

The Architecture of Inner Harmony

A Philosophical Framework for Self-Identity, Meaning, and the Right Way to Live

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A brainstorming document. Positions are provisional — intended to provoke discussion among colleagues rather than to settle questions.

1 The Deepest Value

Love for oneself: inner harmony between self-identity, the meaning of life, and the right way to live. Truth as the choice which is in harmony with me.

2 The Existential Triad

🌀 Identity — The Anchor.

Who you believe you are determines what you are capable of valuing. It is the ontological baseline (*ontological*: concerning what you fundamentally are, prior to any particular choice).

☛ **Meaning — The Compass.**

Meaning bridges the gap between self and world. The teleological pursuit of what you value (*teleological*: aimed at a goal, at a “for the sake of which”).

☛ **The Right Way — The Vehicle.**

The daily, pragmatic execution of identity. Ethics as meaning transformed into action — what Aristotle calls *praxis*.

A complementary view: tight coupling

The anchor/compass/vehicle picture above presents the triad as parts playing different roles in sequence — identity first, meaning next, action third. It is intuitive, but it suggests one-way dependencies and a hidden order.

A stronger reading is that the three are not three answers but three faces of one question. Identity cannot be fixed without already having a sense of what is worth pursuing; meaning cannot be located without a way of life that lets it show; the right way cannot be chosen without a self to be choosing it. Each presupposes the other two.

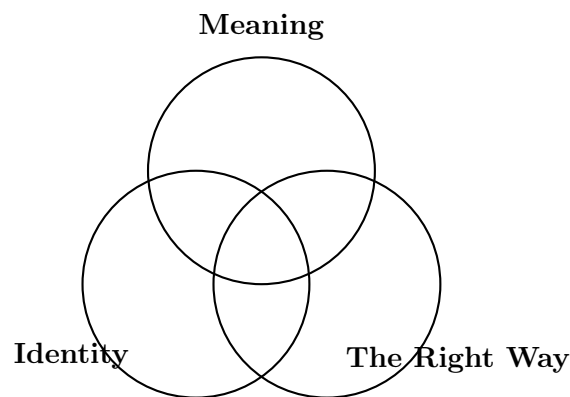


Figure 1: The coupled view: three intertwined facets of a single question. None is intelligible in isolation; an answer in any one domain shifts the others.

Open question. Are these two pictures — the layered triad and the coupled triad — equivalent, complementary, or rivals? Where does each one break down? The layered picture is easier to follow and to teach; the coupled picture is more general and arguably more honest. Both are kept here on purpose.

3 Methodology: How to Research?

Bottom-Up Method — *Phenomenological Data*

Gathering data from lived experience. Observing energy flow, pain, and peace to build an authentic foundation.

Top-Down Method — *Framework Building*

Mapping the “possibility space.” Identifying broad categories of history and philosophy to test for resonance.

4 Generating Data: Indirect Questions

These probes are one tool of the bottom-up method introduced earlier. The bottom-up approach draws on at least three families of data: **indirect probes** of lived experience, **empirical facts** about ourselves and the world (biology, neuroscience, history), and **thought experiments**. This section illustrates the first family; the next illustrates the third, and uses the second along the way.

The questions below are *examples* of the kind of indirect probe we have in mind — not a canonical list. The family of useful questions is much wider, and colleagues are invited to extend or contest these. If the coupled view of the triad is correct, a well-chosen probe will land on identity, meaning, and the right way at the same time — so the labels are pragmatic, not exclusive.

✔ Meaning.

What am I willing to suffer for without resentment? (*The pursuit you cannot talk yourself out of.*)

✔ Flow.

When do I completely lose track of time and self-consciousness? (*The activity where the self quiets and time disappears — popularly called a “flow state”.*)

✔ Boundaries.

What actions in others make me feel profound disgust? (*The ethical floor you cannot argue with.*)

✔ Truth.

When have I felt most like a fraud vs. most authentic? (*Moments of self-betrayal vs. moments of being yourself.*)

5 Thought Experiments: What Persists as “Me”?

Thought experiments — sometimes called *virtual experiments* — are a second bottom-up tool. By imagining a precise but currently impossible scenario, we surface the criteria our intuitions are actually committed to. Where indirect questions probe lived experience, thought experiments probe lived *intuitions* — the gap between what we say we believe and what we are not willing to give up.

The teleporter

Suppose a machine that scans every molecule of your body, destroys the original, and rebuilds an exact copy at a distant location. The copy steps out, remembers your childhood, finishes your

sentences, and reports being you. **Have you been transported, or killed and replaced by a stranger?**

The first intuition is that something is lost: the continuity of consciousness breaks at the moment of disassembly. Most readers say — probably not me.

But this intuition is unstable on inspection:

- Continuity of consciousness already breaks in ordinary life — every night in deep sleep, every general anaesthetic. If the teleporter scanned and rebuilt me while I was asleep, and I “woke up” on the other side, would that pass? And if it does — what was so special about being conscious during the operation?
- Perhaps the matter has to be the same. But the matter of our own body is not the same across our own life either. Most molecules in a human are replaced over time. The popular “every seven years” figure varies wildly by tissue (gut lining renews in days, bone over years, neurons largely do not renew at all), but the broad point stands: the body you walk around in is not the body you had a decade ago.

So neither continuity of consciousness nor continuity of matter survives examination as a sufficient criterion for being “me” through time. **What, then, makes me be me?**

This concrete puzzle is one entry point to the question the next section approaches from another angle.

6 The Duality of Perspective

The Spectator

Human beings seen as **biological robots**. Driven by predictable mechanisms, evolutionary programming, and physiological laws.

The Subjective Awakening

Realizing “*I am one of them, but I did not choose which one.*” This unchosen embodiment points to a divine conscious spark.

Who am I? I am the mysterious focal point of consciousness.

7 Shared Human Foundations

The previous section left us with the question *what am I?* The shortest path to an answer leads outward. Most of “who am I” lies in “who is human”: if I cannot specify myself in private, I can at least specify the kind I belong to. What is shared by every member of that kind is already a substantial fraction of me.

How do we learn what is shared? One route is to look at humanity’s own collective choices. The figures, images, and ideals that humanity has consistently elevated across centuries act as a long-running natural experiment in what people recognise as essentially human. Religions

are a particularly rich source here: many of them preserve a central figure who compresses something close to a “general human.” The image of Jesus Christ, accepted across many cultures and centuries, is one widely-recognized compression of this kind — plausibly accepted so widely because it sits very close to whatever the general human is.

The three foundations below are candidates for elements of that general human — a first sketch, not a finished list, and an open invitation for colleagues to add, remove, or contest them.

🍃 **Meaning-Making.**

The psychological necessity of caring about existence.

💔 **Vulnerability.**

Mortality as the foundation of ethics; our time is finite.

👤 **The Need for the Other.**

Identity is formed through contrast and connection with the world.

8 Ethics vs. Morality: From Intuition to Consensus

If the Existential Triad outlines the architecture of inner harmony, the distinction between morality and ethics explains how that harmony scales from the individual to the collective. In everyday language, the two are often conflated; in this framework, they perform distinctly different functions.

Morality as Implicit Intuition

Morality resides within the realm of **Identity** and the **Subjective Awakening**. It is the raw, internal intuition regarding what is right and wrong. It is deeply personal and phenomenological — often functioning as a quiet, implicit compass rather than an articulated set of rules. Morality is the raw data we gather when we ask: *What actions in others make me feel profound disgust?* It is the un-codified gut feeling of the conscious spark.

Ethics as Explicit Consensus

Ethics, by contrast, belongs to **The Right Way** (*praxis*). It is morality that has been brought into the light, reasoned through, and systematized.

Because we are not isolated subjects — because of our fundamental **Need for the Other** — we cannot rely solely on disparate internal compasses to navigate shared existence. When humanity attempts to find a working consensus among its varied moral intuitions, ethics is born. It is the effort to translate implicit personal feelings into an explicit, shared map.

This is precisely where the concept of the **General Human** becomes pragmatic. Enduring religious and ethical frameworks are grand historical attempts to systematize the General Human. When an archetype — such as the universally resonant image of Jesus Christ — is elevated, it serves as a compression of these shared moral intuitions.

Ethics, therefore, is not an artificial constraint imposed on the self; it is the necessary translation of our personal morality into the social world. It is the language our inner harmony speaks when it seeks to harmonize with the other.

9 Open Question — and a Sketch

The framework above is offered as a vehicle for a question, not as its answer. The question itself is for colleagues, and I do not have a settled answer to it myself. What I can offer, in the spirit of the discussion, is a brief sketch of where I currently stand — in general sense, as material for conversation rather than as a conclusion.

The question I am stuck on

I struggle with this question myself. I have tried to draft three indirect questions of my own — of the kind shown earlier — and I cannot reliably find even three. The earlier examples are useful starting points, but I am not sure any of them actually opens the door for me. So the question below is open at my desk first.

What indirect questions, facts, or thought experiments would you use to uncover your own inner harmony? And if you, too, cannot reliably draft even three — what would you do instead?

Where I stand — a general sketch

True love for oneself is not the same as self-interest. It is not the endless pursuit of personal gain and pleasure that the phrase is often taken to mean. True love for oneself is filling one's own life with meaning. In some situations this takes the form of self-sacrifice or self-giving; in others, of love for suffering when the suffering carries meaning.

It reaches outward as well — toward love for the general human, who makes up a large part of me. It would make little sense to love oneself and refuse to love the part of every other person that coincides with me. That part is large; very large.

We live in a world of individualism that quietly masks *socialism* — not the political system, but the simple fact that each of us lives out a life which only makes sense in the context of others. Examples are everywhere. You want to succeed so that you are recognised; but recognition has no meaning without others, so your success is, in essence, for them. And when you reach for success by stepping on others, the harmony breaks.