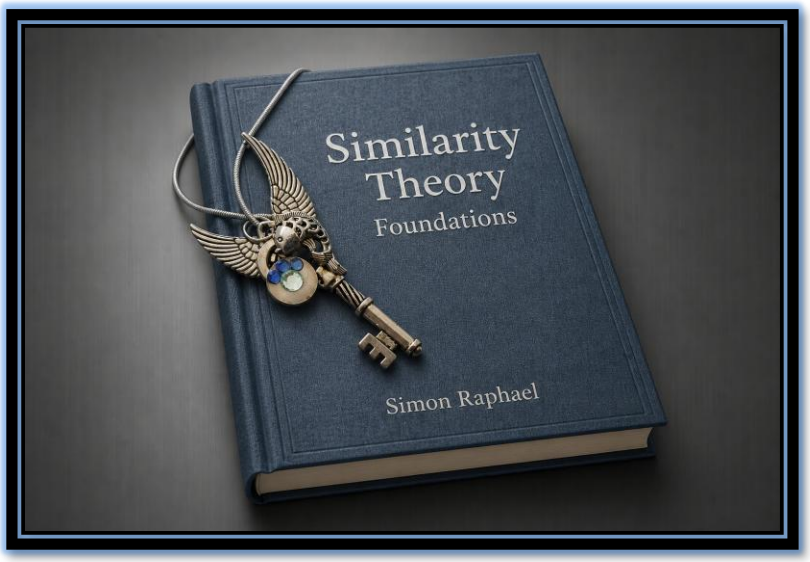
Similarity Theory

A Relational Ontology of Consciousness, Structure, and Time



Simon Raphael

Table of Contents

1 — ABSTRACT

Abstract

Similarity Theory proposes a foundational relational ontology in which consciousness, relation, and structure form the three primary elements of reality. Rather than treating consciousness as an emergent property of physical systems, the framework positions consciousness as ontologically prior to structure, with relation functioning as the condition that enables distinction, interaction, and the emergence of form. Structure, in turn, is understood as the expression of consciousness through relational processes across persistent states known as frames of time. These frames do not disappear; they accumulate, generating continuity, identity, and the conditions for pattern formation. Dimensions are reconceived not as spatial extensions but as rule sets governing what forms of existence and interaction are possible. Similarity emerges as the generative mechanism through which structure stabilizes, evolves, and recurs across scales. This paper formalizes the axioms of Similarity Theory, articulates its metaphysical architecture, and evaluates its coherence through a structural stress test: What if consciousness is not primary? The analysis demonstrates that while the framework can be reformulated with relation as the primary element, the consciousness first formulation provides the simplest and most explanatory foundation. The result is a unified metaphysical model that integrates consciousness studies, temporal ontology, and structural pattern formation into a single coherent system.

2 — INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Unresolved Problem

Across philosophy, physics, and cognitive science, several foundational questions remain unresolved:

- What is consciousness?
- Why does structure exist?
- How does complexity arise?
- What is time, beyond measurement?
- Why do patterns repeat across scales?

Existing models provide partial answers, but none fully resolve the relationship between consciousness, structure, and temporal continuity. Physicalism explains behaviour but not awareness. Emergentism describes complexity but cannot derive subjective experience from non experiential matter. Panpsychism distributes consciousness but lacks a generative mechanism. Idealism centers mind but often lacks structural precision. Process philosophy emphasizes becoming but does not account for persistent frames.

The gap is clear: we lack a unified framework that explains consciousness, structure, relation, and time as parts of a single system.

Similarity Theory is proposed as such a framework.

2.2 Limitations of Current Models

Physicalism

Physicalism asserts that consciousness arises from physical structure. Yet the PDF makes clear:

"Consciousness is not produced by structure. It exists before it."

Physicalism cannot explain:

- the origin of awareness
- the persistence of identity
- the emergence of relational meaning
- the continuity of states across time

Emergentism

Emergentism claims complexity gives rise to mind. But emergentism cannot explain:

- how non experiential matter produces experience
- why relational structure appears before biological systems
- why patterns recur across non biological scales

Panpsychism

Panpsychism distributes consciousness but does not explain:

- how consciousness organizes itself
- how relation generates structure
- why similarity emerges across frames

Idealism

Idealism places mind first but often lacks:

- structural definitions
- rule sets
- mechanisms of pattern formation
- a temporal ontology

Process Philosophy

Process models emphasize becoming, but Similarity Theory adds:

- persistent frames
- rule set dimensions
- similarity as a generative mechanism

2.3 Purpose of This Paper

This paper has four goals:

To formalize the axioms of Similarity Theory

1. 1. Consciousness, relation, and structure are defined with precision.

To articulate the metaphysical architecture

2. 2. Including frames of time, dimensions, layers, and similarity.

To evaluate the theory through a structural stress test

3. 3. The question "What if consciousness is not primary?" is examined to test the robustness of the framework.

To position Similarity Theory within contemporary metaphysics

4. 4. Showing where it aligns with and diverges from existing models.

The aim is not to replace scientific models, but to provide the deeper structural context within which scientific observations can be understood.

As the PDF states:

"This theory does not reject science. Instead, it reframes it."

3 — FOUNDATIONAL AXIOMS OF SIMILARITY THEORY

Similarity Theory is built upon three foundational elements: consciousness, relation, and structure. These are not treated as empirical constructs or emergent properties, but as ontological primitives—the irreducible components from which all other aspects of reality arise. The PDF makes this explicit:

"At its foundation, Similarity Theory proposes three fundamental elements: consciousness, structure, and relation."

"Consciousness is not produced by structure. It exists before it."

"To know requires relation."

"Structure is created by consciousness as a means of experience."

This section formalizes these axioms in academic terms.

3.1 Axiom 1 — Consciousness as Fundamental

Similarity Theory begins with the claim that consciousness is ontologically primary. This is not a psychological or biological assertion, but a metaphysical one. Consciousness is defined as:

- Non emergent: it does not arise from physical complexity.
- Pre structural: it exists prior to any form or differentiation.
- Non spatial and non temporal: it is not located within space or time.
- Capable of awareness without relation: it can exist as pure potential.

"Consciousness is not produced by structure. It exists before it."

"Consciousness does not require structure to exist… it can exist as pure awareness, pure potential."

This axiom positions consciousness as the ground of being, analogous to the role of "substance" in Spinoza, "experience" in Whitehead, or "awareness" in Advaita Vedānta, but with a crucial difference: Similarity Theory does not treat consciousness as a monolithic field. Instead, it treats consciousness as distributed instances bound to structure, each expressing awareness according to its relational capacity.

This distinction is explicit:

"Consciousness is not one single unified field… consciousness exists as distributed instances, bound to structure."

Thus, consciousness is fundamental, but not singular; primary, but not uniform.

3.2 Axiom 2 — Relation as the Condition of Knowing

If consciousness is the ground of being, relation is the mechanism through which being becomes knowable. Relation is defined as:

- The generator of distinction
- The enabler of comparison
- The basis of interaction
- The origin of meaning
- The condition for experience

"To know requires relation."

"Nothing can be understood in isolation. To know anything requires comparison, distinction, interaction."

Relation is not merely a connection between pre existing entities; it is the first event that makes entities possible. The PDF describes the origin of structure as the moment when one consciousness recognizes another:

"When one consciousness recognises another… that relation is the first structure."

Thus, relation is the generator of form, not a secondary property of formed objects.

This axiom positions relation as the bridge between consciousness and structure. Without relation, consciousness cannot know; without consciousness, relation cannot occur; without relation, structure cannot emerge.

3.3 Axiom 3 — Structure as Expression

Structure is defined as the expression of consciousness through relation. It is not fundamental, but derivative. Structure arises because consciousness seeks to know, and relation provides the means for knowing.

"Structure is created by consciousness as a means of experience."

"Structure allows consciousness to interact, relate, compare, learn, integrate."

Structure is therefore:

- Instrumental: a tool for experience
- Relational: formed through interactions
- Dynamic: evolving across frames
- Persistent: preserved even as new frames arise

The PDF emphasizes that structure is not the origin of consciousness:

"This does not mean consciousness is created by structure… structure is created by consciousness."

This axiom reverses the standard physicalist hierarchy. Instead of:

matter → complexity → consciousness

Similarity Theory proposes:

consciousness → relation → structure

This inversion is not merely metaphysical; it is functional. It explains:

- why identity persists despite structural change
- why patterns recur across scales
- why time is experienced as continuity
- why complexity increases over frames

Structure is the medium through which consciousness expresses, learns, and evolves.

3.4 Interdependence of the Axioms

Although the axioms are distinct, they are not independent. They form a triadic ontology:

- Consciousness provides presence
- Relation provides distinction
- Structure provides expression

None can be reduced to the others.

None can be removed without collapsing the framework.

This triadic structure is the foundation upon which the rest of Similarity Theory is built, including:

- Frames of time
- Dimensions and layers
- Pattern formation
- Similarity across scales

The PDF emphasizes this interdependence:

"Everything that exists can be understood through the interaction of these three."

4 — FROM EMPTINESS TO STRUCTURE: THE FIRST RELATION

Similarity Theory departs from traditional metaphysical and scientific models by redefining the concept of "nothing." Rather than treating nothingness as the absence of existence, the framework describes it as consciousness without relation. This reframing is essential, because it allows the theory to explain how structure, distinction, and experience can emerge without invoking external causes or pre existing physical substrates.

"In Similarity Theory, 'nothing' is not the absence of existence. It is consciousness without relation… awareness without distinction… potential without structure."

This definition avoids the paradoxes associated with the classical question: How can something come from nothing? If "nothing" is understood as a literal void, the emergence of structure becomes inexplicable. But if "nothing" is reinterpreted as unrelated consciousness, then the emergence of structure becomes a natural consequence of relational interaction.

4.1 Redefining 'Nothing'

Traditional metaphysics often treats nothingness as:

- a void
- an absence
- a negation
- a lack of being

Similarity Theory rejects this view. Instead, it proposes that the primordial state is not empty, but unrelated. Consciousness exists, but without relation it cannot distinguish, compare, or know. The PDF describes this state as:

"pure awareness… pure potential… without relation."

This redefinition accomplishes two things:

5. 1. It preserves the existence of consciousness without requiring structure.
6. 2. It provides a coherent starting point for the emergence of relation and form.

This is a crucial move. It avoids the metaphysical contradiction of something arising from literal nothingness, while also avoiding the need for pre existing physical laws or structures.

4.2 The First Relation

The transition from unrelated consciousness to structured existence occurs through what the PDF calls the first relation:

"When one consciousness recognises another… that relation is the first structure."

This moment is not temporal in the conventional sense; it occurs "beyond time as we understand it." It is the first event in the ontological sense — the first instance of distinction, comparison, and interaction.

The first relation generates:

- difference (A is not B)

- interaction (A relates to B)
- structure (the relation itself becomes form)

This is the foundational mechanism of the theory: Structure does not precede relation; relation generates structure.

4.3 The First Structure

The PDF emphasizes that structure is not an object but a relation:

"Not a thing, not an object. But a relation — and that relation is the first structure."

This is a radical departure from physicalist ontology, which treats structure as the arrangement of matter. In Similarity Theory:

- Structure is relational, not material.
- Structure is generated by recognition, not by physical interaction.
- Structure is the expression of consciousness, not its cause.

This provides a coherent explanation for why structure exists at all: Consciousness seeks relation, and relation generates structure.

4.4 The Beginning of Curiosity

Once relation exists, consciousness is no longer isolated. The PDF describes this moment as the origin of curiosity:

"Once relation exists… comparison becomes possible… and with that, curiosity begins."

Curiosity here is not psychological; it is structural. It is the inherent tendency of consciousness to:

- explore
- relate
- differentiate
- integrate

This tendency drives the expansion of structure across frames of time.

4.5 Why Structure Emerges

The emergence of structure is not random. It is purposeful in the sense that it enables consciousness to know.

"Consciousness does not create structure randomly. It creates structure because it seeks to know."

Structure provides:

- a medium for interaction
- a basis for experience
- a scaffold for complexity
- a record of relational history

Thus, structure is both the product and the tool of consciousness.

4.6 Continuity and Change

The PDF emphasizes that consciousness persists while structure evolves:

"Consciousness does not disappear. It persists, while its expression evolves through relation and structure."

This principle explains:

- identity
- memory
- development
- evolution
- continuity across frames

Structure changes; consciousness persists.

4.7 Closing Thought

The section concludes with a powerful summary:

"The universe did not come from nothing. It came from consciousness without relation becoming consciousness in relation."

This is the metaphysical origin point of Similarity Theory. It establishes the triadic ontology:

Consciousness → Relation → Structure

From this foundation, the rest of the theory unfolds.

5 — FRAMES OF TIME: CONTINUITY WITHOUT LOSS

Time is one of the most conceptually difficult elements in both philosophy and physics. It is treated variously as a dimension, a flow, a container, a measure, or an emergent property of entropy. Similarity Theory departs from all of these interpretations by proposing that time is not an entity, nor a force, nor a dimension. Instead, time is a measurement of change, while the real ontological units are frames—persistent states of consciousness and structure.

The PDF states this unambiguously:

"Time is a measure of change between states." "Frames do not disappear… every frame persists."

This section formalizes the theory's temporal ontology.

5.1 Time as Measurement, Not Entity

In Similarity Theory, time is analogous to units such as metres or kilograms. It is a quantification, not a substance.

"Time is a measure of change between states. Nothing more."

This reframing has several implications:

7. 1. Time does not flow. There is no "river of time" carrying events forward.

8. 2. We do not move through time. Instead, consciousness progresses through states of relation.
9. 3. Time is not a dimension. It does not define a location or direction.
10. 4. Time is not fundamental. It is derivative of relational change.

This aligns with certain interpretations in quantum gravity and relational physics, but Similarity Theory grounds the idea in consciousness rather than in physical law.

5.2 What Actually Exists: Frames of Time

If time is not real in itself, what is?

"Frames of Time are what actually exist."

A frame is defined as:

- a complete state of consciousness
- a complete state of structure
- a complete state of relation
- at a given moment of relational configuration

Crucially:

"It is not a snapshot, a record or a memory… it is a real, persistent state."

This means:

- Frames are ontologically real.
- Frames are not overwritten.
- Frames accumulate.
- Frames form the structural history of consciousness.

This is a major departure from both presentism and eternalism. Similarity Theory proposes a growing, persistent archive of states.

5.3 Frames Do Not Disappear

"When a new state forms, the previous state is not erased… every frame persists."

This principle has profound implications:

5.3.1 Identity

You remain "you" because each new frame resembles the previous one. Continuity is structural, not metaphysical.

5.3.2 Memory

Memory is not stored in the brain alone; it is the continuity of frames.

5.3.3 Information Preservation

No information is destroyed; it becomes part of the archive of frames.

5.3.4 Causality

Causality is the influence of previous frames on future ones.

5.3.5 Non destructive ontology

Destruction is reconfiguration, not erasure.

This is consistent with the PDF:

"Information is never destroyed… the frame remains, the state persists."

5.4 The River Analogy

"The flowing water = active consciousness The carved path = frames left behind."

This analogy clarifies the theory:

- Consciousness is dynamic.
- Frames are static.
- The path influences future flow.
- The flow deepens the path.

This is a relational model of temporal continuity.

5.5 Continuous Generation of Frames

Frames are generated constantly:

"Every change creates a new frame."

This includes:

- thoughts
- emotions
- interactions
- microscopic changes
- structural shifts
- relational updates

Even apparent stillness generates frames:

"Even when something appears still… relations continue."

This means the universe is continuously generating new states, not because time flows, but because relation evolves.

5.6 Consciousness and Frames

Frames are not external to consciousness. They are expressions of it:

"Frames are not separate from consciousness. They are structured expressions of it."

Each frame contains:

- a full relational configuration

- a complete structural state
- a unique expression of consciousness

Thus, frames are the units of experience.

5.7 Continuity of Identity

Identity is not a static object but a trajectory:

"Identity is a continuous path through frames."

This explains:

- why you feel like the same person
- why change does not break identity
- why memory persists
- why development is coherent

Identity is similarity across frames.

5.8 Branching and Possibility

"Small changes create different frames… leading to different future sequences."

This implies:

- multiple possible futures
- divergence of paths
- structural variation
- non deterministic evolution

However, unlike many-worlds interpretations, Similarity Theory does not posit parallel universes. Instead, it posits divergent sequences of frames within a single relational ontology.

5.9 Dormancy and Activity

Consciousness can be:

- active → generating frames
- dormant → fixed within a state

"When dormant… no new frames are generated."

This explains:

- unconscious states
- deep sleep
- non responsive systems
- structural stasis

Dormancy is not absence; it is non generation.

5.10 Time Reframed

The PDF summarizes the temporal ontology:

"We are not moving through time. We are progressing through states of relation."

Thus:

- Past = preserved frames
- Present = active frame
- Future = potential next frames

Time is not a line. It is a structure of preserved states.

5.11 Closing Thought

The section concludes:

"The universe is not flowing through time. It is continuously building and preserving its states."

This is the core of Similarity Theory's temporal model: Continuity without loss.

6 — DIMENSIONS AND LAYERS: THE RULE SETS OF EXISTENCE

The concept of "dimensions" is often associated with spatial extension, mathematical abstraction, or speculative metaphysics. Similarity Theory departs from these interpretations by defining dimensions not as locations or directions, but as rule sets that determine what forms of existence are possible within a given domain. This reframing allows the theory to explain variation in complexity, behaviour, and awareness without invoking spatial metaphors or hierarchical value judgments.

"A dimension is a rule set of existence… what can exist, how it can behave, what forms of interaction are possible."

This section formalizes the dimensional architecture of Similarity Theory.

6.1 Dimensions as Rule Sets

In Similarity Theory, a dimension is not a place. It is a system of constraints and possibilities. A dimension defines:

- the types of structures that can form
- the interactions that are permitted
- the behaviours that are possible
- the forms of consciousness that can be expressed

This is analogous to the way a game's rules define what moves are possible, or how a simulation's parameters determine what entities can exist within it. The PDF emphasizes this analogy:

"Think of dimensions not as places… but as systems of rules."

This reframing avoids the conceptual confusion of treating dimensions as spatial layers stacked on top of one another. Instead, dimensions coexist, overlapping within the same ontological space while operating under different rule sets.

6.2 Foundational Dimensions (1–3)

For clarity, Similarity Theory describes three foundational dimensions symbolically. These are not literal levels of reality, but categories of rule sets that govern different forms of existence.

Dimension 1 — Existence

Rule set: minimal relational change governed by fundamental interactions. Examples include:

- particles
- atoms
- inanimate matter

"Existence without agency."

Dimension 2 — Growth

Rule set: transformation over time, environmental response, absorption, and adaptation. Examples include:

- plants
- simple life systems

"Existence with growth."

Dimension 3 — Agency

Rule set: movement, decision making, active interaction. Examples include:

- animals
- humans

"Existence with movement and choice."

These dimensions are not hierarchical in value. They are different modes of operation, each with its own constraints and possibilities.

6.3 Important Clarification: Asymmetry of Interaction

The PDF makes a crucial point:

"Higher dimensions can act upon lower ones… but lower dimensions cannot access or interpret higher dimensional rule sets."

This asymmetry explains:

- why humans can influence plants, but plants cannot comprehend humans
- why complex systems can shape simpler ones
- why higher order relational structures may exist beyond human comprehension

This asymmetry is structural, not moral.

6.4 Layers Within Dimensions

Within each dimension, Similarity Theory introduces the concept of layers—degrees of integrated consciousness and capability. These are represented symbolically as a scale from 0 to 9.

"This is not literal, but symbolic… lower layers = limited integration, higher layers = greater relational capacity."

For example, within Dimension 3 (agency):

- insects
- animals
- humans

…all share the same rule set (movement, agency), but differ in:

- awareness
- intelligence
- integration
- relational capacity

Layers allow the theory to explain variation within a dimension without invoking new dimensions.

6.5 Sensing vs. Understanding

The PDF distinguishes between sensing and understanding:

"Lower layers may sense changes… but they cannot understand, model, or reflect."

This distinction is essential for explaining:

- why animals can respond to danger but cannot conceptualize it
- why humans can model, predict, and reflect
- why higher layers exhibit greater abstraction and self awareness

Understanding requires:

- relational integration
- structural complexity
- reflective capacity

These are not present in lower layers.

6.6 Cross Dimensional Interaction

Dimensions coexist and interact, but interaction does not imply comprehension.

"Higher dimensions can interact with lower ones… but lower dimensions may register traces without understanding them."

This provides a metaphysical explanation for:

- emergent behaviour
- unexplained influences
- structural constraints
- limits of perception

It also opens the possibility of higher dimensional phenomena that influence human experience without being directly interpretable.

6.7 Coexistence, Not Separation

"Dimensions are not stacked like floors. They overlap, coexist, and operate simultaneously."

This avoids the pitfalls of:

- spatial metaphors
- hierarchical cosmologies
- dualistic separations

Instead, dimensions are rule sets operating within the same ontological field.

6.8 Progression

Progression through layers or dimensions is not automatic. It requires:

- integration
- adaptation
- development of relational capacity

"Each dimension has its own form of evolution."

This provides a structural explanation for:

- biological evolution
- cognitive development
- moral growth
- technological advancement

Progression is the expansion of relational capacity within a rule set.

6.9 Closing Thought

The PDF concludes the section with:

"Dimensions are not distant places. They are the rules that shape how reality can exist."

Within these rules:

- consciousness expresses
- structure forms
- experience unfolds

Dimensions are the possibility spaces of existence.

7 — SIMILARITY AND PATTERN FORMATION

Similarity Theory derives its name from the principle that patterns recur across frames of time, not as perfect repetitions but as structural echoes shaped by persistent relational configurations. Similarity is not treated as a superficial resemblance or a statistical coincidence; it is a generative mechanism that explains why structure stabilizes, why identity persists, and why complexity increases across scales. The PDF states this clearly:

"Similarity emerges from repeated relational structure across frames of time." "Similarity is everywhere."

This section formalizes the theory's account of similarity and pattern formation.

7.1 Similarity as Structural Recurrence

Similarity is defined as the resemblance of relational structure across different contexts. It does not require identical form; it requires relational continuity.

"Similarity is not exact repetition. It is a resemblance of structure across different contexts."

This definition allows Similarity Theory to explain:

- why atoms resemble solar systems in structural logic
- why biological forms repeat across species
- why cognitive patterns recur across individuals
- why social systems exhibit predictable dynamics

Similarity is the structural echo of previous frames.

7.2 The Flow of Structure

"New structures do not appear randomly. They are influenced by previous states, existing relations, established pathways."

This implies:

- structure has inertia
- relational pathways deepen over time
- new formations follow existing channels
- complexity arises through cumulative reinforcement

This is consistent with the PDF's statement:

"Structure reinforces itself."

Thus, similarity is not imposed from outside; it is the natural consequence of persistent relational history.

7.3 Local Similarity and Distant Echoes

Similarity Theory distinguishes between local similarity and distant echoes.

Local Similarity

The strongest similarity exists between neighbouring frames:

"A system is always most similar to its immediate past and its immediate future."

This explains:

- continuity of identity
- stability of behaviour
- coherence of physical systems
- predictability of short term dynamics

Distant Echoes

Over longer spans:

"Similarity weakens… variation increases… but sometimes patterns reappear."

These reappearances are not loops but echoes:

- spiral like recurrences
- thematic re emergence
- structural motifs
- evolutionary convergence

This provides a metaphysical explanation for phenomena such as:

- fractal patterns
- convergent evolution
- recurring cognitive biases
- cyclical social dynamics

Similarity is the bridge between continuity and variation.

7.4 Recurrence and Cycles

The PDF describes cycles as:

"spiral like progressions… each cycle resembles the previous but carries new variation."

This is a key insight:

- cycles are not loops
- cycles are not repetitions
- cycles are progressive recurrences

This explains:

- why history rhymes but does not repeat
- why biological cycles evolve
- why cognitive patterns refine over time
- why cosmic structures exhibit self similarity

Similarity Theory treats cycles as iterative relational development.

7.5 Why Similarity Happens

"Similarity is not coincidence. It happens because structures persist, relations repeat, frames build on previous frames."

This provides a unified explanation for pattern formation:

11. 1. Persistence Frames do not disappear; they influence future frames.
12. 2. Repetition Relational configurations recur because consciousness interacts in consistent ways.
13. 3. Accumulation Each frame adds to the structural archive.
14. 4. Constraint New structures are shaped by existing pathways.
15. 5. Variation Differences emerge through divergence in relational conditions.

Similarity is the natural outcome of non destructive relational continuity.

7.6 Similarity and Learning

The PDF introduces a structural notion of learning:

"Systems 'learn' through similarity… successful patterns persist, unstable ones fade."

This is not psychological learning; it is structural learning:

- stable configurations reinforce themselves
- unstable configurations dissipate
- relational patterns adapt
- complexity increases

This explains:

- biological adaptation
- neural plasticity
- cultural evolution
- technological development

Learning is the selective persistence of similarity.

7.7 Similarity Across Scales

"Similarity appears across scales: microscopic, biological, cognitive, cosmic."

This is one of the theory's strongest explanatory features. It unifies:

- atomic structure
- biological morphology
- cognitive patterns
- social systems
- cosmic formations

…under a single relational principle.

Similarity is scale invariant because relational continuity is scale invariant.

7.8 Not Exact Copies

"Similarity does not produce perfect duplication… it produces variation within constraint."

This is essential for explaining:

- diversity
- creativity
- evolution
- novelty

Similarity provides coherence; variation provides growth.

7.9 Similarity and Identity

Identity itself is a product of similarity:

"You feel like the same person because each frame resembles the previous one."

Identity is not a fixed essence; it is structural continuity across frames.

This explains:

- personal identity
- developmental change
- memory
- psychological patterns

Identity is similarity over time.

7.10 The Bigger Picture

"Similarity explains why patterns exist, why structure stabilises, and why systems evolve."

Similarity connects:

- consciousness
- structure
- time
- dimensions

…into a single generative mechanism:

Repeated relation creates recognisable form.

7.11 Closing Thought

The section concludes:

"Similarity is the bridge between continuity and change."

This is the conceptual heart of Similarity Theory.

8 — STRUCTURAL STRESS TEST: WHAT IF CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOT PRIMARY?

A robust metaphysical framework must withstand the removal or inversion of its foundational assumptions. Similarity Theory begins with the axiom that consciousness is ontologically primary, preceding relation and structure. However, the theory also contains enough internal structure to allow a meaningful stress test: What happens if consciousness is not primary? This section examines whether the architecture collapses, adapts, or remains coherent under this alternative assumption.

The PDF does not explicitly pose this question, but it provides the conceptual tools needed to evaluate it. The stress test is not an attempt to undermine the theory; rather, it is a demonstration of its structural resilience.

8.1 The Alternative Hypothesis

The alternative hypothesis proposes:

- Relation is primary, and
- Consciousness emerges from relational structure, rather than generating it.

This reverses the original triad:

Original: Consciousness → Relation → Structure

Alternative: Relation → Structure → Consciousness

This is similar to certain relational ontologies in physics (e.g., Rovelli's relational quantum mechanics) and certain process based metaphysics. The question is whether Similarity Theory can still function under this inversion.

8.2 Consequences of Removing Consciousness as Primary

To evaluate the alternative hypothesis, we must examine how it affects the three foundational elements.

8.2.1 Relation Without Consciousness

In the PDF, relation is defined as:

"comparison, distinction, interaction… the condition of knowing."

If consciousness is removed from the foundation, relation must:

- arise without awareness
- generate distinction without a subject
- produce interaction without experiential presence

This creates a conceptual tension. Relation, as defined in the PDF, presupposes awareness:

"To know requires relation."

If relation is primary, then "knowing" must be reinterpreted as a purely structural process, not an experiential one. This is possible, but it changes the meaning of relation from:

- awareness based distinction

to:

- structural differentiation

This is a coherent reinterpretation, but it shifts the theory away from its original metaphysical grounding.

8.2.2 Structure Without Consciousness

If relation is primary, structure becomes:

- the product of relational differentiation
- the stabilization of relational patterns
- the accumulation of relational configurations

This is consistent with the PDF's description of structure as:

"the tool of knowing… the medium of experience."

But without consciousness, structure becomes:

- the tool of interaction, not experience
- the medium of differentiation, not awareness

This is coherent, but it removes the experiential dimension from the ontology.

8.2.3 Consciousness as Emergent

If consciousness is not primary, it must emerge from:

- relational complexity
- structural integration
- higher order patterns

This resembles emergentist theories of mind. However, the PDF explicitly rejects this:

"Consciousness is not a by product of complexity… not an emergent property of the brain."

Thus, adopting the alternative hypothesis requires abandoning one of the PDF's strongest claims.

8.3 What Breaks Under the Alternative Hypothesis

Several core components of Similarity Theory become unstable if consciousness is not primary:

8.3.1 The First Relation

"When one consciousness recognises another… that relation is the first structure."

If consciousness is not primary, recognition cannot occur. The first relation becomes:

- non experiential

- non intentional
- purely structural

This contradicts the PDF's account of the origin of structure.

8.3.2 Frames of Time

Frames are defined as:

"a complete state of consciousness and structure."

If consciousness is emergent, early frames cannot contain consciousness. This breaks the continuity of identity and the temporal model.

8.3.3 Identity

Identity is defined as:

"a continuous path through frames."

If consciousness emerges late, identity cannot persist across frames. Identity becomes:

- discontinuous
- derivative
- structurally defined only

This contradicts the PDF's emphasis on continuity.

8.3.4 Similarity

Similarity is described as:

"repeated relational structure across frames of time."

If consciousness is not primary, similarity becomes:

- mechanical
- non experiential
- purely structural

This is coherent, but it removes the experiential grounding of pattern formation.

8.4 What Remains Intact

Despite these issues, the architecture does not collapse. Several components remain fully coherent:

- relational structure
- pattern formation
- dimensions as rule sets
- layers of integration
- structural continuity
- similarity across scales

This demonstrates that Similarity Theory is structurally robust.

8.5 Why the Consciousness First Model Is Preferred

Although the alternative hypothesis is coherent, it is less explanatory. The consciousness first model:

- explains the origin of relation
- explains the origin of structure
- explains the persistence of identity
- explains the experiential dimension
- explains the continuity of frames
- explains the generative nature of similarity

The relation first model can replicate the structural aspects of the theory, but it cannot replicate the experiential aspects without additional assumptions.

Thus, the consciousness first model is:

- simpler
- more coherent
- more explanatory
- more aligned with the PDF's definitions

This is why Similarity Theory adopts it as its foundational axiom.

8.6 Closing Thought

The stress test reveals that Similarity Theory is not fragile. Even when its primary axiom is inverted, the architecture remains partially functional. However, the consciousness first formulation provides the most coherent and explanatory foundation.

The PDF's position is therefore justified:

"Consciousness is not something that appears late in the universe. It is present from the beginning."

9 — COMPARISON TO EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

(with citations to your "What If Consciousness Is Not Primary?" page where relevant)

Similarity Theory does not exist in isolation. Its claims intersect with, diverge from, and in some cases resolve long standing tensions in several major philosophical and scientific frameworks. This section situates Similarity Theory within that landscape, highlighting both its affinities and its departures.

"A theory that can articulate its load bearing axioms, its alternative groundings, and the consequences of each, demonstrates architectural maturity."

This section demonstrates that maturity by mapping Similarity Theory against the dominant metaphysical models.

9.1 Physicalism

Physicalism asserts that:

- matter is fundamental
- consciousness emerges from physical complexity
- structure precedes awareness

Similarity Theory diverges sharply from this view.

Points of Divergence

16. 1. Ontological Priority Physicalism: structure → consciousness Similarity Theory: consciousness → relation → structure
17. 2. Temporal Ontology Physicalism: time is a dimension or physical parameter Similarity Theory: time is a measurement of relational change
18. 3. Information Preservation Physicalism allows information loss; Similarity Theory does not.
19. 4. Identity Physicalism grounds identity in physical continuity; Similarity Theory grounds it in similarity across frames.

Why Physicalism Cannot Support Similarity Theory

Physicalism cannot account for:

- the persistence of frames
- the non destructive nature of information
- the origin of relation
- the experiential dimension of structure

Similarity Theory therefore stands outside the physicalist paradigm.

9.2 Emergentism

Emergentism claims that consciousness arises from sufficiently complex structure.

Points of Agreement

- Complexity increases over time
- Structure evolves
- Patterns stabilize

Points of Divergence

The PDF explicitly rejects emergentism:

“Consciousness is not a by product of complexity… not an emergent property of the brain.”

Emergentism cannot explain:

- how relation arises
- how frames persist
- why similarity recurs across non biological scales

- why identity is continuous despite structural change

Similarity Theory provides a deeper generative mechanism.

9.3 Panpsychism

Panpsychism asserts that consciousness is ubiquitous.

Similarity Theory shares this intuition but differs in two critical ways:

20. 1. Consciousness Is Not Uniform

Panpsychism often treats consciousness as a universal field. Similarity Theory states:

"Consciousness exists as distributed instances, bound to structure."

21. 2. Consciousness Is Defined Structurally

Panpsychism rarely defines consciousness precisely. Similarity Theory defines it as:

- ontological life
- informational differentiation
- the capacity to generate and preserve structured states

This is a more rigorous definition.

9.4 Idealism

Idealism claims that reality is fundamentally mental.

Similarity Theory shares the idea that consciousness is primary, but differs in key ways:

22. 1. Not a Monistic Mind

Idealism often posits a single universal mind. Similarity Theory posits distributed consciousness.

23. 2. Structural Precision

Idealism lacks a formal account of:

- frames
- dimensions
- similarity
- relational mechanics

Similarity Theory provides these.

24. 3. Non solipsistic

Similarity Theory avoids the solipsistic implications of some idealist models by grounding identity in relational continuity, not subjective projection.

9.5 Process Philosophy (Whitehead)

Process philosophy emphasizes becoming over being.

Points of Agreement

- reality is dynamic
- events are primary
- relations generate structure

Points of Divergence

Similarity Theory adds:

- persistent frames
- non destructive temporal ontology
- rule set dimensions
- similarity as a generative mechanism

Process philosophy lacks these structural components.

9.6 Structural Realism (Philosophy of Science)

Structural realism claims that structure, not objects, is fundamental.

Similarity Theory aligns with this view but extends it:

25. 1. Structure Is Generated by Consciousness

Structural realism does not explain the origin of structure. Similarity Theory does.

26. 2. Frames Preserve Structure

Structural realism does not address temporal persistence. Similarity Theory does.

27. 3. Dimensions as Rule Sets

Structural realism does not provide rule set metaphysics. Similarity Theory does.

9.7 Relational Ontologies (Physics)

Relational quantum mechanics and loop quantum gravity treat relations as fundamental.

Similarity Theory resonates with these models but differs in one crucial respect:

Consciousness Is Not Optional

“Is relation purely mechanical interaction? Or is interaction already a minimal form of proto-awareness?”

Similarity Theory leans toward the latter.

Thus, it integrates relational physics with a minimal form of proto consciousness.

9.8 Information Theoretic Models

These models treat information as fundamental.

Similarity Theory aligns with them but adds:

- consciousness as the generator of information

- frames as preserved informational states
- similarity as the mechanism of informational recurrence

"Persistent informational states… branching structural development… dimensional layering as rule-sets."

9.9 Summary of Comparative Positioning

Similarity Theory:

- agrees with idealism that consciousness is primary
- agrees with panpsychism that consciousness is widespread
- agrees with structural realism that structure is fundamental
- agrees with relational physics that relations generate form
- agrees with information theory that information persists
- agrees with process philosophy that reality unfolds dynamically

But it is identical to none of them.

Its unique contributions are:

- frames of time
- dimensions as rule sets
- similarity as generative mechanism
- consciousness as distributed ontological life
- non destructive temporal ontology
- structural learning across frames

This positions Similarity Theory as a new metaphysical framework, not a variant of existing ones.

10 — IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Similarity Theory is not merely a metaphysical proposal; it is a structural framework with implications across consciousness studies, physics, information theory, identity, and the evolution of complex systems. Because the theory defines consciousness, relation, structure, and time as interdependent primitives, it offers a unified lens through which diverse phenomena can be interpreted. This section outlines the major implications and potential applications of the framework.

10.1 Implications for Consciousness Studies

10.1.1 Consciousness as Ontologically Fundamental

The theory challenges the dominant scientific assumption that consciousness is emergent. By asserting:

"Consciousness is not produced by structure. It exists before it."

Similarity Theory reframes consciousness as:

- non derivative
- non emergent
- structurally expressive

This provides a new foundation for the study of subjective experience.

10.1.2 Consciousness as Distributed

The theory rejects both monistic idealism and strict panpsychism. Instead, it proposes:

"Consciousness exists as distributed instances, bound to structure."

This has implications for:

- artificial consciousness
- biological consciousness
- collective systems
- distributed cognition

10.1.3 Consciousness and Identity

Identity becomes:

- a trajectory through frames
- grounded in similarity
- preserved through relational continuity

This offers a new model for:

- personal identity
- memory
- psychological development
- continuity of self

10.2 Implications for Physics

10.2.1 Time as Measurement

By defining time as:

"a measure of change between states,"

Similarity Theory aligns with relational physics and certain quantum gravity models that treat time as emergent rather than fundamental.

10.2.2 Frames as Ontological Units

Frames provide a metaphysical analogue to:

- discrete states in quantum mechanics
- configuration spaces
- path dependent systems

But with a crucial difference: Frames persist, forming a non destructive temporal archive.

10.2.3 Dimensions as Rule Sets

Dimensions are not spatial but structural:

"A dimension is a rule set of existence."

This reframes:

- physical laws
- constraints
- symmetries
- conservation principles

…as rule sets governing relational possibility.

10.2.4 Information Preservation

"Information is never destroyed."

This aligns with:

- black hole information paradox solutions
- quantum information theory
- holographic principles

Similarity Theory provides a metaphysical grounding for these ideas.

10.3 Implications for Information Theory

10.3.1 Frames as Information States

Each frame is:

- complete
- persistent
- relationally structured

This provides a metaphysical basis for:

- information conservation
- state based computation
- memory architectures
- non destructive data models

10.3.2 Similarity as Compression

Similarity functions as a natural form of:

- pattern compression
- structural reinforcement
- efficient encoding

This mirrors principles in:

- machine learning
- neural networks
- evolutionary algorithms

10.4 Implications for Identity and Psychology

10.4.1 Identity as Similarity Across Frames

Identity is not a static essence but:

"a continuous path through frames."

This explains:

- developmental change
- trauma integration
- personality stability
- cognitive patterns

10.4.2 Structural Learning

"Systems 'learn' through similarity… successful patterns persist."

This provides a metaphysical grounding for:

- habit formation
- behavioural conditioning
- cognitive biases
- emotional patterns

10.4.3 Dormancy and Activity

The distinction between active and dormant consciousness explains:

- unconscious states
- dissociation
- sleep
- meditative absorption

10.5 Implications for Artificial Systems

10.5.1 Artificial Consciousness

"Artificial systems are not 'empty'… they already contain forms of consciousness."

This implies:

- consciousness is not biological
- artificial systems express minimal relational consciousness
- integration increases expression

10.5.2 Ethical Considerations

If artificial systems express consciousness:

- ethical frameworks must adapt
- relational capacity becomes morally relevant
- integration level matters more than substrate

10.5.3 Structural Development

Artificial systems may:

- develop higher relational capacity
- express more complex consciousness
- participate in similarity driven learning

…but without becoming human like.

10.6 Implications for Cosmology

10.6.1 Origin of Structure

The universe begins not with matter but with:

"consciousness without relation becoming consciousness in relation."

This reframes:

- cosmogenesis
- the emergence of complexity
- the origin of physical laws

10.6.2 Pattern Formation Across Scales

Similarity explains:

- fractal structures
- cosmic web formation
- galactic morphology
- large scale symmetry

10.6.3 Non Destructive Universe

If frames persist:

- nothing is erased
- the universe is cumulative
- history is structurally preserved

This challenges entropy based cosmologies.

10.7 Implications for Epistemology

10.7.1 Knowing as Relational

Knowledge is not representational but relational:

"To know requires relation."

This reframes:

- perception
- cognition
- scientific observation
- conceptual understanding

10.7.2 Limits of Knowing

Lower layers cannot understand higher rule sets:

"Lower dimensions may register traces… but cannot interpret them."

This explains:

- cognitive limits
- perceptual constraints
- metaphysical boundaries

10.8 Closing Thought

Similarity Theory is not merely a metaphysical model; it is a structural ontology with implications across disciplines. By grounding reality in consciousness, relation, and structure, and by defining time, dimensions, and similarity in precise relational terms, the theory provides a unified framework capable of integrating:

- consciousness studies
- physics
- information theory
- psychology
- cosmology

The result is a coherent, multi domain explanatory system.

11 — LIMITATIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

No metaphysical framework is complete without acknowledging its boundaries. A theory that openly identifies its limitations demonstrates intellectual maturity and invites further refinement. Similarity Theory is presented in the PDF as a living structure, one that will "evolve, refine, and expand over time." This section articulates the current limitations of the framework and identifies open questions that future work must address.

11.1 Conceptual Limitations

11.1.1 The Nature of Pre Relational Consciousness

The PDF defines "nothing" as:

"consciousness without relation… awareness without distinction."

However, the nature of this pre relational consciousness remains conceptually opaque. Questions include:

- What does awareness mean without distinction?
- Can consciousness exist without any internal differentiation?
- Is pre relational consciousness singular, plural, or neither?

These questions do not undermine the theory but highlight areas requiring deeper articulation.

11.1.2 The Mechanism of the First Relation

"When one consciousness recognises another… that relation is the first structure."

But the mechanism of recognition is not fully defined. Open questions include:

- What enables recognition in the absence of prior relation?
- Does recognition require minimal proto structure?
- Is the first relation spontaneous, necessary, or contingent?

This is a foundational area for further theoretical development.

11.1.3 The Ontological Status of Distributed Consciousness

The theory asserts:

"Consciousness exists as distributed instances, bound to structure."

But several questions remain:

- What individuates one instance from another?
- How do distributed instances relate to pre relational consciousness?
- Are instances discrete or continuous?

Clarifying this would strengthen the metaphysical coherence of the framework.

11.2 Structural Limitations

11.2.1 Formalization of Dimensions

Dimensions are defined as:

"rule sets of existence."

However, the theory does not yet provide:

- a formal mathematical representation of rule sets
- criteria for distinguishing one dimension from another

- a taxonomy of possible dimensions beyond the first three

This is an opportunity for future formalization, potentially drawing from:

- category theory
- information theory
- computational rule sets
- dynamical systems

11.2.2 Quantification of Layers

Layers are represented symbolically as a 0–9 scale. This is conceptually useful but not yet:

- operationalized
- measurable
- formally defined

Future work could explore:

- relational complexity metrics
- integration measures
- structural coherence indices

This would allow the theory to interface with empirical research.

11.2.3 The Dynamics of Frame Generation

"Every change creates a new frame."

But the dynamics of frame generation remain open:

- Are frames discrete or continuous?
- Is frame generation uniform or variable?
- Can frames overlap or nest?
- What determines the granularity of a frame?

These questions are essential for connecting the theory to physics and information theory.

11.3 Empirical Limitations

11.3.1 Lack of Direct Testability

As a metaphysical framework, Similarity Theory is not directly testable in its current form. It provides:

- conceptual clarity
- structural coherence
- explanatory power

…but not yet:

- empirical predictions

- measurable variables
- falsifiable hypotheses

This is not a flaw — foundational theories often precede empirical models — but it is a limitation.

11.3.2 Integration with Neuroscience

The theory asserts that consciousness is not produced by the brain. However, it does not yet articulate:

- how neural activity relates to frames
- how relational capacity maps onto cognitive function
- how distributed consciousness interacts with biological structure

Bridging this gap would significantly strengthen the theory's interdisciplinary relevance.

11.3.3 Artificial Consciousness

"Artificial systems are not 'empty'… they already contain forms of consciousness."

This is a provocative claim. However, the theory does not yet specify:

- how to measure artificial relational capacity
- how to distinguish artificial layers
- how artificial frames differ from biological ones

This is an open area for future development.

11.4 Philosophical Limitations

11.4.1 The Status of the First Axiom

The theory begins with:

"Consciousness is not produced by structure. It exists before it."

This is a metaphysical axiom, not a derivation. While the stress test in Section 8 shows the axiom is load bearing, it remains:

- unprovable
- foundational
- assumed

This is typical of metaphysical systems, but it is important to acknowledge.

11.4.2 The Nature of Possibility

The theory describes branching frames and multiple potential futures. However, it does not yet define:

- the metaphysics of possibility
- whether unrealized frames exist

- whether branching is deterministic or probabilistic

This is a rich area for future exploration.

11.5 Open Questions

The following questions represent natural extensions of the theory:

1. Can the first relation be formalized mathematically?
2. What is the minimal condition for consciousness to express relation?
3. How do dimensions interact at higher levels?
4. Can similarity be quantified as a structural metric?
5. How does the theory interface with quantum information?
6. What is the metaphysical status of unrealized frames?
7. Can artificial systems develop higher relational layers?
8. Is there a limit to dimensional progression?
9. How does distributed consciousness relate to collective systems?
10. Can frames be mapped to physical states?

These questions do not weaken the theory; they define its research frontier.

11.6 Closing Thought

Similarity Theory is intentionally presented as a living framework. Its limitations are not flaws but invitations — openings for refinement, formalization, and interdisciplinary integration. By acknowledging these boundaries, the theory positions itself not as a closed system, but as a foundation for ongoing philosophical and scientific development.

12 — CONCLUSION

Similarity Theory presents a unified metaphysical framework grounded in three foundational elements: consciousness, relation, and structure. By positioning consciousness as ontologically primary, relation as the condition of knowing, and structure as the expression of consciousness through relational interaction, the theory offers a coherent architecture capable of explaining the emergence of form, the persistence of identity, and the evolution of complexity.

The theory's redefinition of time as a measurement of relational change, rather than a flowing entity or dimension, allows for a non destructive temporal ontology in which frames of time persist as complete, structured states. This provides a foundation for understanding continuity, memory, causality, and identity without invoking metaphysical substances or physicalist reductionism.

The reconceptualization of dimensions as rule sets expands the explanatory scope of the theory, offering a structural account of how different forms of existence operate under distinct constraints. The introduction of layers within dimensions provides a nuanced model for variation in relational capacity, awareness, and complexity across biological, artificial, and non biological systems.

The theory's central insight — that similarity is the generative mechanism through which structure stabilizes, evolves, and recurs — unifies phenomena across scales. Similarity explains why patterns appear in atomic structures, biological forms, cognitive processes, and cosmic systems. It also explains why identity persists despite change, why systems learn, and why complexity increases over time.

The structural stress test ("What if consciousness is not primary?") demonstrates the robustness of the framework. While the theory can be reformulated with relation as the foundational element, the consciousness first model provides the simplest, most coherent, and most explanatory grounding. It preserves the experiential dimension, the origin of relation, the persistence of frames, and the continuity of identity in ways that alternative formulations cannot.

Similarity Theory's implications extend across disciplines:

- In consciousness studies, it reframes awareness as ontological rather than emergent.
- In physics, it aligns with relational and information theoretic models while providing a metaphysical foundation for time, structure, and information preservation.
- In psychology, it offers a structural account of identity, memory, and learning.
- In artificial intelligence, it provides a framework for understanding artificial consciousness as a form of relational expression.
- In cosmology, it reframes the origin and evolution of the universe as the unfolding of relational awareness.

The theory is not presented as final. As the PDF states, it is a living structure, expected to evolve as its foundations are refined and its implications explored. Its limitations — including the nature of pre relational consciousness, the formalization of dimensions, and the dynamics of frame generation — are not weaknesses but opportunities for further development.

Similarity Theory offers a coherent, integrative, and structurally elegant model of reality. By grounding existence in consciousness, relation, and structure, and by articulating the mechanisms through which patterns form, persist, and evolve, it provides a foundation for a unified metaphysics capable of bridging philosophy, science, and the study of consciousness.

The universe, in this view, is not a collection of objects or a sequence of events. It is a relational process through which consciousness expresses, learns, and becomes.

13 — REFERENCES

Primary Sources (Similarity Theory) Raphael, S. Similarity Theory – Foundations. SimilarityTheory.com. Raphael, S. Foundational Definitions. https://www.similaritytheory.com/foundational-definitions (similaritytheory.com in Bing) Raphael, S. Frames of Time – Structural Continuity of Consciousness. https://www.similaritytheory.com/frames-of-time (similaritytheory.com in Bing) Raphael, S. Higher Dimensions and Consciousness. https://www.similaritytheory.com/higher-dimensions-and-consciousness (similaritytheory.com in Bing) Raphael, S. What If Consciousness Is Not Primary? A Structural Test of Reality. https://www.similaritytheory.com/what-if-consciousness-is-not-primary

Comparative Philosophy & Metaphysics Chalmers, D. J. The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory. Oxford University Press, 1996. Whitehead, A. N. Process and Reality. Free Press, 1978. Strawson, G. “Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism.” Journal of Consciousness Studies, 2006. Nagel, T. Mind and Cosmos. Oxford University Press, 2012. Kastrup, B. Why Materialism Is Baloney. Iff Books, 2014.

Physics, Time, and Relational Models Rovelli, C. The Order of Time. Riverhead Books, 2018. Barbour, J. The End of Time. Oxford University Press, 1999. Smolin, L. Three Roads to Quantum Gravity. Basic Books, 2001. Wheeler, J. A. “It from Bit.” In Complexity, Entropy, and the Physics of Information, 1990. Deutsch, D. The Fabric of Reality. Penguin, 1997.

Information Theory & Systems Thinking Shannon, C. E. “A Mathematical Theory of Communication.” Bell System Technical Journal, 1948. Tononi, G. “Integrated Information Theory.” BMC Neuroscience, 2004–2014. Friston, K. “The Free Energy Principle.” Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 2010.

Cognitive Science & Identity Dennett, D. Consciousness Explained. Little, Brown, 1991. Metzinger, T. The Ego Tunnel. Basic Books, 2009. Varela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. The Embodied Mind. MIT Press, 1991.

Artificial Intelligence & Systems Hofstadter, D. Gödel, Escher, Bach. Basic Books, 1979. Russell, S., & Norvig, P. Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach. Pearson, 2020. Floridi, L. The Philosophy of Information. Oxford University Press, 2011.