaphysics, but it applies them to make a religion intellectually robust as a worldview. Thus, there is Christian theology, Islamic theology, Buddhist theology, and so on. Since religion already has an axiological dimension (how to accord with providence, how to lead righteous lives, how to serve the sacred, how to gain immortality, etc.) the work of theology develops an Absolute Deity from types 1, 2, 3, or 4 that best guides a religion's path for appreciating that Deity. Theology undertakes explanations about the divine's involvement with such matters as access to divine knowledge (revelation), an earthly appearance in human form (incarnation), a human being's elevation to godly status (deification), an emotional connection (adoration), and a rescue from finitude and evil (salvation). Hence, there are four basic sorts of "God" and four primary types of Theology about that supreme deity and creation. Additional axiological perfections can be required by theology for its supreme deity, such as "pure consciousness" (Brahman in Hinduism), "righteousness" (God in Christianity and Islam), "total love" (in devotional cults and spiritualisms), and so on.

Pursuing metaphysics alone, applying only reason and omitting values, discerns the four Absolutes and their respective rational advantages. However, this or that Absolute can strike people as warmly *playful*, *bountiful*, and *beautiful*, or perhaps instead as coldly *indifferent*, *inhuman*, and *unethical*. If reality should bear value, as orthology expects, what values does reality itself have?

Assigning priority to selected orthological standards molds metaphysical absolutes into more human and humane shapes. Cultural spheres of life suggest designs to an absolute's nature. Perhaps the absolute is operating akin to the way humanity undertakes our art, music, dance, literature, education, technology, or politics. The Absolute's ways may be like the playful composition of a grand musical dance or a theatrical narrative, or the artful cultivation of ever-richer forms, or the workings of a cosmic machine, or even the arena

of sporting or warring competitions. Whatever is most real must be most responsible for whatever makes it worthwhile to be real. We can ask of the Absolute what we ask ourselves: What is it doing here?

The four metaphysical requirements for an absolute – eternality, permanency, finality, and ultimacy – can be transposed into orthological requirements blending in valuations. For example, what is timeless outranks anything transitory; what has permanence grounds whatever deserves to stand; what has finality holds all the final answers; and what has ultimacy offers support when all else fails. Although an absolute seems secretive, we obligate a genuine absolute to somehow be evocative, regulative, instructive, and supportive. Interpretation more than speculation might serve as a surer mode to reach an understanding (and mutual understanding?) with the reality of an absolute. Consequentially, an absolute should be meaningful, if anything else could have any meaning too. Emotionally, humanity feels a need to believe that we are meant to be here. Taken religiously, a High God is expected to be preeminent, procreative, proactive, and protective. Where reverence intersects with governance, the supreme may suggest idealized types of leadership as exemplary, nurturing, illuminating, or commanding. As it goes above, so below. Accordingly, success in life depends on conducting oneself either ritualistically, creatively, insightfully, or dutifully. Irresponsible failure at one's life comes from a lack of self-control, due to some kind of self-deficiency: either self-initiative, self-inertia, self-ignorance, or self-importance.

We will not proceed further into Theology and religious ethics here. For Philosophy, it remains important to understand how axiology can play a major role with finding the best worldview of reality. Different people would judge and rank the absolutes differently depending on their own ideals of excellence, virtue, purity, beauty, mystery, supremacy, and perfection. To understand reality best we may have to first understand humanity, our value priorities, and our ethical principles.

9. A Human Worldview for Reality

The squirrels, the birds, they are not asking, "What is reality?" And they do not ask for worldviews about reality. They already view the world, while they go about their lives. "Their world is not enough," we humans think. We think about the human world, and congratulate ourselves for having a world different from the animals. Every creature survives each new day for as long as it can with as much zest and intensity as it can, fully immersed in its experiential expanse whether the length of a twig, the breadth of a marsh, or the stretch of a sky. The world for them is enough. For us, being simply where we have our own being does not seem to be enough. And, being fair to ourselves, we intuitively know that trying to be more, always more, is our human fate and our inherited right.

Long ago, inventiveness and imagination, able to reach for the not-yet-done and anticipate the not-yet-seen, were gradually combined. The ancestral Homo mind expanded into the wider space of "try-to-make-seeable" where creative ideation is pursued for its own sake and its own novel results. By the epoch of Homo Sapiens, we were inhabiting lands existing for us just as we viewed them, rather than merely walking on the same earth with the animals. "What should be, what could be?" came to dominate our thoughts over "What is this, what is that." The animals live within reality, while humans reside with real optionality.

We are able to think, “Even our world around us is not enough, there should be more.” And so we make more out of ourselves. We are the tooling animals, the playing animals, the exploring animals, the gossiping animals, the grieving animals. These capacities are admirable, but they come with a cost. Any increase in being demands compensations and polarities according to the immutable rule of restless nature itself. To use a tool is to become a tool-deployer. To act out is to adopt a role. To settle down is to raise up a wall. To speak some truth is to partly deceive. To love past death is to love the deathless. Humanity arose where tool-deploying clears a working space for routinized labors; where play-acting inflates an airy sphere for enacting serious scripts; where territory-seeking sets boundaries of insecure securities; where truth-telling spins heads faster around lies; where love-bonding sustains beloved spirits beyond material bodies. Only humans engage in laboring, acting, defending, lying, and worshipping.

These pairings of human capacities – tool/labor, play/role, explore/settle, truth/deception, love/spirit – empower many of our amazing cultural capabilities. Further core aspects of human culture, such as art, education, morality, music, and sport, could be similarly assessed. Homo Erectus acquired most of these capacities in their proto-forms, and Homo Sapiens fulfilled all of them. When members of a human society are empowered by these dual-faced capacities, a society is able to regularize and standardize how they are conducted for meeting the urgent needs of communal living.

Society imposes its characteristic demands. How one must act now dominates over how one may want to play next; don’t transgress beyond your regular roles, your society warns. Where one happens to live now restrains where one might wish to go next; don’t trespass beyond your homeland territory, your nation warns. What one should believe now takes precedence over what one could learn for oneself next; don’t deviate away from your familiar views, your community warns. How one treats the spirits now affects one’s own spiritual fate; don’t abandon venerating the ancestors or deities, your conscience warns.

Society rapidly discovers valuable uses for reliable labors, roles, boundaries, deceptions, and spirits. Human societies eventually became reliant on conformed workers, role-players, walls, ideologies, and myths. These are all-too-human realities. They appear far more real than anything else on earth, to the ordinary eye. And society wants every child to become an adult agreeing on this shared reality.

Human socializing, our supreme specialty as an animal species, evolved to the stage where it is more important to duplicate and re-duplicate these conventional forms than to develop an original and authentic individual. Indeed, any degree of independence constitutes, for conformist society, regrettable indolence, selfishness, migrancy, deviancy, and heresy. Immoral perversity soon follows. From society’s standpoint, the reality of the larger situation demands cast roles and caste conformity, not individuality. When society is busy instructing everyone how to best be an individual like everyone else, there is no genuine individuality offered. Fleeing from rigid society feels like the only recourse, but that is an opposite extreme to save as a last resort. There are moderate middle ways, that we can discern with a philosophical and ethical lens.

We begin where any inquiry must, with where we actually are as humans, anthropologically. To know one’s working role, one’s rightful place, one’s view point, one’s inner spirit – these are key realities of common humanity. Our lives employ a narrative binding its components together. Humans are the only animals who make up stories and then believe them. Our stories about who we are represent more enlarged reality than

anything else sitting around. Reality is foremost whatever we must have to keep our narratives going – but what extends our narratives is what stretches us towards potentials and possibilities. We live across a reach of time projecting ourselves and our values into the future; to be human is always to be *more*. Who we are now has to fundamentally be about we will be. (That is how we grasp that we have wills, and not just habits.) That excess of potential reality keeps humanity busy. Only humans must think about how to be human, and be a better human.

Nature waits ever patiently while people ponder and choose their realities. “What should be real?” is a question occurring to someone discerning how arbitrary the social script distributes prestigious and powerless roles; or someone detecting how each culture's absolute verities are just conventionalities and conveniences. “Is my reality nothing more than my working/adopted roles and my ethnic/cultural identity?” Indeed, you may be more, if you have the courage and insight to *realize* (to *make-real* for oneself) the world of truth (the non-illusory) or the world of spirit (the non-material). However, eluding roles and evading identities cannot offer an escape from humanity entirely, since veritable and spiritual worlds are still human realms too.

Well, where might one want to go with one's human existence? “Let's go back to the source, to the origin!” That is one driving motivation of humanity, yes. “Let's spread out farther, onwards into the universe!” Yes, that is another human drive too. Away from the dull routines of ordinary living, those drives propel two primal myths promise a journey of boundless expansion for human existence.

Pondering existential options – for choosing what reality should be like – represent our undertaking to philosophically combine cosmology (what is real) with orthology (what is right). We have observed that combination in a previous section, where rational metaphysics (a way of doing cosmology) cooperates with axiology (a concern for values) to seek the best Absolute. Here, both parts of orthology are applied: axiology and ethics. Our reality should reflect what we hold to be truly worthy and morally righteous. What kind of reality should we wisely accept?

10. Four Basic Orthologies

To examine these four opportunities – of character, identity, truth, and spirit – is to become philosophical by taking the first step of perceiving how they together form reality, and each provide reality differently from the others. The next step is observing how they compete for loyalty. Each orthology (a structure of right values) attempts to assimilate the priorities of the others.

I. Communalism: your duties accord with your social position, determined by traditional custom that embodies all truths needed for your spiritual fulfilment. What is real is just what is required for your kinship relationships and your group to prosper: these are the respectable objects for devotion. One's communal myth supplied a sense of a *spiritual absolute*, a Type 2 absolute that interrelates and integrates everything within the living cosmos. When most Homo Sapiens lived in groups no larger than bands or clans (i.e. from around 200,000 years ago down to 20,000 years ago), this communalism was humanity's worldview.

II. Culturalism: your opportunities converge on your inherited identity, preserved by collective heritage that approves any truths conducive to the collective spirit. What is real is only what is essential for your authentic

identity to flourish: these are the appropriate stances for fidelity. One's cultural religion supplied a *theistic absolute*, a Type 3 absolute that organizes cosmic powers according to their responsibilities for sustaining the cosmos. By the time that most of Homo Sapiens lived in tribes (around 50,000 to 10,000 years ago), this culturalism was humanity's dominant worldview, with communalism becoming rarer. It persists to this day in indigenous non-stratified societies.

III. Conceptualism: your ideas cohere through your reflective intellect, revealing valid truths that decide all principles structuring your social virtues and cultural ideals. What is real is only what is consistent with your well-regimented mind to know: these are the demonstrated facts for credulity. The origins of geometry, mathematics, and logic in several civilizations suggested purely conceptual schemas. After philosophical reflection arose in literate nations, intellectuals then invented metaphysical speculations that discerned absolutes and those theories diversified into idealisms, phenomenisms, and realism.

IV. Mentalism: your experiences center around your aware self, surrounded by fast-changing phenomena of actor, culture, and world entertained by the unchanging consciousness beholding them all. What is real is just what is attending to the impermanent: the permanent self (transcendental ego, soul, atman) beyond causality, materiality, space, and time. Humanity from the Stone Age had the capacity for trancing and mystical episodes. After meditational practices emerged around the world, masters charted psychological and para-consciousness stages that diversified into mysticisms, spiritualisms, and transcendentalisms.

Communalism was a complete worldview, the only worldview, during humanity's distant Stone Age past, but it vanished as a worldview from the planet long ago. Humans are still communal, but our enlarged societies – where most are strangers to each other – have to rely on more complex worldviews. Culturalism does survive in remote corners of the planet. The other two axiologies are not complete worldviews by themselves; they are philosophical classifications for components of actual worldviews adopted by humanity since the Stone Age. As societies grew more complex during the rise of farming and settled life, accounts of the world incorporated conceptualism and mentalism to keep pace.

11. Eight Primary Worldviews

These four main orthologies can be combined and get paired with one of the types of absolutes to form complete worldviews. Six additional worldviews that emerged since the Stone Age have proliferated across world cultures and civilizations.

(I) Communalism and (II) Culturalism = Ethnic Solidarity. These views blend together with minor adjustments fairly easily, solidifying larger societies and their maintenance of specialization, segmentation, and stratification. This culturally tribalistic worldview prefers conformity and homogeneity over plurality and diversity, so Ethnic Solidarity demands uniformity. When an ethnic group is heard demanding respect for pluralism, what they actually desire is autonomy from a larger external nation to continue maintaining its own internal conformity. These groups want the freedom of group pluralism more than individual liberty and diversity. Cultural identity is of course eroded away by any internal freedom to depart from customary ways. And, no sooner does a group achieve recognition from society in a spirit of pluralism, does that group promptly congeal around just the "right" way to embody and express that group identity. This paradox is all the more

necessitated within a democracy, where tribalistic politics gets results and personal eccentricity raises suspicions. However, within such tribalistic solidarity, members only hear the same dogmas without worry of being contradicted or proven wrong. Type 4 Absolutism matches well with Ethnic Solidarity. Every individual per se is a manifestation of reality while cultures sets conventions for one's role identities (e.g. customary caste in religious Hinduism, wealth class in materialistic Capitalism).

(I) Communalism + (III) Conceptualism = the Principled Organization. In a principled organization, what is most real is only what has credibility according to the group's particular methodology of thinking. For example, when a scientific field determines that "DNA" exists inside living cells, or a religious sect determines that "devils" exist within possessed persons, members of that organization accept that reality together, and reinforce that belief collectively. In order for a person to truly understand what a "DNA" is or what a "devil" is, one must submit to the rigorous disciplines practiced by the acknowledged masters and experts. If one has never been a member of this or that organization, belief in its entities is merely optional. We may say that others have put their faith in DNA, or in devils, without grasping the reasons those believers have for their commitments. (That's why we outsiders only label them as 'believers' rather than 'knowers'.) However, all the good reasons for credulity exist only within that principled community: the field says, "We know that we use the right experiments because we truly found DNA," or the sect says, "We know that we have the right rituals because we truly found the devils" and so on. To announce, "I don't believe in your science," or "I don't believe in your sect," is simply to state the obvious, that you are not yet a member and so your mind is undisciplined and unable to know. If you participate whole-hearted and whole-mindedly, you would be trained for interacting with DNA or with a devil. The rewards are immense, since unlimited knowledge beckons, for individuals now and especially humanity in the long run. The Principled Organization in turn fosters the establishment of rigorous arts, academic disciplines, expertise professions, scientific fields, and universities. Type 2 Absolutism is the obvious fit with Principled Organization. Organizations explore the immense plenitudes of reality from multiple perspectives through different practices and methodologies, from the most physical to the most spiritual, without competition or contradiction.

(I) Communalism and (IV) Mentalism = the Devotional Cult. Examples include adepts imitating a heroic warrior, a group of guru followers, or a deity's temple for worshippers. One realizes their true identity (past, present, and future) through a submissive engagement with a person (directly) or personage (indirectly through an idol). One's supreme being lies in this all-absorbing relationship approaching unification, towards achieving the exalted state enjoyed by the focal paragon. Only earthly rewards may come, as with the bushido code of the samurai or the strict regimen of the athlete (and new cults for Trekkie and Jedi enthusiasts are further illustrations). Or, other-worldly rewards may come, if this devotional path leads to salvation from evils of this world and the next. Levels of attainment bring their proportionate rewards. The highest attainment (by only a few) is to be a re-exemplification of the paragon, becoming the next "reincarnation" or "avatar" of the original. Subsequent individuals proving such attainment are likewise essentially duplicates of each previous avatar back to some (now legendary or mythical) original. In its religious forms, the cult affirms the divine identity of the focal paragon, whether currently on earth (a sadhguru 'godman' for example) or no longer on earth (Jesus, Krishna, and so on). Type 1 Absolutism is well-designed to support a Devotional Cult, although a Type 3 Absolutism can also serve if incarnations are rare or unique (e.g. Jesus).

Culturalism (II) and Conceptualism (III) = Cosmic Ideology. More than philosophy or theology is needed to forge cooperation here. Social and political forces are required to establish one principled cosmology for reality as the exclusive worldview for an entire culture and nation. The pluralistic toleration seen with principled organizations is not wanted. Where a culture elevates one particular institution – such as a recognized Church, a field of Science, or a faith in Technology – to supremacy intellectually, then its knowledge dictates reality. Socially, major institutions reinforce indoctrination into that dominant ideology while other worldviews are scorned as alien or suppressed as dangerous. In return, those institutions justify their powers and privileges by pointing to their fitting roles in accord with the cosmic ideology. For example, the formal education repeats the divine revelations; the government structure mirrors the celestial hierarchy; the economic system is analogous to nature's ways; the historical dialectic culminates in proletariat revolution; the industrial complex is designed for human progress; and so on. One message resounds throughout: only within the cosmic ideology can an individual have a meaningful existence and any salvific hope. Taken all the way to planetary scale, an ideology asserts itself as a one-world cosmopolitanism designed to override and replace local, customary, and nationalistic ideologies. Type 4 Absolutism makes the best fit with Cosmic Ideology. What coheres with the core knowledge of the ideology (the *realism*) can be conveniently explained as manifestations of the reality already understood by the tradition (*reductionism*), while anything inconsistent with the ideology gets dismissed as error or illusion (*eliminativism*).

Conceptualism (III) and Mentalism (IV) = Supreme Mentality. These two views can be merged through major compromises crafted by philosophy and theology. Most regions of the world find them standing apart in a distrustful co-existence. Intellectualism and spiritualism regard each other with diffidence or outright disdain, each taking themselves as the contrary of the other. Rationalism and mysticism are practically defined as farthest opposites and adversaries. Only where conceptualism can impose its schemas on transcendentalism can they alloy together, such as Platonism and Kantianism, or philosophies in Christianity and Buddhism such as Aquinas and Vasubandhu. Mystical idealism similarly conceives the absolute as a supremely knowing intellect, such as Christianity's Meister Eckhart in the West and Hinduism's Śaṅkara in the East. Interest in the paranormal and the psychical, taken to a philosophical level, is another illustration of Supreme Mentality, such as Jungian or transpersonal psychology. The individual reward arrives when one's intellect ascends towards the supreme Intellect of the absolute. Type 3 Absolutism pairs best with Supreme Mentality. For the planet, the eventual correction of distorted and biased thinking would transform humanity into one harmonized understanding with ultimate Mind.

Culturalism (II) and Mentalism (IV) = Enlightened Utopianism. Cultivating like-minded members is the task of a wisdom tradition offering its profound insights for the inner transformation of both the spirit and society. The hoped-for size of this enlightened group may vary, from a small commune to a broad movement on towards a trans-national reach. To transcend barriers of prejudice and partisanship, one's highest commitments are to the radical path of wisdom, anyone else on that path too, and all who should benefit from joining in (practically anybody). Grand ideologies and legalities about regulating society tighter and tighter to compel good behavior are counter-productive, perpetuating conflict instead of peace. There will be no lasting peace until there is inner tranquility, coming from the higher plane of illumination into one's true nature and the same potential light within everyone. Unlike missionary religions preaching their scriptures, esoteric cults following divine incarnations, or ideologies mandating mass conformity, Enlightened Utopianism freely offers guidance without demanding conversion or allegiance, or presuming one cultural heritage. This way of wisdom

is difficult, for nothing “transcendent” offers a rescue and we are entirely responsible for our redemption together. The planetary goal is the eventual elevation of humanity’s consciousness to its destined higher form. Exemplars from the past that took universalistic forms are philosophical versions of Stoicism, Taoism, Mahayana/Chan Buddhism, and Vedanta Hinduism. Modern examples include Liberal Humanism, Romantic Anarchism, Theosophy/New Thought, and Transhumanism. Type 1 Absolutism or Type 4 Absolutism is typically selected to energize Enlightened Utopianism. The Absolute’s purity of consciousness and righteousness shines the light drawing us towards perfection.

We have discriminated eight major worldviews and their associated absolutes. Each one is capable of supplying all the optimal reality that a human would need for life.

- Communalism (now extinct)
- Culturalism (rare indigenous groups)
- Ethnic Solidarity (tribalism found in larger society)
- Supreme Mentality
- Principled Organization
- Devotional Cult
- Cosmic Ideology
- Enlightened Utopianism

Further mergings or blendings don’t work philosophically or pragmatically. They differ deeply about orthology – what is most valuable – so they disagree over priorities and they find each other unethical as well. Since their orthologies incline them towards one or another absolute, metaphysics alone cannot determine which worldview is “truer”. A worldview gets constructed for both rationality and optimality.

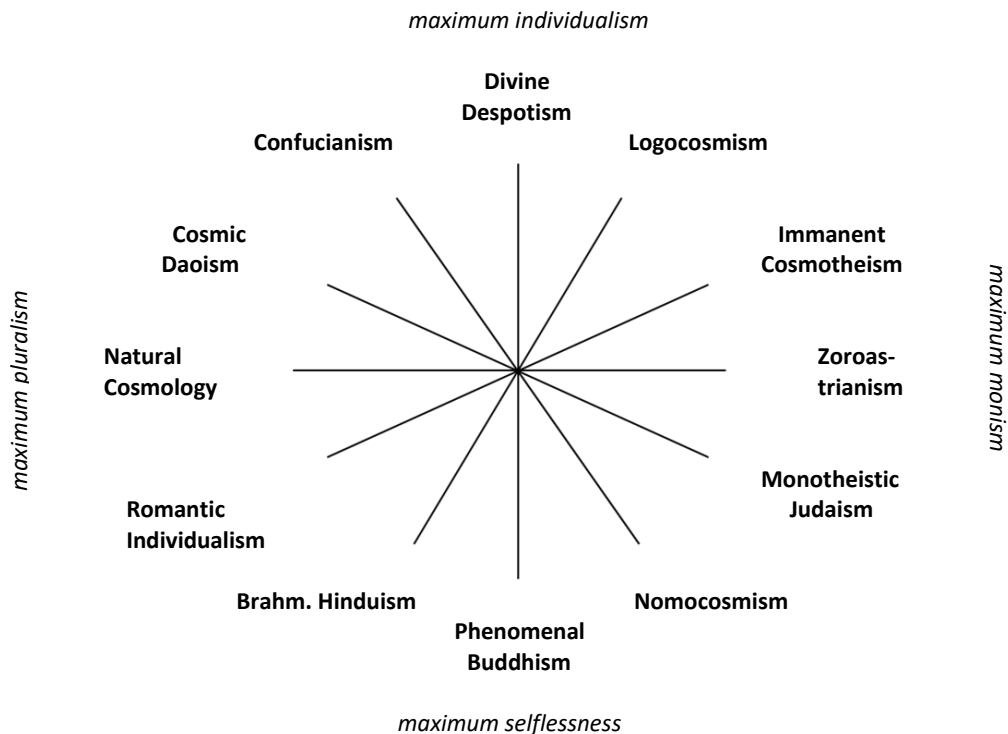
This list of eight primary worldviews appears incomplete to someone unfamiliar with philosophy. Philosophy and its subfields of metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, and ethics cover the core of any worldview. Where are big religions like Christianity and Hinduism? What about theology? Where is science? Indeed they have been included. Nothing about culture, God, science, or politics has been left out. Indigenous and traditional societies have their ethnic solidarities and devotional cults. Labels that come to mind like “science” or “religion” are parts of a worldview, not a complete worldview. Some worldviews listed above are determined to make religion or science central. Familiar religions such as “Christianity,” “Islam,” or “Confucianism” are vast systems of thought which have taken one or another worldview form over history. Since its founding, Christianity has been pursued as a devotional cult (messianic Christianity), a cosmic ideology (political Christianity), a supreme mentality (theological Christianity), and an enlightened utopianism (Christian communalism). Other religions have similarly taken various worldview formats, with each worldview choosing its preferred type of absolute to play the role of “god”.

12. Do We Want True Reality, or a True Home?

Within any sufficiently large society since the Stone Age, multiple worldviews in addition to just Ethnic Solidarity have coexisted and interacted for centuries or even millennia. Much cross-cultural borrowing and adaptation has happened because humans are curious and co-creative, and mutual toleration or cooperation between worldviews can enliven or even stabilize a culture. People “compartmentalize” and societies “departmentalize” so that one aspect or phase of life relies on one worldview while another worldview satisfies a different part of life. Religious worldviews handle religious matters; scientific organizations handle techno-scientific matters; political ideologies handle civic matters; and so on. Maintaining proper adjustments and harmonizations is ultimately the responsibility of philosophy and its areas of cosmology and orthology, so that mutual comprehension takes precedent over hostile confrontation. This essay is an illustration in miniature.

Unavoidable antagonisms have also occurred since the Bronze Age. The Axial Age from 1100–400 BCE witnessed twelve unique cosmologies arriving to displace the older Bronze Age mythologies.

THE AXIAL WHEEL



Axial world-systems, some more philosophical and some more religious, have contended for supremacy ever since.

Besides the collisions of religions, civilizational conflicts have sometimes involved a Cosmic Ideology colliding with an Enlightened Utopia, such as Confucian China encountering Buddhism; Medieval Catholicism digesting Greek Humanism; Communism confronting Western Liberalism; and Techno-Materialism critiqued by New Age

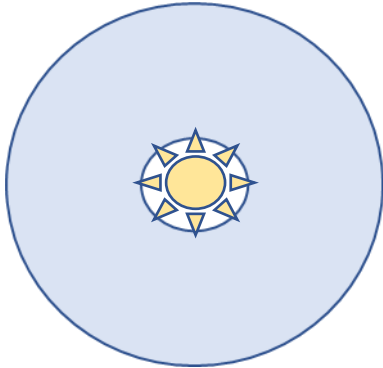
Spirituality. Cultures have to consider carefully which worldviews are compatible. Neither Supreme Mentality, Principled Organization, nor Cosmic Ideology can tolerate much Ethnic Solidarity (too tribalistic) or Devotional Cult (too insular). Enlightened Utopianism even in democratic form represses Ethnic Solidarity and Devotional Cult. For its part, Supreme Mentality presumes metaphysical knowledge superior to that of any Principled Organization (so pragmatic knowledge gets over-regulated by transcendent knowledge) and then assumes responsibility for crafting the “best” Cosmic Ideology (so politics gets regulated by pure reason in authoritative manner). Cosmic Ideology and Enlightened Utopianism will only foster the sorts of Principled Organization promoting its own ideological or utopian plans for humanity’s progress.

Ultimately, we humans must live philosophically within a habitable worldview. We would not know how to live monotonously, rootlessly, literally, materially; at least we could not live humanly and humanely. Even the ascetics, the mystics, the yogis, the hermits, and all those renouncers of social forms and duties, typically enjoy sojourning between pilgrimage sites, conversing with adepts or students, and indulging in poetry or artistry. Those living closest to the animals or angels can’t resist telling the rest of us all about it. Our communing nature as human never lets us down, even if the rest of the human world is endless disappointment. We will make reality feel like a home for humanity, through one worldview or another, just as much as reality makes a home for us.

The Perennial Mind-Matter Matrix

Where conceptualism is presumed, trusting the conceptual more than anything nonconceptual, four worldview systems compete for primacy, each one claiming superiority over neighboring systems. However, while advance that superiority convincingly, a system shows enough metaphysical flexibility to morph into a neighboring system.

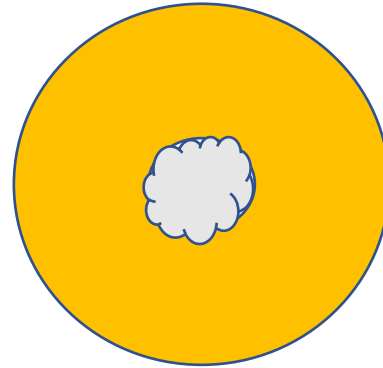
A. The Absolute has no meaning or value
Physicalism (Type 4) / Nihilism (Type 1)



In this system the realm of sentient meaning seems vitally warm in contrast to the coldly indifferent cosmos. Sentience is driven to expand its symbolic and technic control to sustain a sense of purpose. The alternative is stoic detachment and resignation.

In order to grant sentience some small place in reality, metaphysics can grant its manifestation from the real substantiality of the cosmos. Consciousness and mind remain epiphenomenal and unable to cause anything.

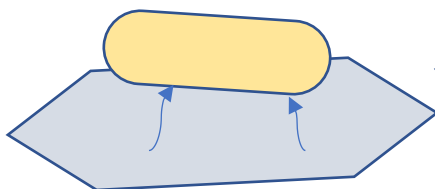
D. The Absolute consists of meaningful values
Idealism (Type 4) / Organicism (Type 2)



In this system the cosmos consists entirely of dynamic vitality that sustains mentality and its telic values. Intelligence constructs theories of de-vitalized energy/matter for its convenience. The alternative is a return to puzzling dualisms.

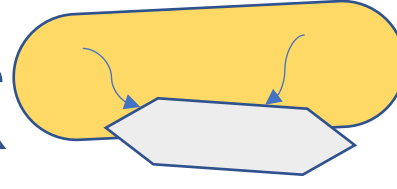
In order to permit the external world to have some independence, metaphysics can admit its projection from the real ideality of the cosmos. Mere matter cannot cause anything mental.

B. The neutral Absolute makes everything occur substantially while manifesting as vital mentality.



Type 4 (Dual-Aspect)

C. The ideal Absolute cognizes everything mentally while managing its formation of dynamic materiality.



Type 3 (Dualism)

In the West, Marcionism and Gnosticism rejected an alienating cosmos and sought redemption in dualism. Similarly, against Scientism, the cold cosmos needed technology's takeover or spiritualism's idealization.
The Western Modernity Matrix

By 1800 an idealistic and romantic rebellion was arising against rationalistic materialism and deism. The conceptual dualism inherited from Plato (in Aquinas, Descartes, Locke) is inherently unstable: either mind or matter must account for the other to take epistemic and ontological priority. By 1900 modernist cosmology was in place, but it was an awkward arrangement of all four ontologies with incongruent orthological implications, from nihilism to tribalism and utopianism. They only made cumulative sense – interdependence for relief from nihilism, evolution to explain our progress – under a regime of utilitarianism (the right is the practical). To rival each of those unwelcome views, four philosophies received academic and popular attention during the 20th century – idealism, speciesism, spiritualism, and conservatism – but their coherence was far from guaranteed. For example, social psychology’s idealism (your reality is just what your mentality structures) reinforced anthropology’s tribalism (knowledge exists only within groups) and religious conservatism in a rebuke to globalist imperialism. However, this postmodernist populism encourages partisan nationalism and discourages the inter-group toleration needed for pluralistic democracy and cosmopolitanism. For another example, that “quantum holism” elevating spirit to cosmic proportions cannot be harmonized with a humble environmentalist agenda or a retreat back to scriptural commandments.

	Axiology: Human existence is ...	And that view of human existence ...	The alternative view is ...	The rival philosophy needed is ...
Cosmology = Type 1 Cyclical (time is unreal)	meaningless (principled organiza- tion for scientism)	is nihilistic, leaving us with depressing absurdity. (but life needs life)	We are existentially quite meaningful.	Type 4 Idealism. Reality is either mental or dependent on mind.
Natural History = Type 4 Emergent (time is relational)	interdependent (cosmic ideology of environmentalism)	is naturalistic, reducing us to strands within ecology webs. (adaptation contest)	We are naturally far more important than any other kind of life.	Speciesism. The quality of human life exceeds the rest.
Biology = Type 2 Agonistic (time is spasmodic)	antagonistic (ethnic solidarity seems prudent)	is unethical, as if our virtues evolved for evolutionary victory. (victory is progress)	We are essentially happier through tranquility and caring.	Spiritualism. The practices of mindful- ness purify the soul.
Society = Type 3 Developmental (time is linear)	progressive (enlightened utopias are just ahead)	is optimistic, but the brave new world is too utilitarian. (back to deontology)	We are inherently made for respecting time-honored ways.	Conservatism. The preservation of traditional values.

The Western Modernity matrix totals up to twelve cosmologies/axiologies. Let's first list the six worldviews that have dominated Western thought. These six worldviews offer six possible combinations of reason and faith, and offer three naturalisms and three supernaturalisms. The first two worldviews take the extreme options of either exclusive faith, or exclusive reason. The next two worldviews rely on faith, either a faith that dominates reason or a faith that relies on reason. The last two worldviews rely on reason, either a reason that relies on faith or a reason that dominates faith.

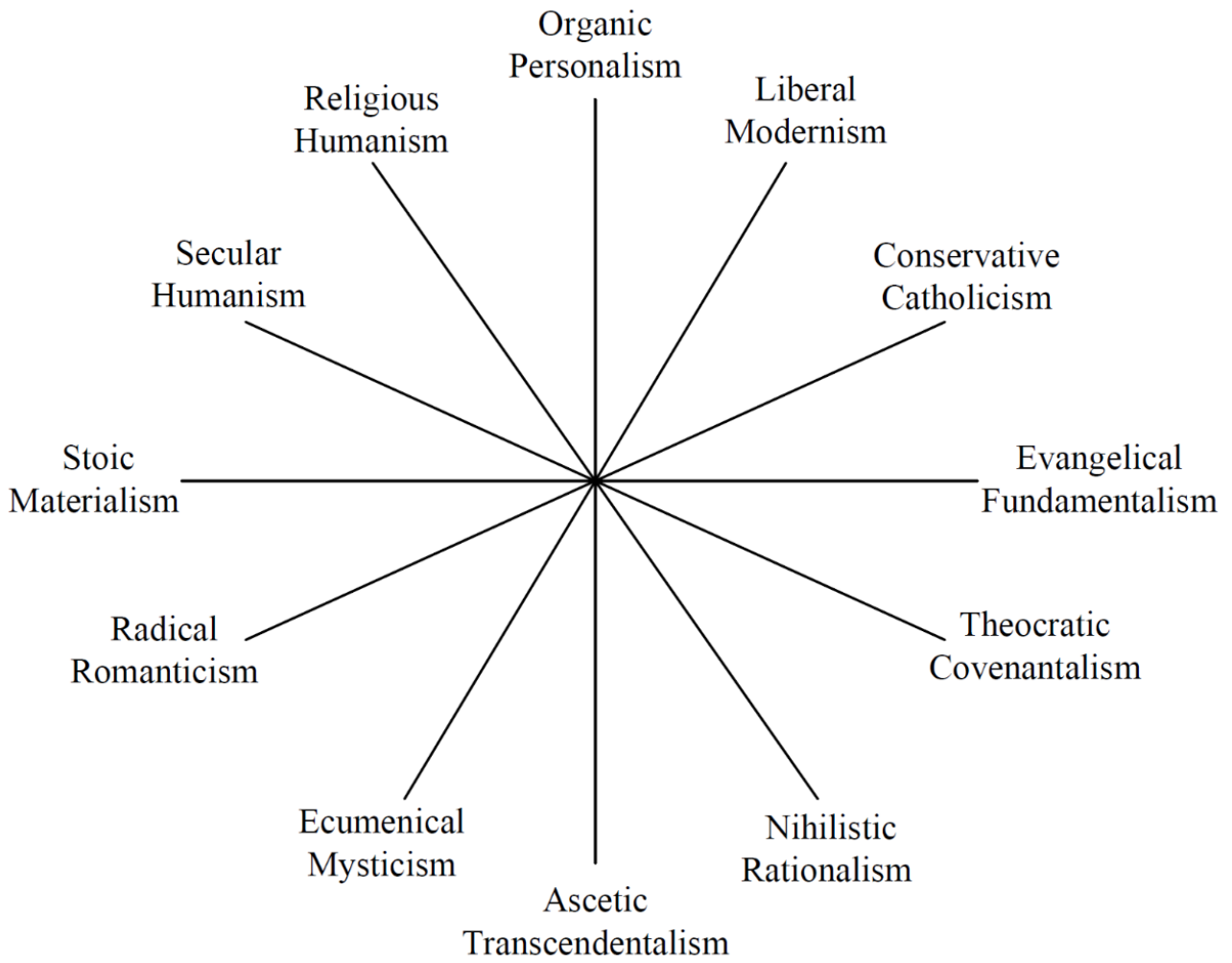
Ecumenical Mysticism	Faith for encountering god without any reason involved
Nihilistic Rationalism	Reason for knowing reality without any faith involved
Evangelical Fundamentalism	Faith about god and ethics by true revelation unchallengeable by reason
Liberal Modernism	Faith in god's transformations through symbolism adaptable with reason
Religious Humanism	Reason about nature and ethics with assistance from transformative faith
Stoic Materialism	Reason for understanding nature and ethics unchallengeable by faith

These six worldviews do not exhaust the religious and nonreligious options. Six additional worldviews fit in between the primary worldviews:

- ascetic transcendentalism between Ecumenical Mysticism and Nihilistic Rationalism;
- theocratic covenantalism between Nihilistic Rationalism and Evangelical Fundamentalism;
- conservative catholicism between Evangelical Fundamentalism and Liberal Modernism;
- organic personalism between Liberal Modernism and Religious Humanism;
- secular humanism between Religious Humanism and Stoic Materialism;
- radical romanticism between Stoic Materialism and Ecumenical Mysticism.

These twelve worldviews are distributed across the range of combinations of faith and reason. They offer stably coherent foundations capable of justifying a comprehensive understanding of reality, humanity, and morality.

Some of these worldviews have far more adherents than others in the West at present; this categorization is not about popularity, but intellectual integrity.



13. Varieties of Modern Naturalism

The 20th Century of philosophy witnessed strenuous competition among several varieties of naturalism. Careful comparison and evaluation of these naturalisms depends on a thoughtful classification of possible naturalisms. A categorization of seven major varieties of naturalism is crafted by considering how a naturalism deals with epistemic and ontological prioritizations among the sciences and the potential prioritization of science over other modes of experience. This categorization exposes where naturalisms can agree and where they must conflict. Each of the major varieties of naturalism had important proponents, from Dewey, Whitehead, and Santayana to Quine, Sellars, Davidson, and Putnam. The contest of these naturalisms is now inherited by 21st century naturalism.

Naturalism dominated 20th century philosophy.¹ Naturalism is a philosophical worldview that relies upon experience, reason, and especially science for developing an understanding of reality. Naturalism demands that these three modes of understanding together shall control our notion of reality. Varieties of naturalism emerge because the many essential factors of experience, reason, and science can be coherently related in numerous ways. All naturalisms demand that experience, reason and science be taken most seriously, so that no fourth mode of understanding can be permitted to override them. This triadic unity moderates the excesses of phenomenalism and idealism, and filters out spiritualism and supernaturalism for their introduction of radical and mysterious discontinuities into knowledge and reality.

Scientific method and knowledge plays a crucial role in all naturalisms. Varieties of naturalism may be distinguished along three dimensions: the degree of ontological confidence given to science; the breadth of explanatory discretion given to science; and the number of scientific fields permitted to describe reality. From the logically possible combinations resulting from these dimensions, seven viable varieties of naturalism are distinguished and contrasted. Each of these varieties of naturalism has had champions in the course of 20th century philosophy, such as Dewey, Whitehead, Santayana, and Quine to Sellars, Davidson, Churchland, Putnam, and Searle.

The conclusion discusses the three major competitors during the 20th century for the title of the “genuine” naturalism: Reductive Physicalism, Non-reductive Physicalism, and Perspectival Pluralism. The struggles between these great naturalisms, and the other viable varieties of naturalism, has been bequeathed to the 21st century, and their outcomes may decide the ultimate fate of naturalism itself.

I. Stage One: Science, Knowledge, and Reality.

There are six primary options when considering whether science yields knowledge about reality:

- (1) Reality cannot be known at all – radical skepticism.
- (2) Reality only consists of what science cannot know about – only other non-sciences know reality.
- (3) Science rarely gives reliable knowledge about reality – other non-sciences know reality far better.
- (4) Science is able to give increasingly reliable knowledge about reality.
- (5) Science is the only source of knowledge about reality.
- (6) Reality only consists of what science knows about.

Each of these six options present pathways to many different worldviews. Because naturalism at minimum presupposes that the knowledge about reality provided by science can seriously rival any other alleged source of knowledge, options 1, 2, and 3 are rejected by naturalists. Options 4, 5, and 6 can lead to varieties of naturalism.

- (4) Science is able to give increasingly reliable knowledge about reality. There may be other ways besides science for knowing reality, but those ways are not better than science. Science needs assistance from other

ways of knowledge to fully understand reality. This option searches for a comprehensive worldview formed by blending together ways of knowledge. Two interesting varieties:

4A. Ontological Dualism: there are two (or more) kinds of reality, knowable through two or more ways. For example, perhaps introspection is a non-scientific way of knowing reality, because we are consciously aware of mental realities that science can never explain — leading to Mind-Body Dualism.

4B. Synoptic Monism: there is only one kind of ultimate reality, but it is knowable through two or more ways. We consciously know of realities (perhaps mental in nature) that science cannot fully explain. Varieties include Dual Aspect Monism, and also Panpsychism which holds that the natural world explored by science is ultimately composed of entities that have a mental/spiritual aspect. Unlike option 4A, synoptic monism can be used to develop kinds of naturalisms.

(5) Science is the only source of knowledge about reality. The only type of knowledge is scientific knowledge. However, some of reality consists of entities that cannot be known by science, simply because science is not designed to provide knowledge about these entities. Two interesting varieties:

5A. Perspectival Realism: we are acquainted with the entities unknowable through science, because we experience these entities in some other way. For example, much of experience which provides the data for science is not itself also known by science. Specific types include Emergent Naturalism (mental entities emerge from, but are not reducible to, physical entities) and Pragmatic Naturalism, which both offer attempts to coordinate experience with science. However, unless the perspectives of ordinary experience on reality is carefully reconciled with scientific knowledge, excessive concern for ordinary experience can lead towards option 4.

5B. Transcendent Realism: there must be entities unknowable by science, since science's own limitations suggest that some of reality is beyond scientific knowledge.

(6) Reality only consists of what science knows about. Only what can be known by science really exists. Two interesting varieties:

6A. Current Scientific Exclusivism: reality only consists of what current science knows now. This option is not widely favored because science frequently revises its understanding of reality. However, on this option there is no other rational way to understand reality, so current science's worldview is the only reasonable choice.

6B. Scientific Exclusivism: reality only consists of what perfected science would know. This thesis is sometimes called Eliminative Materialism or Physicalism. This option cannot yet depict reality accurately, since we can't know which parts of science have been perfected already, and hence this option cannot be useful for developing a concrete worldview.

Only three of the six primary worldviews described above can lead to kinds of naturalism: Synoptic Monism, Perspectival Realism, and Scientific Exclusivism. Transcendent realism may be ignored here because any transcendent natural reality, if it exists, cannot be an important part of the contest between naturalism and non-naturalism. Current scientific exclusivism may also be ignored here because the scientific exclusivist, when challenged over something that current science can't yet explain, will eventually resort to the claim that future science will probably explain it.

Stage One Summary: Three Kinds of Naturalism

Synoptic Monism	Perspectival Realism	Scientific Exclusivism
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II. Stage Two: Explaining Experiences using Science's Theories.

Let us further consider ways of distinguishing kinds of naturalism. Consider these three kinds of naturalisms.

Narrow Naturalism: If some X is among those things (or among the properties of those things) which are described by science’s best theories, then the existence of X is accepted; otherwise, its existence must be denied.

Fitting Naturalism: All the entities accepted by narrow naturalism exist, plus additional things as follows: If some X is successfully hypothesized as really being a Y that is among those things (or among the properties of those things) which are described by science’s best theories, then the existence of X may be accepted.

Broad Naturalism: All the entities accepted by fitting naturalism exist, plus additional things as follows: If some X is successfully explained by a hypothesis about why X exists which references only those things (or properties of those things) which are described by science’s best theories, then the existence of X may be accepted.

So far we have distinguished six kinds of naturalism, along two dimensions: (1) the degree of ontological confidence given to science, from synoptic monism to perspectival realism to scientific exclusivism; and (2) the breadth of explanatory discretion given to science, from narrow to fitting to broad naturalism.

Stage Two Summary: Three More Kinds of Naturalism

Narrow Naturalism	Fitting Naturalism	Broad Naturalism
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III. Stage Three: How Many Sciences Describe Reality?

There is one more dimension that further distinguishes kinds of naturalisms: (3) the number of scientific fields permitted to describe reality. Some naturalists are happy with letting many sciences know reality, while other naturalists want only one scientific field to know reality.

The latter type of naturalists have typically accepted a methodological principle that may be called “reductionist universalism” — only the smallest parts of reality really exist, and the natural laws about those parts are universally valid (they hold in all regions of the universe), exclusively valid (no other laws have independent validity), and exhaustively valid (all events are dictated by these laws). As physics is the scientific field that knows the smallest parts of reality, reductionist universalism amounts to the claim that all of reality ultimately consists solely of subatomic particles and that all events in the natural universe are ultimately dictated by the laws those subatomic particles obey. The naturalist who follows reductionist universalism will be the sort of materialist who puts physics first — this naturalism can be called “physicalism.”

Other kinds of naturalism do not agree with reductionist universalism and feel comfortable with permitting other scientific fields to describe reality with just as much legitimacy as physics. Because the biological and social sciences have traditionally used some methodological principles and modes of causality that depart from the physical sciences, many naturalists want to draw a line between trustworthy physical sciences (physics, chemistry, geosciences, astronomy, cosmology) and suspicious biological and social sciences.

The naturalists who would permit just the physical sciences to describe reality (“scientism”) form a separate camp from those naturalists who are comfortable with all of the physical, biological, and social sciences describing reality (“pluralism”).

Stage Three Summary: Three More Kinds of Naturalism

Physicalism	Scientism	Pluralism
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IV. Stage Four: How Many Naturalisms?

The varieties of naturalism may be distinguished along three dimensions: (1) the degree of ontological confidence given to science, from synoptic monism to perspectival realism to scientific exclusivism; (2) the breadth of explanatory discretion given to science, from narrow to fitting to broad naturalism; and (3) the number of scientific fields permitted to describe reality, from just physics to the physical sciences to all sciences.

If all combinations of these nine kinds of naturalism were created, 27 varieties of naturalism would result. Let us first combine breadth of explanation with the number of scientific fields.

TABLE ONE: NINE KINDS OF NATURALISM

Best Science Naturalism	Physics	The Physical Sciences	All Natural, Biological, and Social Sciences
Narrow Naturalism	Eliminative Physicalism	Eliminative Scientism	Eliminative Pluralism
Fitting Naturalism	Reductive Physicalism	Reductive Scientism	Reductive Pluralism
Broad Naturalism	Liberal Physicalism	Liberal Scientism	Liberal Pluralism

Now combine these nine kinds of naturalism with the three kinds of naturalism that express the degree of ontological confidence given to science, from synoptic monism to perspectival realism to eliminative materialism. These combinations generate twenty-seven potential varieties of naturalism. However, many of these varieties are not viable because of coherence problems, and some are not practical because their principles would conflict.

TABLE TWO: TWENTY-SEVEN VARIETIES OF NATURALISM?

Ontological Confidence	Synoptic Monism	Perspectival Realism	Scientific Exclusivism
Explanatory Function			
Eliminative Physicalism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with synopticism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with perspectivism	good fit: reality only is what physics says Eliminative Physicalism

Eliminative Scientism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with synopticism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with perspectivism	poor fit: can reality be only what the physical sciences say? Eliminative Scientism
Eliminative Pluralism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with synopticism	not coherent: eliminativism conflicts with perspectivism	not practical: the many sciences yield diverse views on reality
Reductive Physicalism	not coherent: why reduce when reality has multiple modes?	not practical: why reduce what is only experienced?	good fit: reality must be reducible to physics Reductive Physicalism
Reductive Scientism	not coherent: why reduce when reality has multiple modes?	not practical: why reduce what is only experienced?	poor fit: is reality reducible to the physical sciences? Reductive Scientism
Reductive Pluralism	not coherent: why reduce when reality has multiple modes?	not practical: why reduce what is only experienced?	not practical: many sciences yield contrary views on reality
Liberal Physicalism	not practical: using only physics diminishes diverse views on reality	not practical: physics alone can't explain diversity of experience	good fit: physics alone supplies explanations of all reality Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism
Liberal Scientism	poor fit: why demand explanations when reality has multiple modes? Synoptic Scientism	poor fit: can the physical sciences fully explain diverse experience? Perspectival Scientism	good fit: the physical sciences supply explanations of all reality Exclusivist Liberal Scientism
Liberal Pluralism	good fit: the many sciences indicate plural modes of reality Synoptic Pluralism	good fit: the many sciences indicate plural perspectives on reality Perspectival Pluralism	good fit: the sciences supply explanations of all reality Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism

After eliminating sixteen varieties of naturalism because they are either incoherent or impractical, and leaving aside the four “poor fits” asking for unstable combinations, there are seven viable varieties of naturalism remaining.

V. Stage Five: The Seven Viable Varieties of Naturalism.

The seven varieties are listed in order from the very restrictive to the very open assertions about what reality is like.

1. *Eliminative Physicalism*: reality only is what physics says. This variety is the most austere and rigid naturalism, restricting reality most sharply. According to Eliminative Physicalism, the only realities are those that number among those things (or among their properties) which are described by physics' best theories. This eliminativism typically accepts the principle of "reductionist universalism." Once eliminativism rejects the existence of some X, then any belief or judgment or knowledge claim about X is strictly false or quite meaningless. Trouble soon erupts, because the other physical sciences, such as chemistry, do not regard their respective claims about nature as meaningless and may not agree that reductionism will ever work. Sometimes eliminative physicalists relent from this harsh treatment of eliminable entities, saying that discourse about many condemned Xs can still be partially and temporarily meaningful (at least until replaced with physicalist discourse), and "second-class" practical language and knowledge about these Xs may be needed. For example, naturalistic philosophy of mind can treat folk psychology as not entirely false since its talk of perceptions and other mental things may at least point to real phenomena that require better description rather than no description. For example, Paul Churchland's endorsement of eliminative materialism treats the ontology of perceptions and beliefs as "illusion" yet his own cognitive science admits the existence of the "qualitative character of a sensation" in the course of explaining it.² Successful explanations, even of the most austere reductive sort, tend to confirm the reality of the things explained (failed explanations arouse doubt). Genes are not unreal because they are composed of nucleotide molecules. The Eliminative Physicalist who is too generous with "second-class" language and knowledge, especially regarding mental affairs, risks sliding over to Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism, and is under great pressure to at least admit the superiority of Reductive Physicalism.

2. *Reductive Physicalism*: reality must be reducible to physics. This variety is almost as austere as eliminative physicalism. According to Reductive Physicalism, the only realities are those of physics' best theories, plus those additional things which can be theoretically and ontologically reduced to them. Reductive Physicalism accepts reductionist universalism, but resists collapsing into eliminative physicalism by permitting the existence of things that can have their own properties, behaviors, and laws that physics itself does not investigate. Most eliminativists gain their confidence in the non-existence of X after reductivists have done their work, and most physicalists are eliminativists about some things (the paranormal, the mythical) and reductivists about other things (the biological, the social). Reductive Physicalism must demand complete submission to the principle of reductionist universalism from all other sciences, or else it must admit the superiority of Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism. The practical difference between a reductivist and an eliminativist is that an eliminativist about some X would not seek any reductive explanation of X, since it is irrational to attempt to explain the non-existent. However, most eliminativists gain their confidence in the non-existence of X after reductivists have done their work, and most physicalists are eliminativists about some things (the paranormal, the mythical) and reductivists about other things (the biological, the social). Challenges to reductionism can arise from the natural sciences, such as biology or geology – the reductive physicalist demands that these sciences' entities and laws be reducible in principle to those of physics, but no one knows how to even attempt such a reduction. In light of such troubles among the physical sciences, the social scientist, not surprisingly, is tempted to rebel against this imperial demand of physics. Resistance to reductive universalism among social scientists is not necessarily matched by enthusiasm for theoretical pluralism in their own fields, however; a separate defense of theoretical pluralism is needed.³ Psychology in particular must deal with the first-person situated and subjective perspective of consciousness, and many philosophers also want to preserve legitimate discourse and inquiry into such experience. Churchland may be better located here with Reductive Physicalism, along with Jaegwon Kim⁴ who admits that some mental features may not be entirely eliminable as unreal by proven reductions.

3. *Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism*: physics alone supplies explanations of all reality. This variety is attractive to naturalists who are skeptical about reductive explanations of all realities to physical realities. Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism holds that reality consists of what can be explained by physics. This variety of naturalism does not adhere to the principle of reductionist universalism, keeping it distinct from its eliminativist and reductivist cousins. Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism does maintain an analogue of reductionist universalism, which can be called “explanatory universalism,” which instead declares that only the things and laws theorized by physics may be referenced when fully explaining reality, so that explanations of things are best given solely in terms of the things recognized by physics alone, if only by some future final physics. This prioritization of physical explanation is frequently signaled by hostility towards consciousness, free will, social forces, or anything that could challenge strict determinism. Ernest Nagel’s naturalism might be best classified here; his hostility towards life and social science explanations using suspicious teleologies was matched by his confidence in his “bridge-laws” for reducing such “explanations” to those of physics.⁵ These “bridges” are multiply-realizable and must endlessly proliferate, however. The primary difficulty that confronts Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism is causality: physically explainable but irreducible things can appear to have their own causally lawful relationships, and so one event might be described as having two sufficient causes, or the very notion of “cause” can fracture into distinct senses. The work of Wilfrid Sellars and Daniel Dennett make strenuous efforts to reconcile the normative, manifest, and folk ways of living and speaking with physicalism’s underlying truth. By denying complete reductionism in practice, Sellars and Dennett can sound like pluralists or even perspectivalists, but their firm commitment to the exclusive ontological reality of the strictly physical ultimately belies their generosity towards normative, intentional, and psychological modes of language. Unless the descriptive and causal overdetermination issues are eventually resolved, however, Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism is under great pressure to either collapse into Reductive Physicalism, or to go in the opposite direction and mutate towards Perspectival Pluralism.

4. *Exclusivist Liberal Scientism*: the physical sciences supply explanations of all reality. For reasons given below, this position is better labeled as Non-Reductive Physicalism. Like any middle position that tries to compromise all things, this variety is highly unstable, under intense pressure to resign the field in favor of its exclusivist cousins. According to this position, reality consists only of those things that are explainable by the physical sciences. But why just the physical sciences? The Exclusivist Liberal Physicalist will complain that purely physical explanations must in principle prevail across all the physical sciences anyways. The Exclusivist Liberal Pluralist will complain that admitting the explanatory power of the physical sciences should be extended to all of the sciences. Even worse than competition from its cousins, this variety suffers from both of the severe difficulties confronting its cousins. Like Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism, this variety must resolve the issue of causal overdetermination, lest it admit the superiority of Reductive Physicalism. Like its other cousin, Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism, this variety must also resolve the issue of incoherence between the physical sciences, which can be handled more easily by Reductive Physicalism on the one hand, or by Perspectival Pluralism on the other. During the 20th century, the two most popular forms of Exclusivist Liberal Scientism were Non-reductive Physicalism and the closely related position of Emergent Supervenient Naturalism. For Non-Reductive Physicalism, the only realities are those of physics’ best theories, plus those additional things of the other physical sciences which can be theoretically reduced to them, plus those non-reducible experiential / mental / social properties or powers which are ontologically dependent on physical things. This position is widely labeled as “Non-reductive Naturalism” but that label is too broad, obscuring the remaining varieties of naturalism (V, VI, VII) and omitting its distinctive prioritization of physics. For this position, the most urgent priority in the defense of naturalism is ontological: mental properties are distinguishable from, but still entirely dependent on, physical things. Dynamic and causal supervenience holds globally. Non-reductive physicalists sometimes express this position in terms of Emergent Naturalism: reality includes many entities which are emergent (neither explanatorily nor ontologically reducible to physics) even though these entities entirely supervene on (cannot exist without) realities known by perfected physics. Emergent Naturalism has enthusiasm for the supervenience strategy, and would not obstruct the search for correlation, dynamic, and causal superveniences. Dubious whether the supervenience strategy will ever culminate in satisfactory

reductions of all phenomenal/mental entities, the option of emergence can seem attractive. There are no non-physical things, yet there are non-physical “mental” properties that can be experienced, even though they must really be properties of physical things. Even if other sciences besides physics experimentally confirm theories about “mental” things as having somewhat independent existences and/or causal powers from physical things, such knowledge is inferior to physics, and any suggested quasi-independence of the mental from the physical is only illusory. To summarize, this Non-Reductive Physicalism is the compromise position taken by a philosopher who admires the reductivist program and endorses physicalism, yet also believes that some experiential/ biological/social properties will likely forever resist theoretical reduction. W. V. Quine’s holistic scientism is probably best categorized here, and his philosophy spawned a wide variety of non-reductive naturalisms projecting at least a “token-token” identity if not “type-type” identity of mind and matter. Although Quine was notoriously hostile towards mental states, he was not a straightforward reductive physicalist, by endorsing the knowledge of the several natural sciences while demanding strict supervenience over micro-physical matters. Donald Davidson’s Anomalous Monism is in this non-reductive tradition, along with many similar formulations. Non-Reductive Physicalism is inherently unstable, because any devout endorsement of physicalism is embarrassingly compromised by the admission that some phenomenal/mental entities will never be reduced: not by any semantic, epistemic, explanatory, scientific, functional, or ontological means. Non-reductive physicalists are torn by this position’s conflicting pressures. A genuine physicalist should instead bravely vow that future science will supply all necessary reductions, while a stubborn non-reductivist should instead slide over to Emergent Supervenient Naturalism (which in turn is under pressure to mutate towards Perspectival Pluralism) or Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism (which is similarly under pressure to mutate into Perspectival Pluralism).

5. *Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism*: the many sciences supply explanations of all reality. This variety is attractive to naturalists who are skeptical about reducing all realities to physical realities on the one hand, and also skeptical about any naturalistic ontology that permits experience to yield genuine perspectives on reality that can never be fully explained by the sciences. Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism holds that reality consists of what can be explained by the many sciences including the life sciences and social sciences. Its pluralism encourages all of the sciences to draw their own conclusions about reality. But this liberality also encourages such a diversity of conclusions about reality, and such a multiplicity of entities for theorizing, that incoherence among them will inevitably result. The only way to manage this diversity is to assign each science its own task of exploring a “level” or “aspect” of reality, so that clashing scientific theories are kept apart. For example, chemistry studies the laws peculiar to interacting molecules, while subatomic physics studies the quite different laws peculiar to subatomic particles, without worrying how these entities and laws specifically relate to each other. The naturalistic pluralist must accept the “disunity of science” and defend each science’s theoretical autonomy for deciding how to best satisfy the methodological standards of empirical inquiry. Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism is also burdened with showing how all of experience and the mental life is in principle explainable by the many sciences. The first-person situated and subjective perspective of consciousness must be ultimately explainable in terms of the third-person objective knowledge of the sciences. Taking up the eliminativist challenge to empirically justify talk of intentions, beliefs, and the like, a philosopher of mind can not merely praise the utility the “intentional stance” but also thereby justify it over reductionist accounts as well.⁶ This liberal pluralism can proclaim its advantages over all pretenses to physicalist reductionism, but its dealings with experience remain extremely hazardous. Any experiences not satisfactorily explained by the sciences will pressure this naturalism to mutate into Perspectival Pluralism. Barry Stroud, recognizing the position of Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism and labeling it as “open-minded or expansive naturalism,” prefers it over all reductionisms. However, Stroud warns that excessive expansiveness, a willingness to undertake explanations for most everything we encounter, may remove substantive meaning from the term “naturalism.”⁷ John Searle’s “biological naturalism” is caught up in this problem too, when he simultaneously insists that the life sciences can deal with subjective consciousness in a way that mere physicalism or machine functionalism will never succeed.⁸ However, Searle’s strong insistence on the separate ontological category of subjectivity makes one wonder if even the life sciences or psychological/social sciences

could ever handle such subjectivity, making his stance sound much more like Perspectival Pluralism or even Synoptic Pluralism.

6. *Perspectival Pluralism*: the many sciences along with experience indicate plural perspectives on reality. This variety offers a middle path between Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism's reliance on science alone and Synoptic Pluralism's hypostatizations of ways of experiencing and knowing reality. Perspectival Pluralism concludes that the sciences are unable to fully explain experience and the mind, yet it also respects how the sciences can cohere with, and frequently illuminate, much of experience and the mind. Perspectival Pluralism finds that experience and scientific knowledge presents multiple perspectives upon the same reality. The first-person situated and subjective perspective of consciousness is neither inexplicable nor incongruent with the third-person objective knowledge of the sciences, since all experience and knowledge is embedded in situated contexts. Our mental lives are correlated to some degree with nervous processes, scientific knowledge grows from our careful observations of the world, and our experiences of the world can be usefully coordinated with scientific knowledge. Appreciation for the many vital and practical relationships and interpenetrations among experiences and scientific knowledge inspires the Perspectival Pluralist to postulate one natural world which experience and science both reveal. Pleas for perspectivalism and pluralism resound throughout the works of pragmatists, including John Dewey, a paradigmatic example of a perspectival pluralist. Nicholas Rescher applies the label of "perspectival pluralism" for his metaphilosophical stance in addition to "pragmatic idealism."⁹ Ronald Giere also calls his position "perspectival pluralism" and in recent writings¹⁰ he has acknowledged his connection with pragmatism. Pragmatic pluralists understandably express high confidence in science's ability to find explanations for all phenomena, since they oppose the positivisms, constructivisms, and antirealisms which lead away from naturalism. Such confidence is actually the defining characteristic of Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism, which means by "explanation" something stronger than the weak coordination between science and experience sought by Perspectival Pluralism. For example, an Exclusivist Liberal Pluralist will anticipate that neurophysiology may someday "explain" human emotions in a near-reductionist manner (romantic love is "caused" by certain neurotransmitters, for example). The Perspectival Pluralist resists such narrow causality, preferring to emphasize how science can help understand the plurality of interrelationships between social conduct, personal feelings, and brain modifications. The Perspectival Pluralist must tread carefully when explaining science's "explanations" of experience and the mental life. To justify confidence in one natural reality, the Perspectival Pluralist develops an ontological system to show how all experience and all scientific knowledge can be coordinated together. Any irreconcilable contradiction between some aspect of experience "E" and some part of scientific knowledge "K", a contradiction so severe that it is impossible to see how E and K could both be about the same natural reality, dooms Perspectival Pluralism. Making this task easier is the view held by Perspectival Pluralism (but not Synoptic Pluralism) that experience is not itself a kind of knowledge that could challenge scientific knowledge. Synoptic Pluralism is designed to handle conflicts between experiential knowledge and scientific knowledge by assigning what each knows to sharply dichotomized modes of reality. The Perspectival Pluralist worries that such an accommodating synopticism is tantamount to a resignation to ontological dualism. The disagreements between Dewey's perspectival pluralism and the systems of his contemporaries George Santayana and Alfred North Whitehead (both Synoptic Pluralists) prefigure much of the contemporary debate between naturalisms. This disagreement has more recently erupted over Dual Aspect Monism. Can Dual Aspect Monism make any proper claim to naturalism? David Chalmers suggests that ample psychophysical laws ensure a fundamental ontological connection between mind and matter, holding out hope for naturalism's victory over ontological dualism in a manner suggestive of Perspectival Pluralism.¹¹ Psychophysical laws only raise the problem of causal overdetermination once again. Pragmatic pluralists such as Hilary Putnam and John Dupré find that multiple modes of explanation generate multiple modes of causality.¹² Can a vision of multiple modes of one reality be adequately distinguished from a straightforward ontological pluralism of many worlds. Nelson Goodman notoriously raises doubts about halting short of ontological pluralism.¹³

7. *Synoptic Pluralism*: the many sciences, reason, and experience indicate plural yet related modes of reality. This variety is the most open and flexible naturalism, defining reality most generously. According to Synoptic Pluralism, reality has a variety of aspects or modes as known by the many sciences, and also has aspects or modes known by experience and perhaps pure reason as well which the sciences are incompetent to describe or explain. The simplest forms of Synoptic Pluralism include Dual Aspect Monism (the sciences deal only with reality’s physical aspect while the introspective mind only deals with reality’s mental aspect), and Panpsychism (the sciences accurately but only partially describe all realities, because the sciences cannot capture the sentient or feeling aspect of these realities). Dual Aspect Monism has the heavy burden of confidence that science will figure out the deepest ontological relations between mind and matter despite the irreducible subjective/objective dichotomy; Thomas Nagel is a recent illustration. Epiphenomenalism is another intriguing form of Synoptic Pluralism (although the epiphenomenalist who denies that irreducible qualities of experience are themselves objects of knowledge would instead be a Perspectival Pluralist). Synoptic Pluralism requires some sort of naturalistic ontology — an account of reality that constructs a coherent understanding of one single natural reality with multiple aspects and experienced/known in multiple ways. Synopticism can more easily segregate incompatible aspects into distinct modes of reality that need not fully overlap or intersect. Charles Peirce and William James prefigure much of 20th century Synoptic Pluralism in America. Santayana’s four Realms of Being and Whitehead’s panexperiential Process Philosophy emphasize their capacious accommodation of diverse modes of experiencing/describing/knowing. Stephen Pepper’s World Hypotheses, Paul Weiss’s Modes of Being, Nelson Goodman’s Ways of Worldmaking, and Richard Rorty’s Linguistic Turn¹⁴ have similar merits. A synoptic naturalist ontology is not testable by ordinary experimental methods, because it is designed to be maximally compatible and coherent with all knowledge and experience from all sources. Since experience increases and knowledge evolves, a naturalistic ontology must adapt to keep pace, and this adaptability serves as its test of adequacy. Synoptic Pluralism distinguishes itself from Perspectival Pluralism by concretizing and hypostatizing experienced and known entities for their classification into sharply distinct ontological categories, to forbid the merging of these entities into coordinated perspectives upon reality. On the other hand, unless Synoptic Pluralism can develop its own compelling naturalistic ontology, its enthusiasm for multiple modes of reality can easily amount to ontological dualisms and pluralisms which entirely depart from naturalism.

VI. *Stage Six: The Great Naturalisms.*

Each of the seven major varieties of naturalism suffer from unresolved problems requiring further intense philosophical work. Lacking satisfactory resolutions to their problems so far, they are under great pressure to mutate into some other variety of naturalism. The next table diagrams the seven major naturalisms, their most urgent issues, and the direction of pressure for mutation.

TABLE THREE: SEVEN VARIETIES OF NATURALISM AND THEIR ISSUES

Eliminative Physicalism	Reductive Physicalism	Exclusivist Liberal Physicalism	Non-reductive Physicalism	Exclusivist Liberal Pluralism	Perspectival Pluralism	Synoptic Pluralism
what about “second class” knowledge?	must justify reductionist universalism	what about causal over-determination?	why appeal to just physical sciences?	why not admit superiority of perspectivism?	must justify perspectival ontology	goes to ontological extremes?
pressure →		←pressure	←pressure→	pressure→		←pressure

As evident from the lines of pressure indicated in Table Three, most naturalisms gravitate around the three great naturalisms: Reductive Physicalism, Non-reductive Physicalism, and Perspectival Pluralism. They stand opposed across a wide divide that separates the physicalists from the pluralists. The essential issue for naturalism consists of the fundamental disagreement that divides Reductive Physicalism apart from Perspectival Pluralism — does any science’s knowledge, and the reality it knows, have priority (epistemic and ontological) over all other knowledge and experience?

How can we begin to decide this most fundamental issue over reductionism versus perspectivism? What can these great naturalisms do to gain the advantage over the other? We conclude by suggesting a few recommendations for pursuing these debates among naturalisms in the 21st century.

Reductive Physicalism must (1) display more successful and significant reductions to physics, to increase confidence that reductions are essential to science; (2) guarantee that reductive universalism is consistent with science’s actual use of theoretical models and natural laws; (3) demonstrate that avoiding entity duplication and causal overdetermination is essential to scientific progress; (4) explain why its categorization of all sciences but physics as “second class” is not just as curious as perspectivism’s categorization of all sciences as partial and limited; and (5) justify the view that experience is either eliminable or reducible, at least in principle.

Non-reductive Physicalism must (1) show how the lack of reductions to physics is not simultaneously a clinching argument for perspectivalism; (2) restrict the domain of legitimate scientific reductions so that they are neither universal nor disposable; (3) argue that entity duplication and causal overdetermination are tolerably inevitable results of scientific progress; (4) explain why a compromise view of physics as “first among equals” is still justifiable in light of the admitted entity duplication and causal overdetermination; and (5) justify the view that closely interconnecting experience with physical processes yields confidence in a “token-token” identity of the mental and the physical.

Perspectival Pluralism must (1) produce more impressive ontological systematizations across the sciences and experience, to increase confidence that such systematizations are essential to the progress of knowledge; (2) show that reductive universalism is inconsistent with science’s actual use of theoretical models and natural laws; (3) demonstrate that entity duplication and causal overdetermination are not detrimental to scientific progress; (4) explain why the standard of scientific method should prevail without any amendment awarding preference to reductive accounts; and (5) justify the view that scientific theorizing is continuous with ordinary experience and should be coordinated with experience in a naturalistic ontology.

NOTES

1. A judicious sampling is collected in *Philosophic Naturalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Ryder (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1994).
2. Paul Churchland, *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 6, 25.
3. See Helen Longino, “Theoretical Pluralism and the Scientific Study of Behavior,” in *Scientific Pluralism*, ed. Stephen H. Kellert, Helen E. Longino, and C. Kenneth Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 102–131.
4. Jaegwon Kim, *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).
5. Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961).
6. See for example Robert Audi, “Mental Causation: Sustaining and Dynamic,” in *Mental Causation*, ed. John Heil and Alfred Mele (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 53–74.

7. Barry Stroud, "The Charm of Naturalism," in *Naturalism in Question* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 32–35.
8. John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
9. Nicholas Rescher, *Metaphilosophical Inquiries*, vol. 3 of *A System of Pragmatic Idealism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).
10. Ronald Giere, "Perspectival Pluralism," in *Scientific Pluralism*, ed. Stephen H. Kellert, Helen E. Longino, and C. Kenneth Waters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 26–41. Giere, *Scientific Perspectivism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
11. David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
12. Hilary Putnam, "Causation and Explanation" in *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 137–150. John Dupré, *The Disorder of Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
13. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978).
14. Goodman is cited in note 13. See Stephen Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942); Paul Weiss, *Modes of Being* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958); Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy" in *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, ed. Richard Rorty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1–39.