

Welcome to this week's presentation & conversation hosted by the **Canadian Association for the Club of Rome**, a Club dedicated to intelligent debate & action on global issues.

The views and opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the speaker & do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of CACOR.

The Root (Meta) Challenge of the 21st Century: Why Don't We Get It?

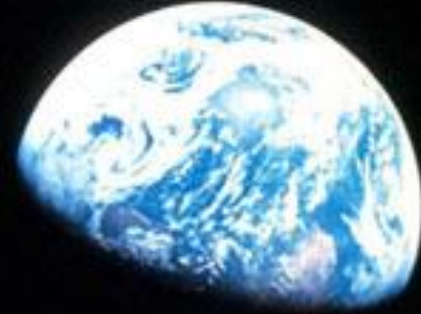
Biography: Ruben was born and raised in Calgary, AB by strong prairie women; educated at Queen's University, Kingston, Queen's Theological College, & United Theological College, Bangalore, India. This enabled me to become a Canadian pioneer of serious futures studies & strategic foresight & to pursue my passion to make reliable sense of our times. I have taught at Queen's & the University of Calgary; worked for a host of clients in & beyond Canada; conceived & created new institutions. Today, I am Executive Director of Foresight Canada & a member of the Board of both Ralph Connor Memorial United Church and CACOR.

Description: We know that our apprehension of reality determines our responses to it. Our choice is to "understand or die." Given this, best we get serious about learning to see, explore, and reflexively understand & test the adequacy of our routine ways of understanding. We should pay careful attention to the work of surfacing & exploring our unconscious & implicit understandings of reality, the Earth, life, our species, our cultures, ourselves & the root challenges of our times. I shall offer reasons why we who are Modern Techno-Industrial (MTI) persons in MTI families, communities & cultures should be especially cautious. We continue to naively assume that the future belongs to us, when even now it is slipping through our fingers, I shall explain why & what options are open to us.

CACOR acknowledges that we all benefit from sharing the traditional territories of local Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, & Inuit in Canada) and their descendants.



Website: Canadiancor.com
YouTube: Canadian Association for the Club of Rome
2025 March 5, Zoom #235



The Root Meta-Challenge

Of the 21st Century:

Why don't we (MTI) Get It?

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March 5, 2025
CACOR
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A Vitally Important Insight

Our Apprehension of Reality Shapes Our Responses to It



“Our perspective on the world determines how we behave in the world.”

Fouts and Jensvold, *Probing Human Origins*, 2002

Our Apprehension of Reality Shapes Our Responses to It

If misapprehend, then NOT Respond well.



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Our Apprehension of Reality Shapes Our Responses to It

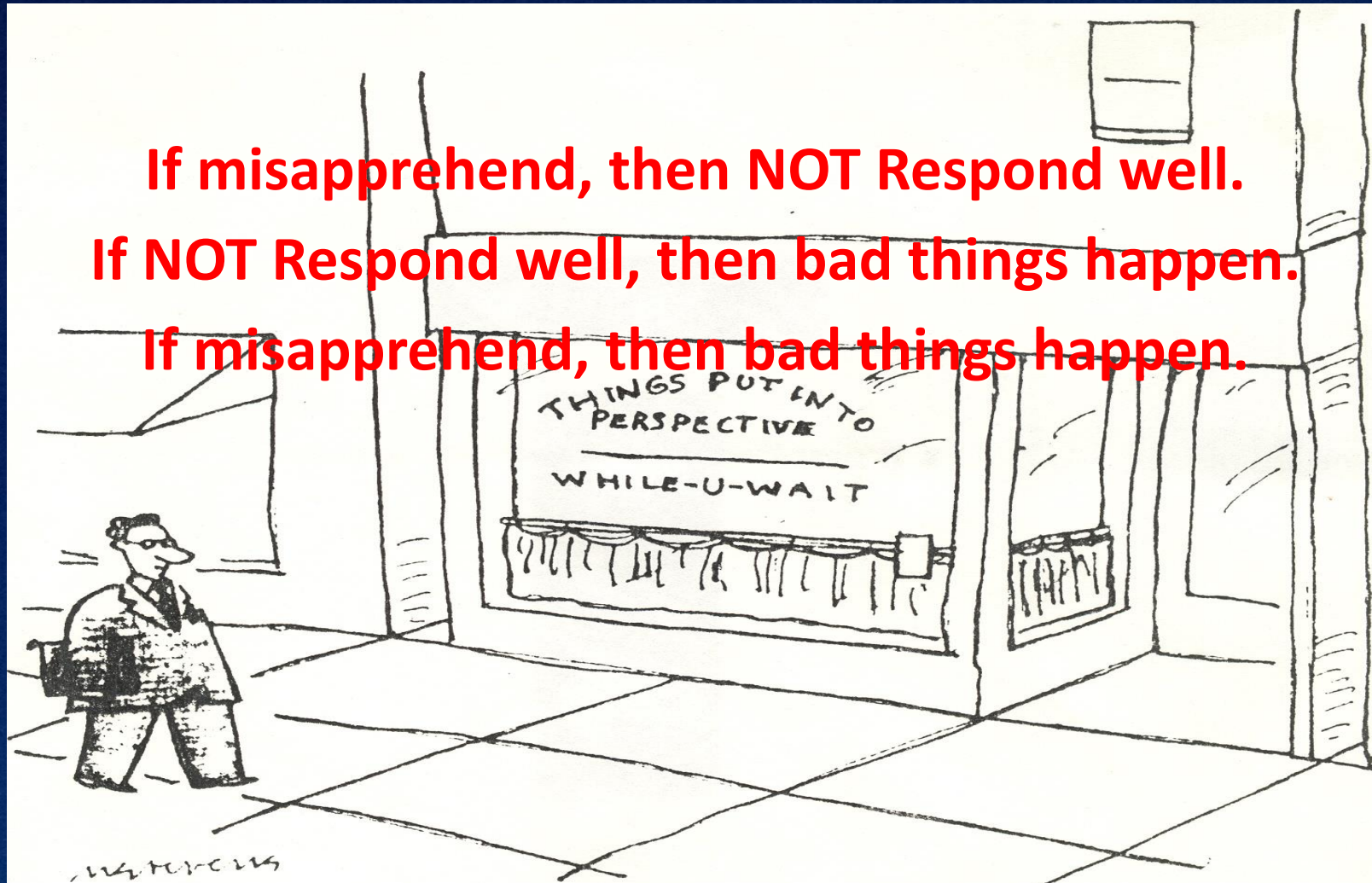


**If misapprehend, then NOT Respond well.
If NOT Respond well, then bad things happen.**

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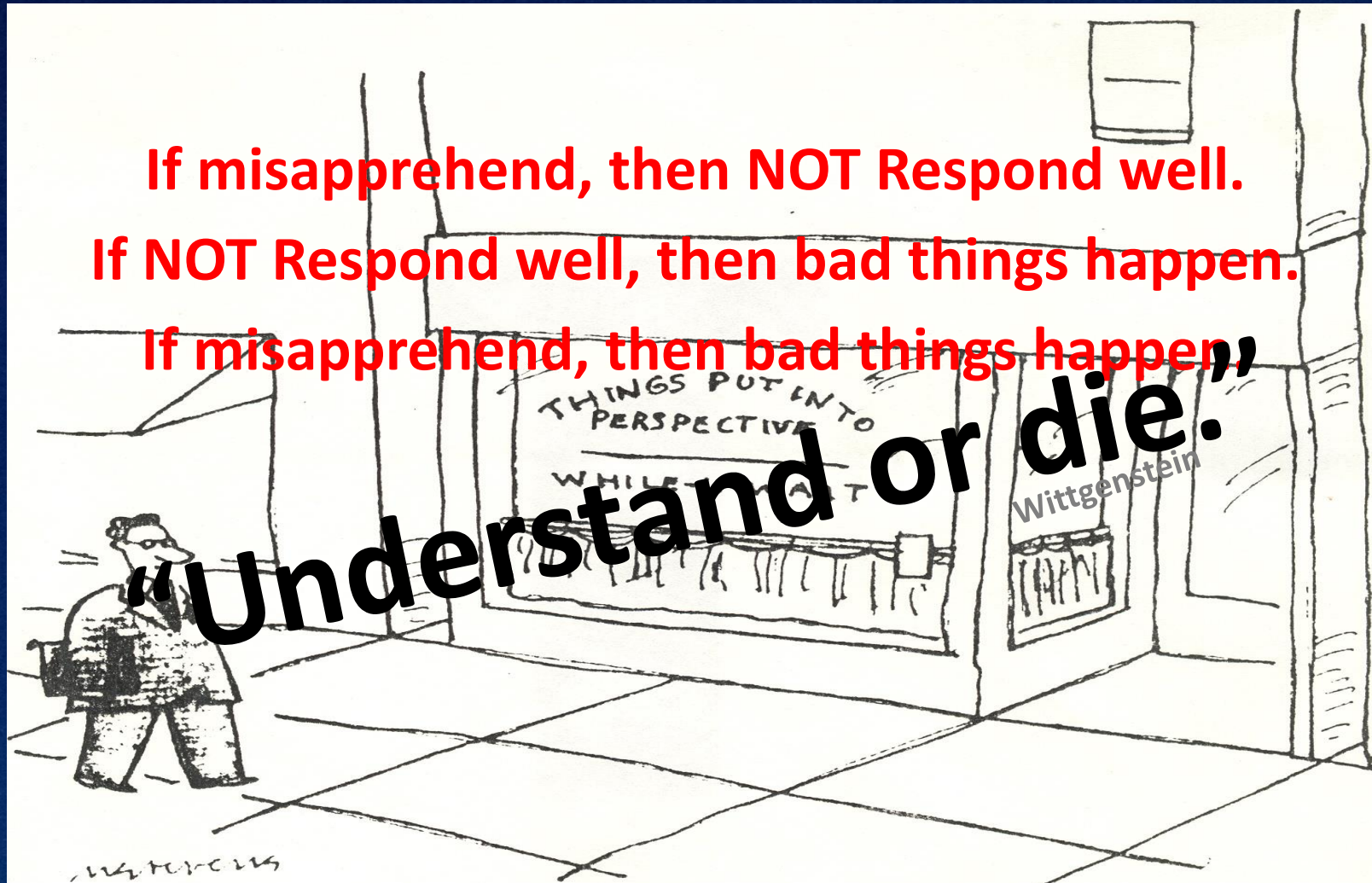
If NOT Respond well, then bad things happen.

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My Views Today

What Do We (MTI) NOT Understand?

Situation:

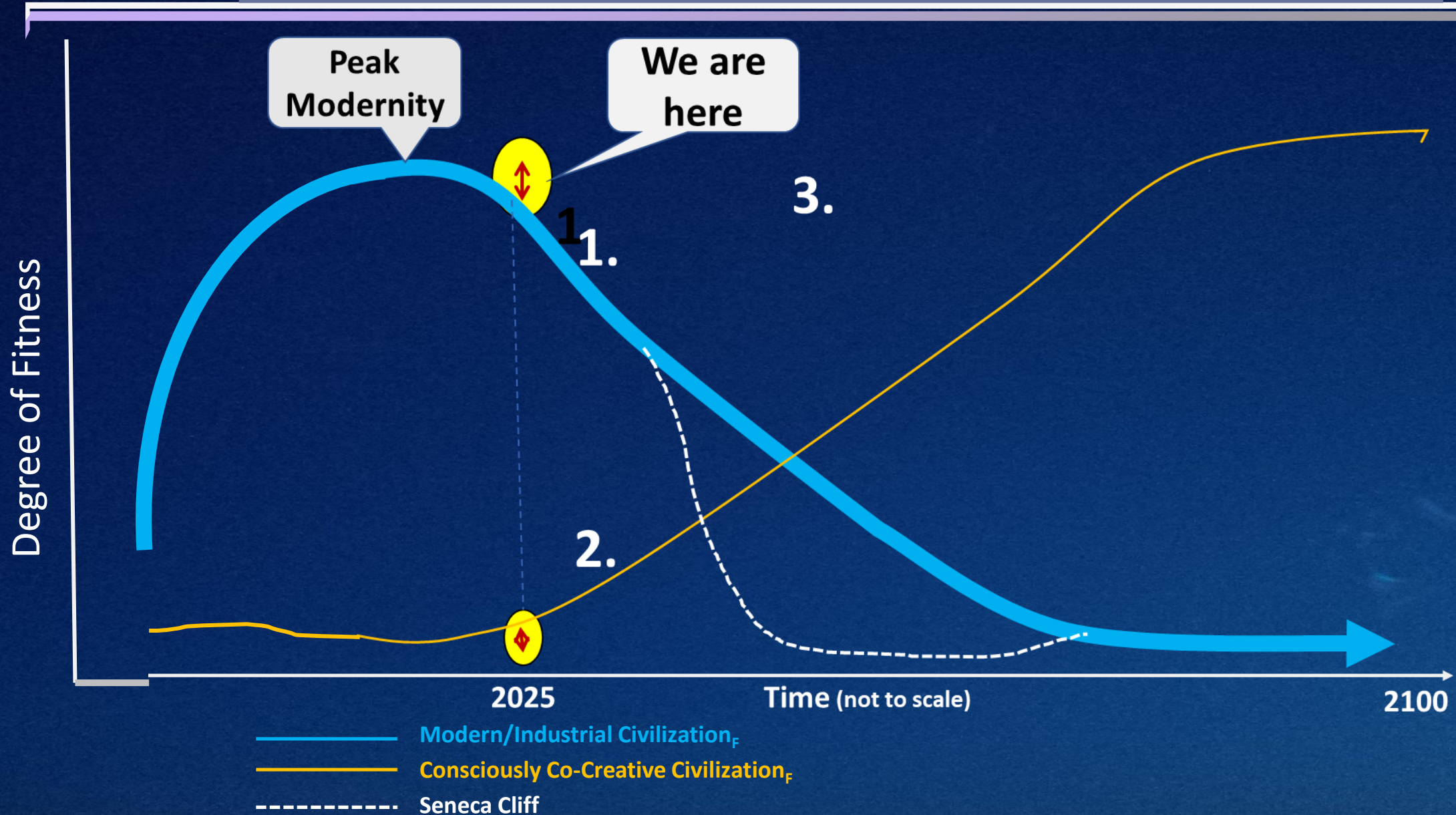
We do not understand that our Modern Techno-Industrial (MTI) form of civilization is already past its peak, in a state of increasing disintegration (a.k.a. simplification, collapse) [see Rees, Bendell, de Oliveira, Hagens] and will not survive the 21st Century.

Today, no MTI culture, not even one significant MTI institution, “gets it” that this is the case and has openly committed itself to re-organizing, inside and out, in order to come to understand and respond with imagination and courage.

Question:

Why? How do we account for this apparently appalling situation within MTI cultures – the very cultures which see themselves to be smartest, most science-literate problem solvers in human history?

We (MTI) Cannot Imagine This Really is Our Situation



We (MTI) Cannot Imagine that This Can Be the Case

After 1,000 years of intensifying development, it is becoming clear that the MTI way of apprehending reality, presenting ourselves to it and responding to reality (1) is not sustainable and (2) cannot be made to be sustainable. MTI cultures **CANNOT** be “fixed” or “solved”.

Therefore, our only hope is to learn what it will take for us as MTI persons, families, communities, and jurisdictions to transcend our formation as MTI by consciously cooperating with our own evolution at every scale, and this on the basis of new apprehensions of, and responses to, reality.

We (MTI) Cannot Imagine This Summary Conclusion

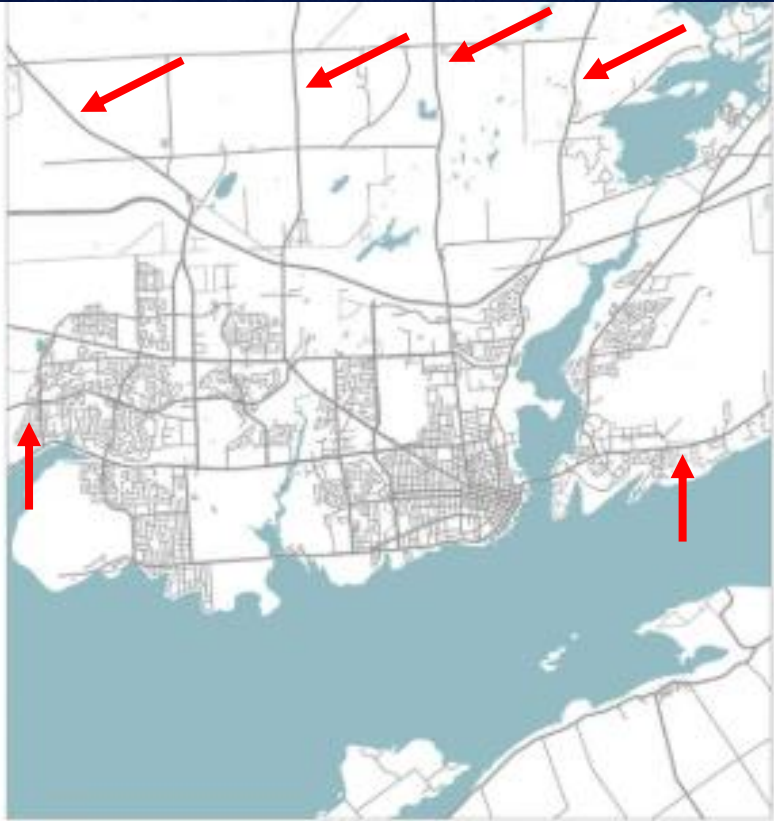
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**No New, Updated,
Revised, Fixed version
of MTI cultures will Do**

The Kind of Journey We are On

Observation



KINGSTON

It is possible to make the case that MTI cultures have no long-term future in at least two fundamentally different ways:

1. By using STEM. Measure “objective” features and runs the numbers.
2. By using the skills of the humanities. Sensitive observation, deep thought, deeper reflexivity, deeper yet meta-reflexivity.

Question

Could you write a reasonably acceptable (C+) paper on the ontological and epistemological presuppositions (OEP) of the MTI form of civilization and how they are similar to and different from the OEP of other forms of civilization and why it matters?

Why Is This Important?

If the OEP of MTI cultures can be shown to be inadequate in light of the best we now know about reality, life on Earth, including humanity, then it can reasonably be concluded that MTI cultures are ill-founded ; that “the centre cannot hold;” that MTI cultures will disintegrate as it dawns on folks that there is no solid ground under their feet.

We Begin Our Journey in Mumbai

IFF In India 2006



IFF In India 2006



**“Only what you
cannot see.”**

IFF In India 2006



Only what you
cannot see, yet.

In a MTI Version of a Wittgensteinian Fly-bottle



What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein —

Philosophical Investigations pt. 1, sec. 309 (1953)



Required: An Escape Hatch + Evolved Maturity



What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.

— Ludwig Wittgenstein

Escape hatch

Philosophical Investigations pt. 1, sec. 309 (1953)



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An Invitation to Risk A New Apprehension of Reality

"Scientific knowledge, originally seen to make possible the prediction and manipulation of nature, appears now to be pointing us toward a new relationship with the natural world based on sensitive observation and participation, rather than control."

Brian Goodwin
Complexity Matters:
A Reintroduction to Complexity,
2017

Living into Our Civilizational Journey

“I have spent much of the last forty years endeavouring to understand world views other than those we in the West have inherited; and in the last several years I have been particularly concerned with the question of what is involved in the endeavour to understand, and to help others understand, an outlook different from the one that one already has.

One of the conclusions to which I have come is that in order to understand a different view – especially if it be radically different and/or profound, comprehensive, humane – *one must oneself become a different sort of person.*”

Wilfred Cantwell Smith
Letter to Butch Nelson
Mid 1980s

MTI Pushes Back

MTI Cultures are Deeply Committed to Being MTI

- ❖ MTI is good to go. Troubled, but good to go.
- ❖ We are not only the best way of living developed to date, we are the best possible.
- ❖ MTI cultures are the best **problem solvers** history has even seen.
- ❖ Science-enabled technologies and free markets are the key. Given their track record we must *“dance with the ones who brung ya’.”* (The Hon. Brian Mulroney)
- ❖ Any decent human future will be an improved version of MTI.
- ❖ Those who say otherwise are spreading “fake news.”
- ❖ Those who “Cry wolf” can be safely ignored.
- ❖ Let’s get back to **solving our problems** and creating our preferred future.

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- ❖ Any decent human future will be an improved version of MTI.
- ❖ The above mentioned “Fatal Pivotal Situation/Question” is fake news.
- ❖ Those who “Cry wolf” can be safely ignored.
- ❖ Let’s get back to **solving our problems** and creating our preferred future.

All problematic conditions can be understood and dealt from within the MTI frames of reference.

Backed by the Official MTI Story of Deep History

As a species we who are Homo sapiens have faced many profound challenges and a handful of existential threats over our 350,000 year-long journey. Before we became modern, we were at great risk because we could not tease out the real objective truth about Earth, other species, and ourselves from our inherited cultural traditions, myths, superstitions, and prejudices, from our theological suppositions and from village gossip. Nor could we protect those we loved from the ravages of weather and disease. However, now that we have the science of the Enlightenment we can wrestle truth to the ground and own it. With the technologies which that science enables, we can also own the Earth. Our success over the past 500 years makes this clear. Happily, today, we who are MTI peoples and cultures know what needs to be done and have (or will soon have) the capacities, human and technological, to do it. Therefore, our core work in the 21st century is to find the leadership, political will, science-based technologies, and money which will enable us to extend our MTI ways of being and living to and even beyond the ends of the Earth, and as we do create a future which is more just, equitable, and inclusive.

Ruben Nelson, "Where are We in History: Reflections on the New Core Work of the 21st Century." 2024 (in print)



GLOBAL SOLUTIONS SUMMIT 2024

MAY
6-7

Leaders in all sectors
Promise they are the
“solution”
To our problems.

MOVING BEYOND THE CRISIS:
MOBILIZING CHANGE
FOR GLOBAL PROSPERITY

The Only Official MTI Answer is NOT Surprising

- ❖ MTI is good to go. Troubled, but good to go.
- ❖ We are not only the best way of working developed to date, we are the best possible.
- ❖ **These messages overwhelm ALL messages at odds with the "Official MTI Story."**
- ❖ MTI cultures are the best problem solvers history has even seen.
- ❖ Science-enabled technologies and free markets are the way. **1% of the Global GDP (\$210t) is explicitly devoted to reinforcing the MTI Story.**
- ❖ **The MTI Story is echoed/amplified thousands of times each day in every sector.**
- ❖ Any decent human future will be an improved version of MTI.
- ❖ The above mentioned "Focal Puzzling Situation/Question" is fake news.
- ❖ Those who "cry wolf" can be safely ignored.
- ❖ Let's get back to solving our problems and creating our preferred future.

WHY?

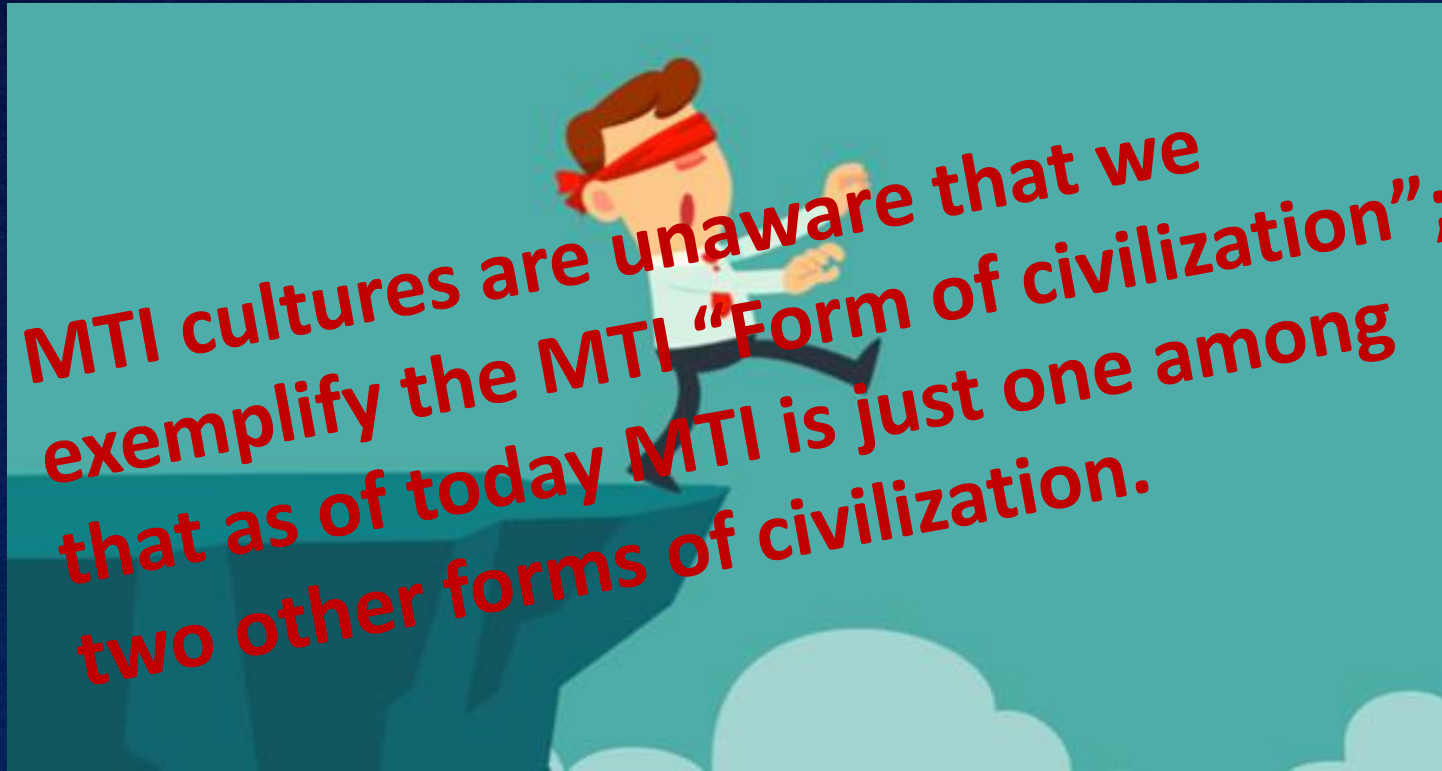
WHY? MTI is “Context Blind,” “Reality Blind”



“Nothing good ever came out of a blind spot.”

Louise Penny
Kingdom of the Blind
2018

WHY? MTI is “Context Blind,” “Reality Blind”



“Nothing good ever came out of a blind spot.”

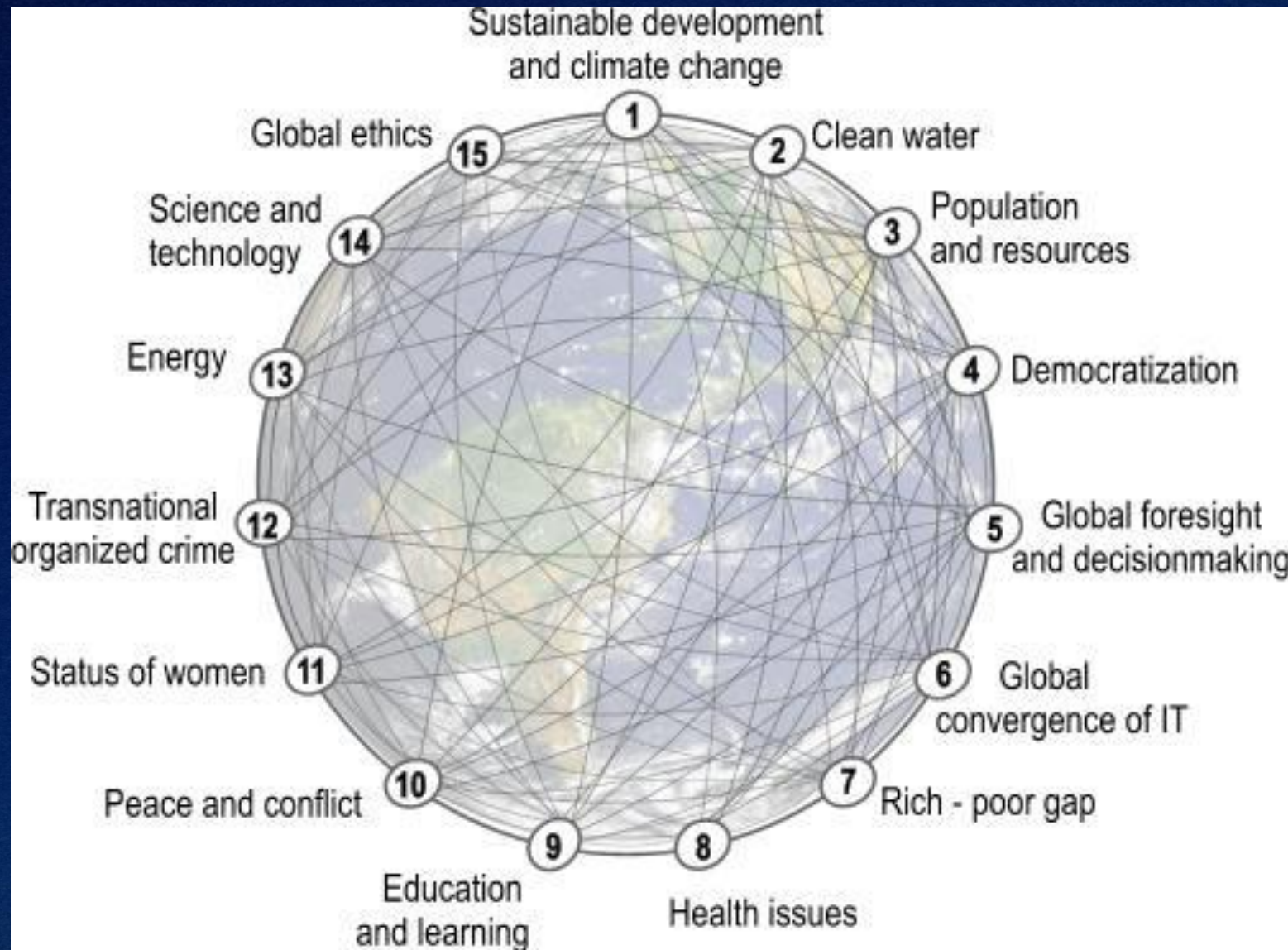
Louise Penny
Kingdom of the Blind
2018

CSER



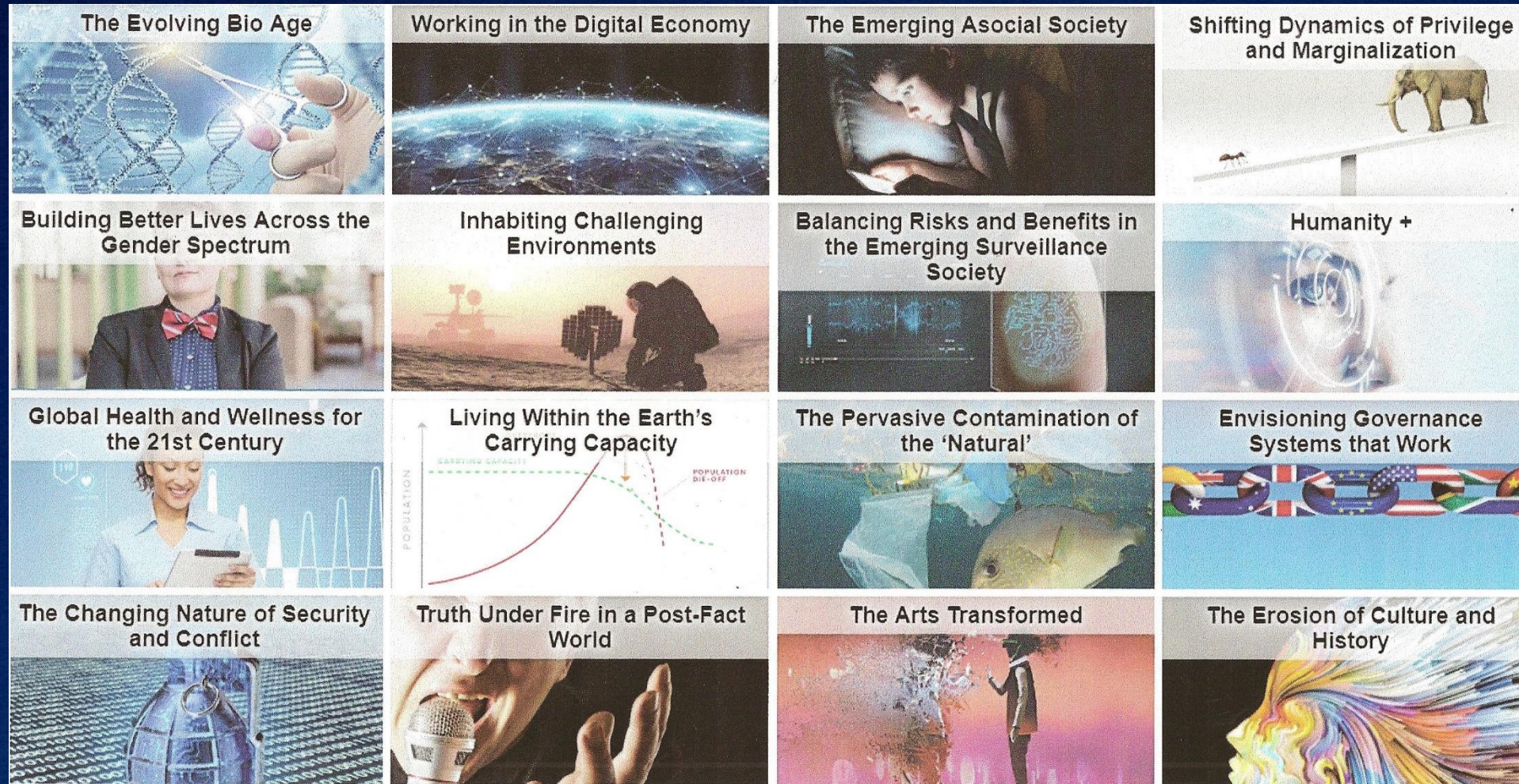
We are dedicated to the study and mitigation of risks that could lead to human extinction or civilisational collapse

Blind to Civilizational_F Overshoot

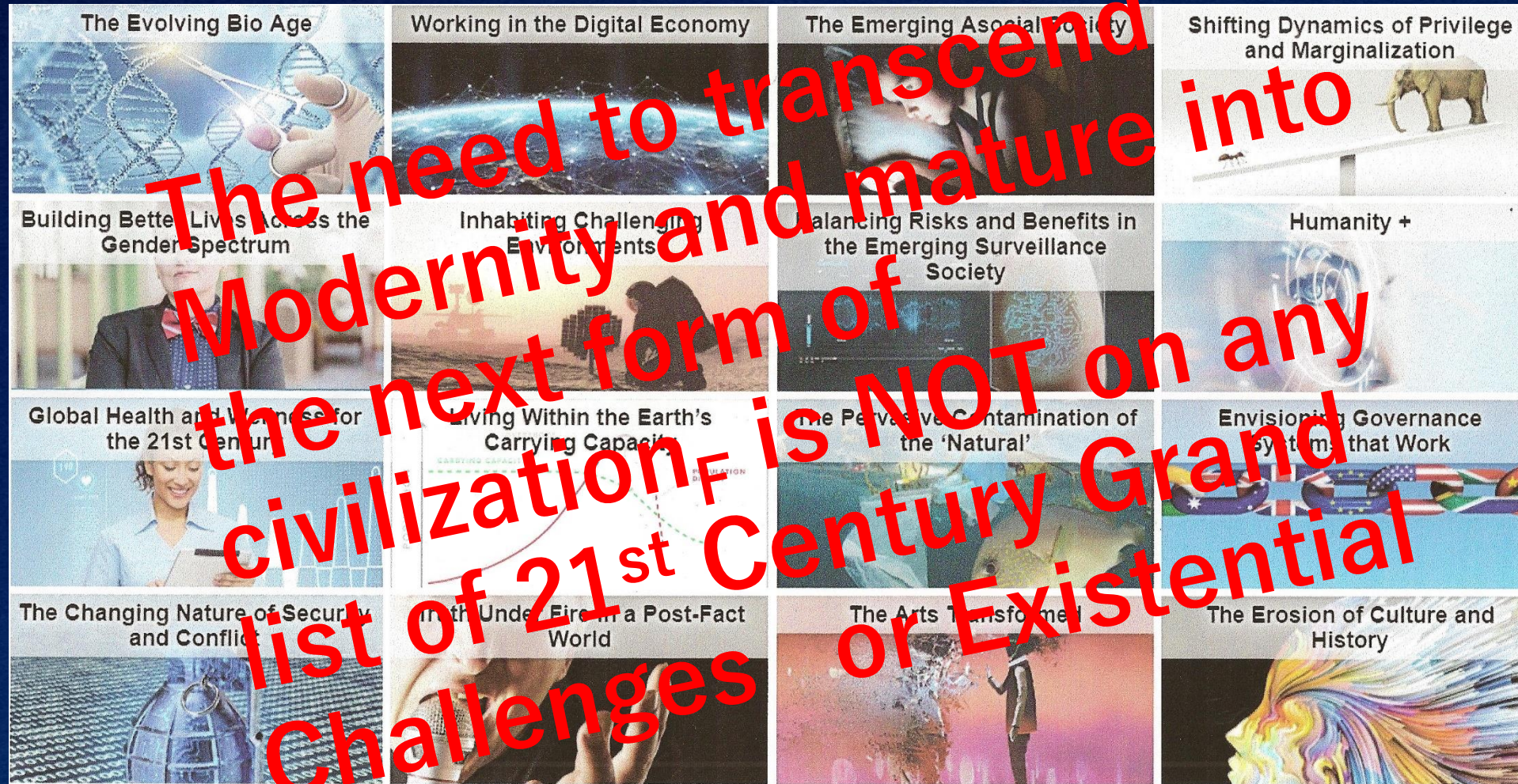


The Millennium Project
GLOBAL FUTURES STUDIES & RESEARCH

We Do Not See MTI to be the Root Source of Our Crises



Blind to Self-Inflicted Collapse at Every Scale



Why “Reality Blind”? MTI is NOT Routinely Reflexive

MTI requires us to be:

- Logical
- Empirical
- Rational
- Critically minded
- ~~Routinely Reflexive~~



“Nothing good ever came out of a blind spot.”

Louise Penny
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2018

Why is MTI NOT Routinely Reflexive?

MTI requires us to be:

- Logical
- Empirical
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- ~~Routinely Reflexive~~



“Nothing good ever came out of a blind spot.”

Our MTI interpretation of Reality does not require reflexivity in order to know reliably.

Louise Penny
Kingdom of the Blind
2018

We Need to “Get Real”

Caution: Things are about to Get Deep

DEEP Listening

DEEP Hope

DEEP Insight

DEEP Time

DEEP Transformation

DEEP Learning

DEEP Knowing

DEEP Silence

DEEP Dives

DEEP Trouble

DEEP Adaptation

DEEP Darkness

DEEP Love

DEEP Faith

Our Apprehension of Reality Shapes Our Responses to It



“Our perspective on the world determines how we behave in the world.”

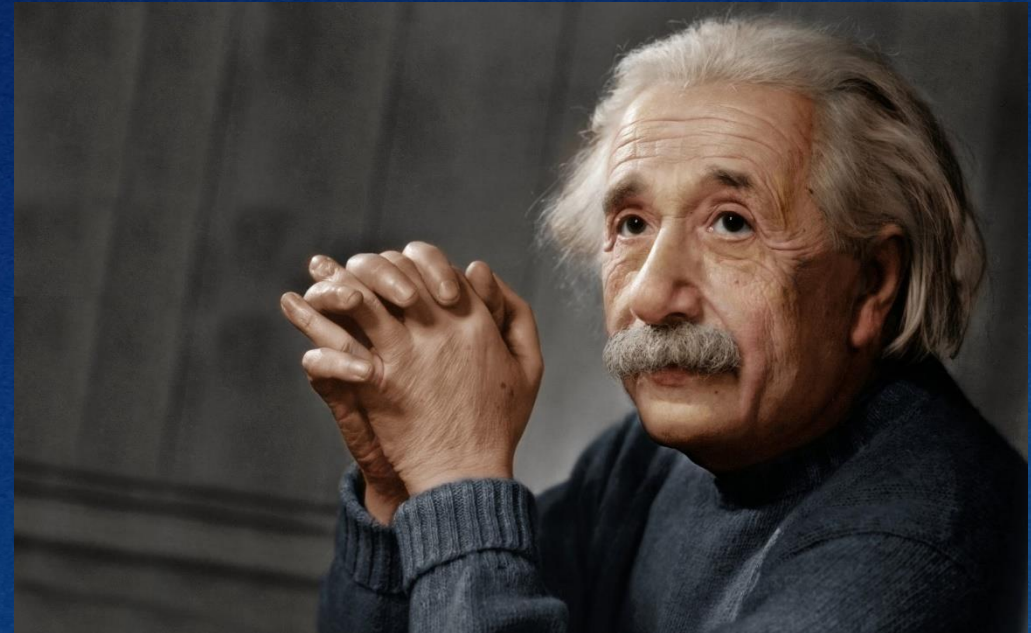
Fouts and Jensvold, *Probing Human Origins*, 2002

What Mental Models Do We Need?

- **Meta Perspectives on Levels of Generality**
- Reality that Allows Reasonably Coherent Alternative Apprehensions
 - **Alternative Forms of Civilization**
 - **Causal Layers of Consciousness and Culture**
 - **Ontological and Epistemological Presuppositions**

We (MTI) Cannot See this Applies to Us (MTI)

We cannot use the same kinds/levels of thinking that got us into a mess to get us out of it.



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Reality and Our Relationship to Reality

1. The reality we live in, in its totality, requires interpretation by H. sapiens.
2. Over long periods H. sapiens can develop reasonably coherent, broad and inclusive interpretations that are widely shared and accepted.
3. Each way of construing reality is called a **“Form of Civilization.”***
4. All human cultures, exemplify one (or more) forms of civilization.
5. To date, reality has been construed with extraordinary coherence by H. sapiens in three quite different ways.
6. Each **Form of Civilization** is defined and constrained by its Ontological and Epistemological presuppositions (OEP).

- *“Forms of civilization” is a concept not yet in good currency. I coined it at a futures conference at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland in 2007.*

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A New Level of Generality for Civilization_F

Higher
Still

Family

Human Civilization
All humankind at a given time.

Higher

Genera

Forms of Civilization_F
*Provides a “root paradigm” of reality
and persons in reality.*

New
Concept
&
New
Level

Lower

Species

Cultures, as exemplars
*A way to live within & embody the “root
paradigm” of a form of civilization.*

Integral
sense of
'culture'

Lower
Still

Sub-
Species

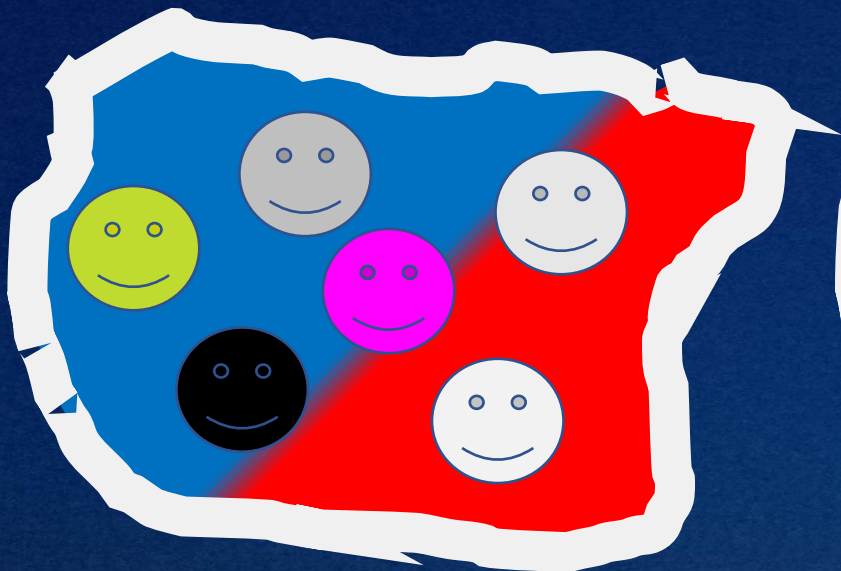
Sub-cultures

NOTE: Drop the concept of 'civilizations'.

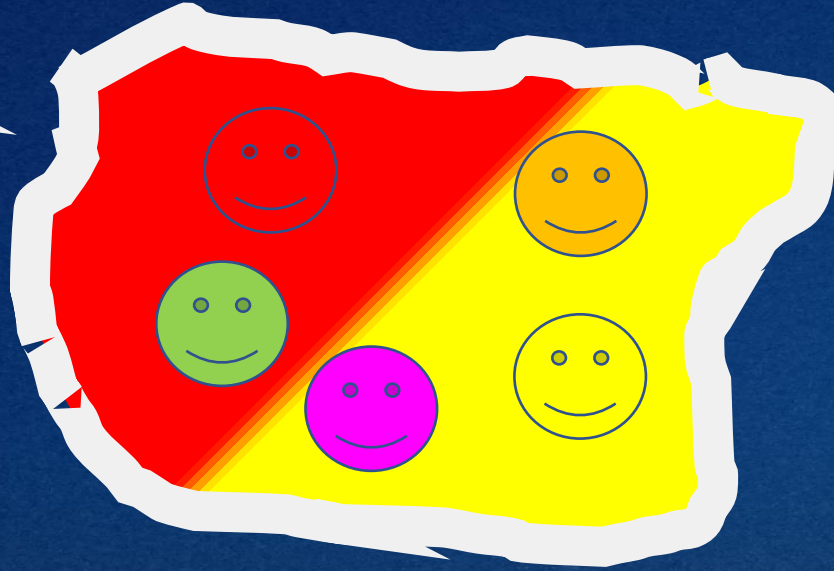
'Form of Civilization'_F

A civilization_F is a shared human way of knowing/
experiencing/being in and responding to reality and being human,
the core paradigm of which is fundamentally different from the
core paradigm of a different form of civilization_F.

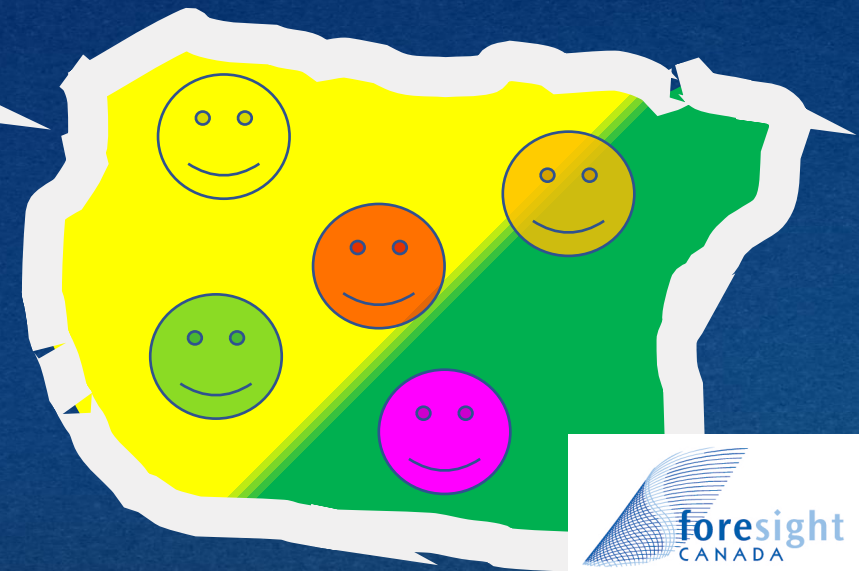
Indigenous



Settled Agricultural



Modern Techno-Industrial



Core Paradigm of a Civilization_F

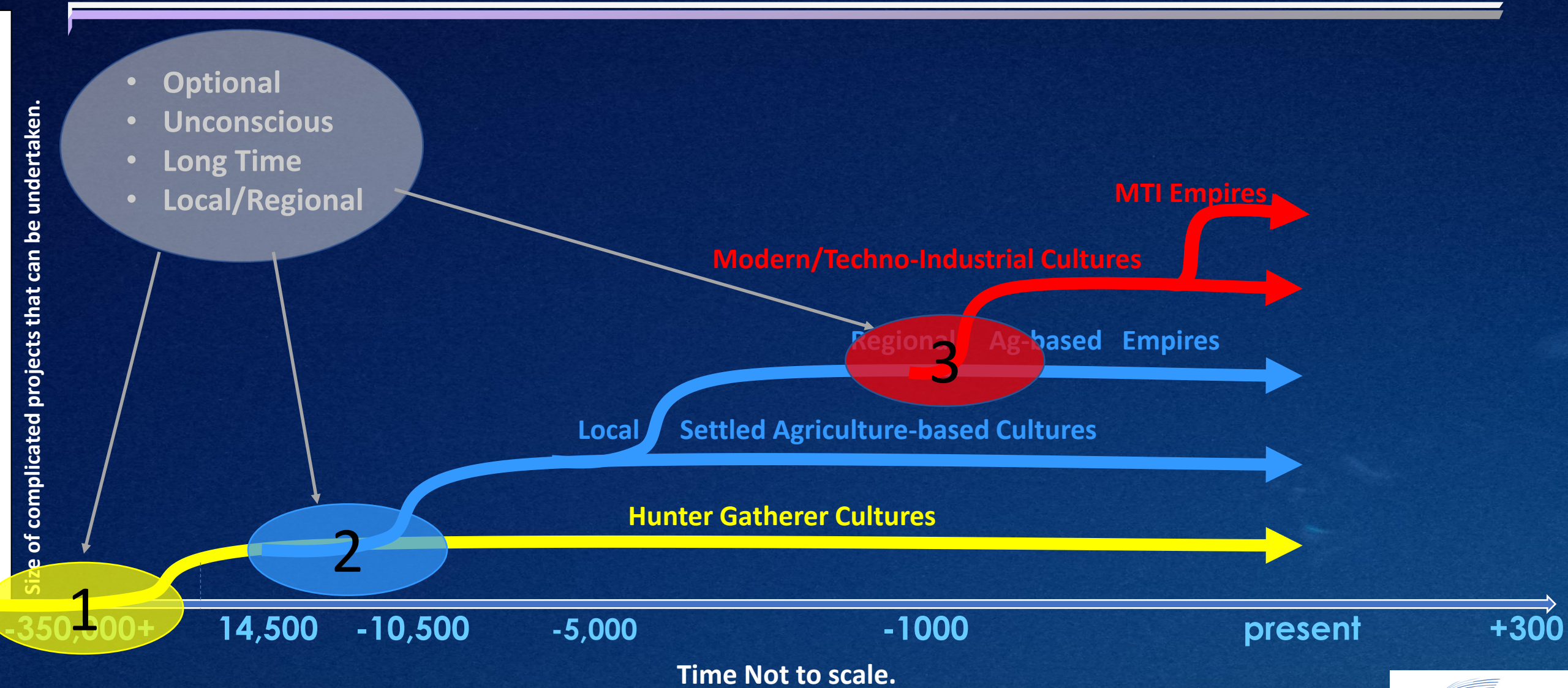
The majority of those who live in cultures which exemplify the same civilization_F unconsciously share the ways they know, imagine, think things through and conduct themselves regarding:

- The nature of reality.
- The nature and agency of human persons.
- The relationship of persons to reality.

Each civilization_F is one possible, reasonably coherent way of *“being/doing the human and the Earth as beings on/in the Earth.”*

The trajectory of history changes when a new civilization_F emerges!

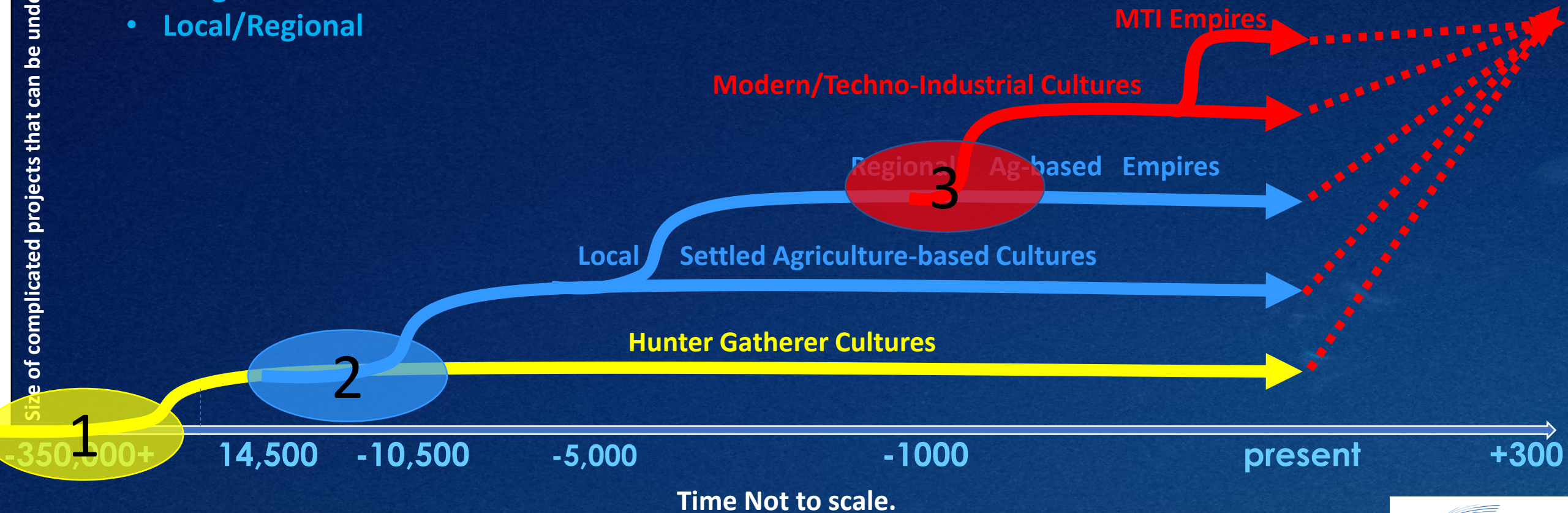
A Summary of Our Journey as H. sapiens



Official MTI "Globalization" Project/Fantasy

- Optional
- Unconscious
- Long Time
- Local/Regional

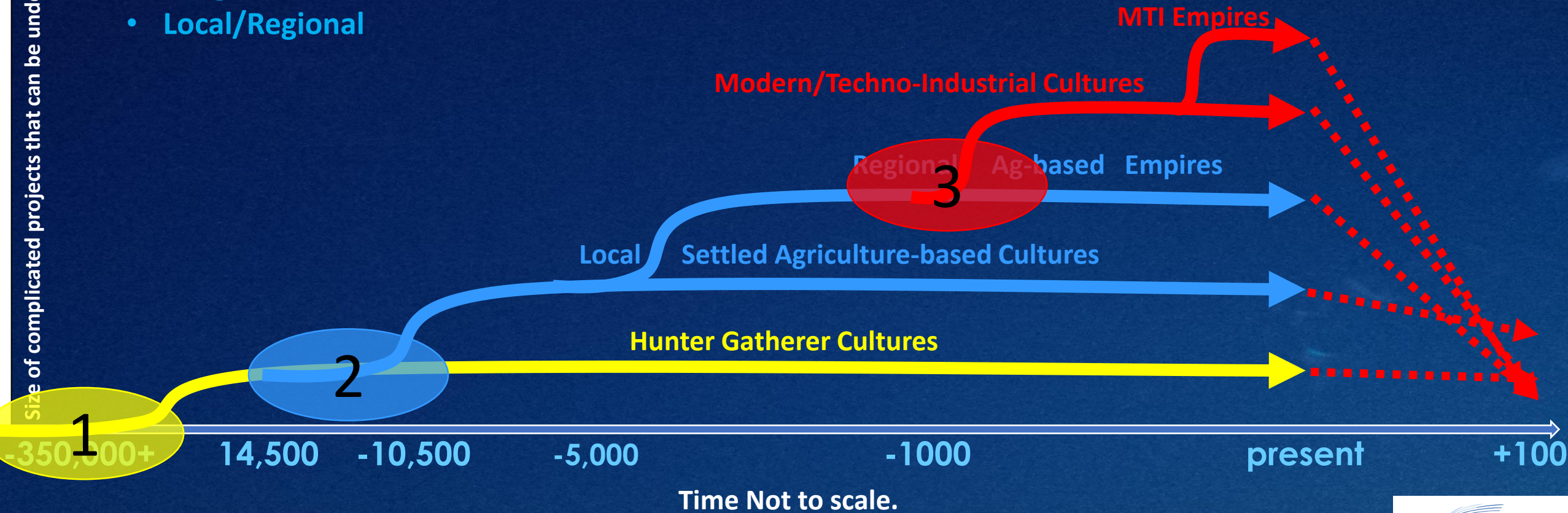
Size of complicated projects that can be undertaken.



The Emerging Voice of Collapsology

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Size of complicated projects that can be undertaken.



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 - Ontological and Epistemological Presuppositions

A Model: Causal Layers of Consciousness and Culture

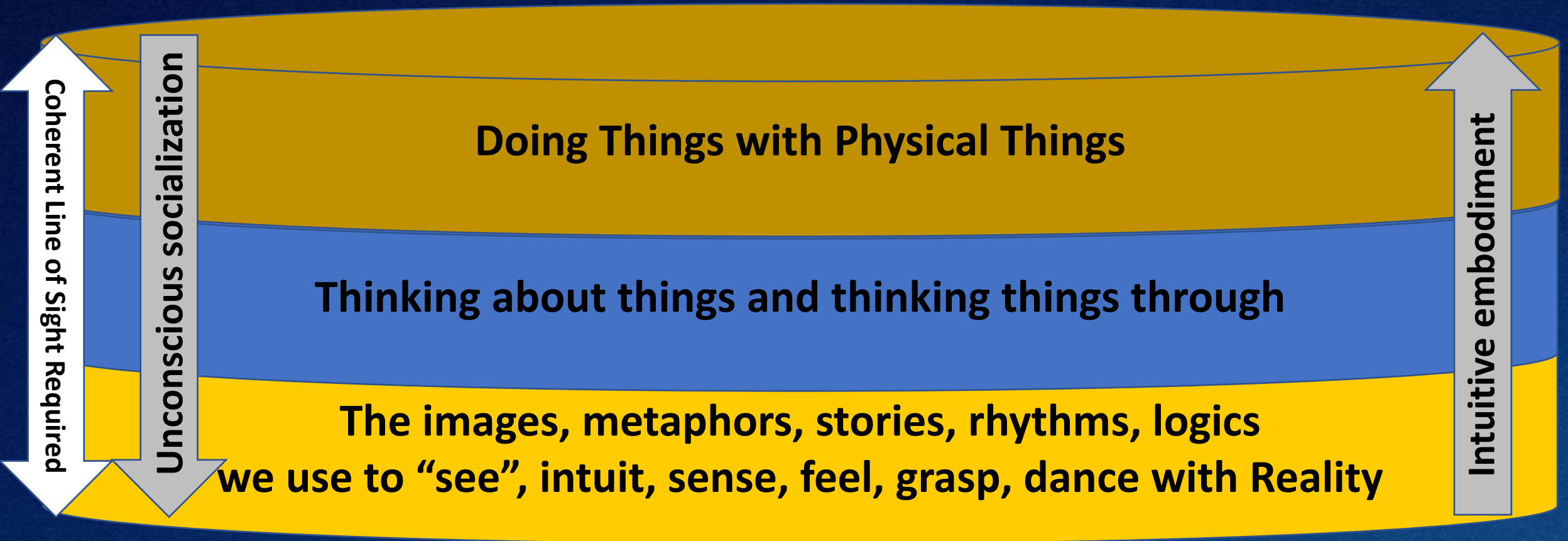
**Doing Things with Physical Things
The “Bloody Obvious”**

A Model: Causal Layers of Consciousness and Culture

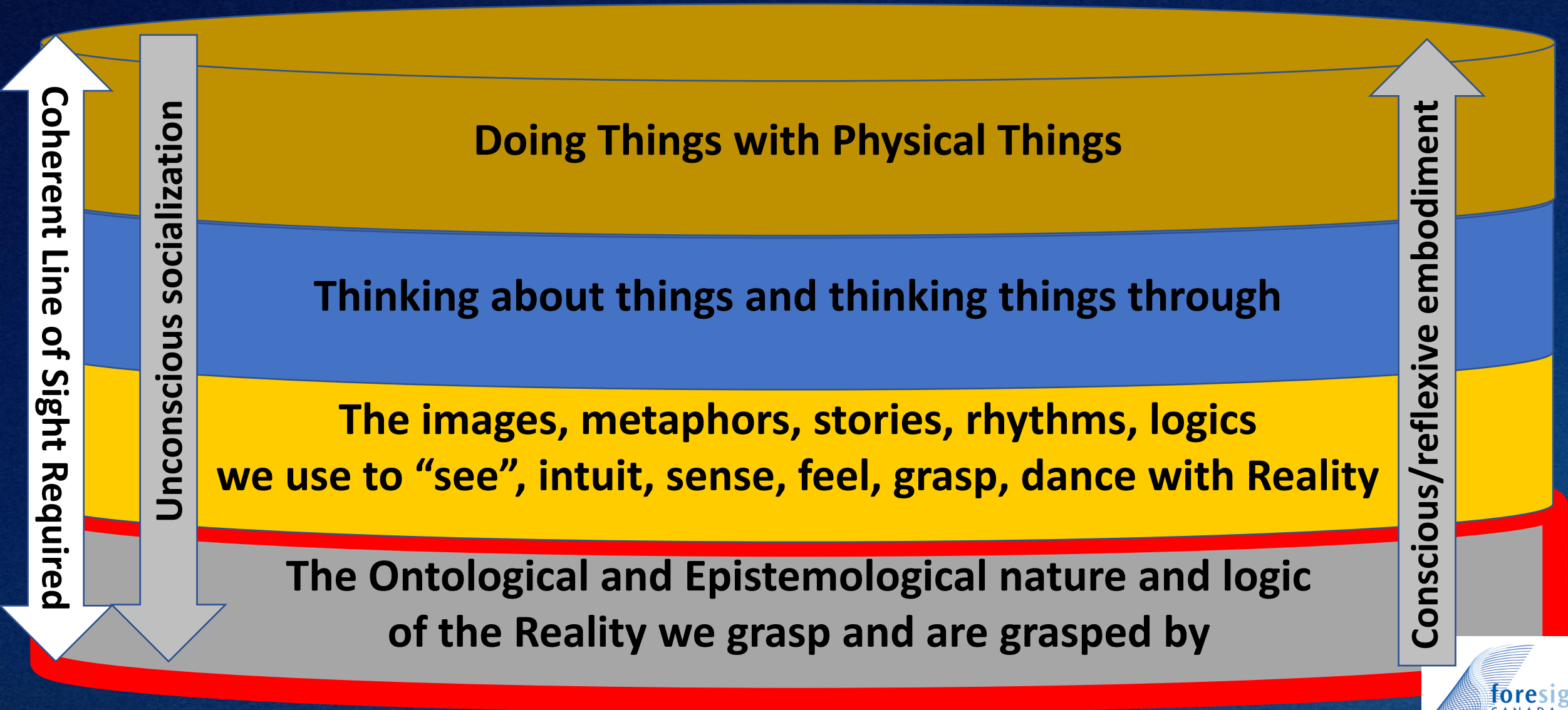
**Doing Things with Physical Things
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Thinking about things and thinking things through

A Model: Causal Layers of Consciousness and Culture

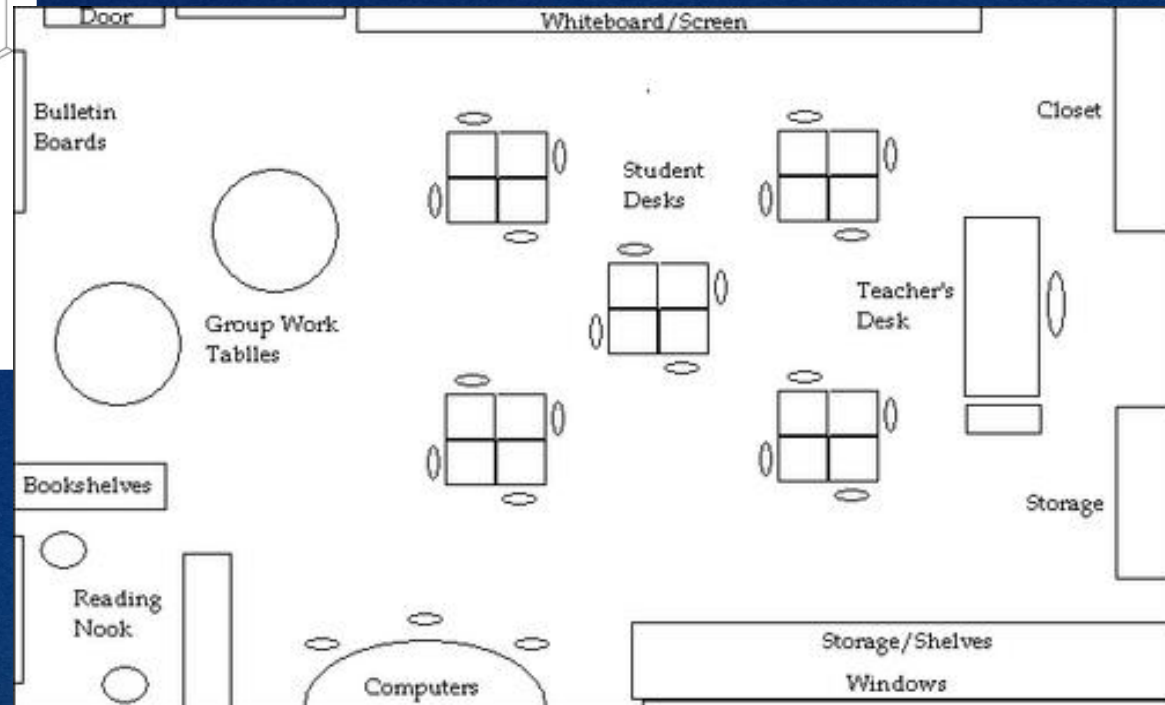
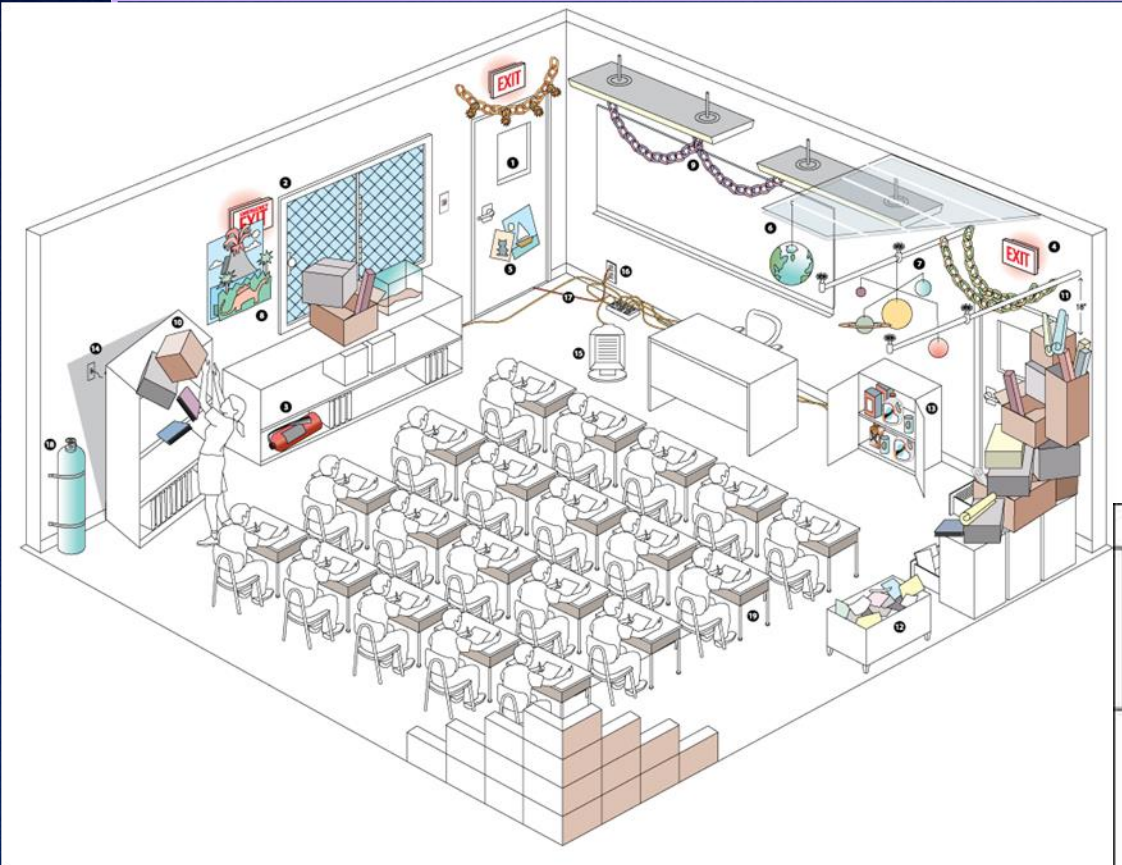


A Model: Causal Layers of Consciousness and Culture



Putting This Mental Model to Work

Consciousness Matters: Physical things as Embodied Consciousness





The Critical Insight

The Vital Foundational Importance of OEP

The Metaphors/Images/Stories/Rhythms/Logics by which we both access, express and value the reality we encounter must be consistent with the Ontological and Epistemological Presuppositions of the form of civilization we are considering.

The Ontological and Epistemological nature and logic of the Reality we grasp and are grasped by

Coherent Line of Sight Required

1st BIG Lesson

Coherent Line of Sight Required

CANNOT “glue” a feature you desire on to a sense of Reality that inherently rejects the feature.

The Metaphors/Images/Stories/Rhythms/Logics by which we both access, express and value the reality we encounter must be consistent with the Ontological and Epistemological Presuppositions of the form of civilization we are considering.

The Ontological and Epistemological nature and logic of the Reality we grasp and are grasped by

For Example

MTI Cultures:

- Hierarchical
- Male dominated
- Money/Power are primary
- Energy blind
- Earth has resources to use
- Competitive
- Individuals are primary
- Unreflexive

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Culture Many Want:

- Heterarchical
- Equality all around
- Reverence for life is primary
- Energy aware
- Earth is to be respected
- Cooperative
- Persons are relational
- Routinely reflexive

This Transition NOT Possible within MTI Frames

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NOT POSSIBLE: STOP TRYING TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

A Truly Good Culture with Truly Good People

Doing Things with Physical Things

Thinking about things and thinking things through

The images, metaphors, stories, rhythms, logics
we use to “see”, intuit, sense, feel, grasp, dance with Reality

Modern Techno-Industrial
Ontological Epistemological Presuppositions

Coherent Line of Sight Required

Unconscious socialization

Conscious/reflexive embodiment

NOT POSSIBLE: STOP TRYING TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

A Truly Good Culture
Doing Things with Physical Things

with Truly Good
Thinking about things, thinking things through

People
The images, metaphors, stories, rhythms, logics
we use to "see", intuit, sense, feel, grasp, dance with Reality

Modern Techno-Industrial
Ontological Epistemological Presuppositions

Coherent Line of Sight Required

Unconscious socialization

Conscious/reflexive embodiment

THIS IS POSSIBLE

A Truly Good Culture
Doing Things with Physical Things

Thinking about things and thinking things through

The images, metaphors, stories, rhythms, logics
we use to “see”, intuit, sense, feel, grasp, relate with Reality

Ontological Epistemological Presuppositions
WHICH ARE CONSISTENT WITH GOOD PERSONS/CULTURES

Coherent Line of Sight Required

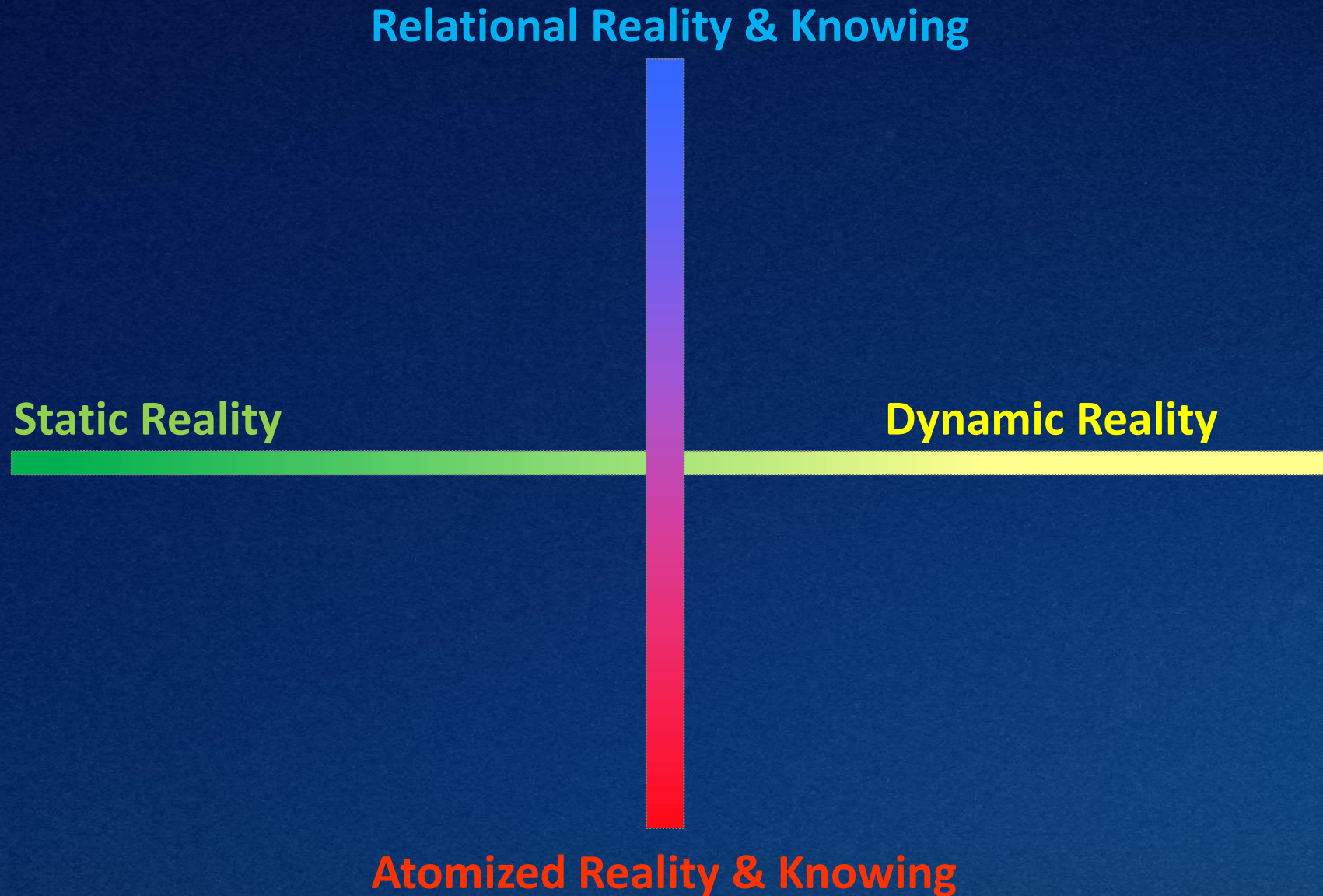
Unconscious socialization

Conscious/reflexive embodiment

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The OEP which Define Forms of Civilization

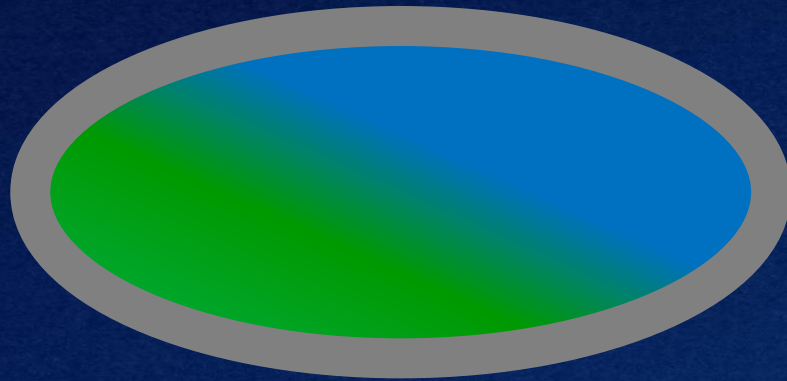


Four Civilizational Possibilities (with endless cultural possibilities)

Relational Reality & Knowing

Truthful

Science



Static Reality

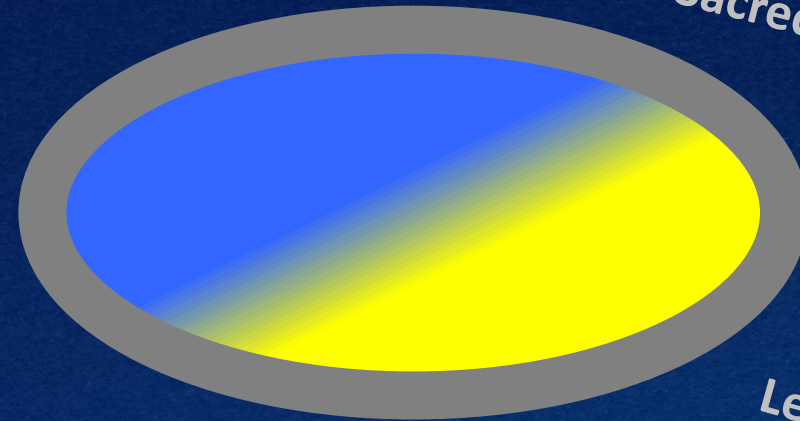


Dynamic Reality

Sacred

Authority

Learning

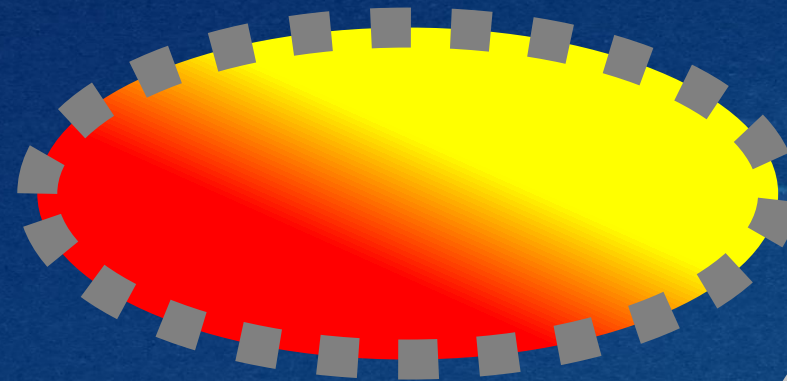
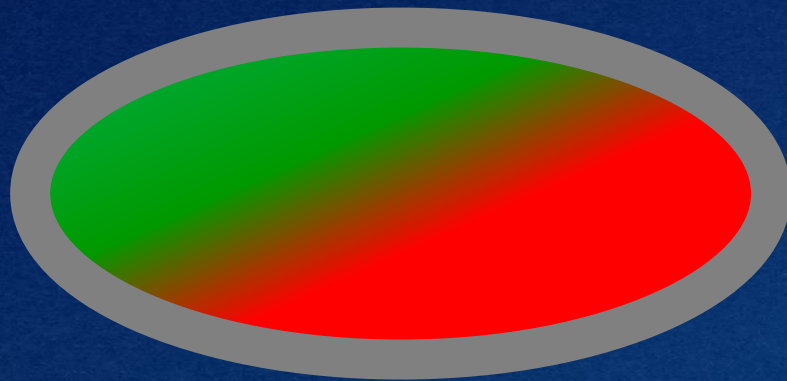


Relatives

Spirituality

Success

Atomized Reality & Knowing



Persons

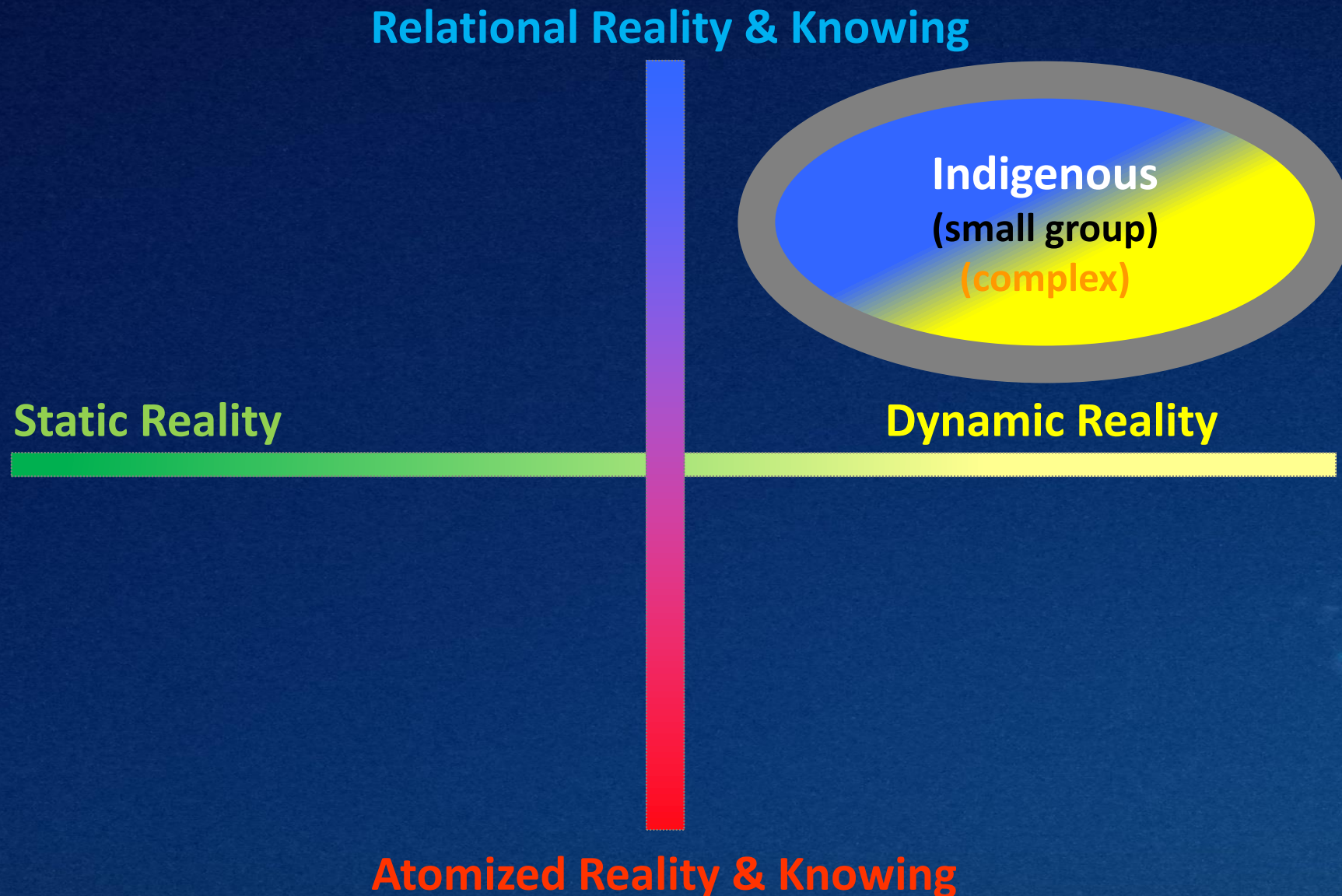
Agency

Faithful

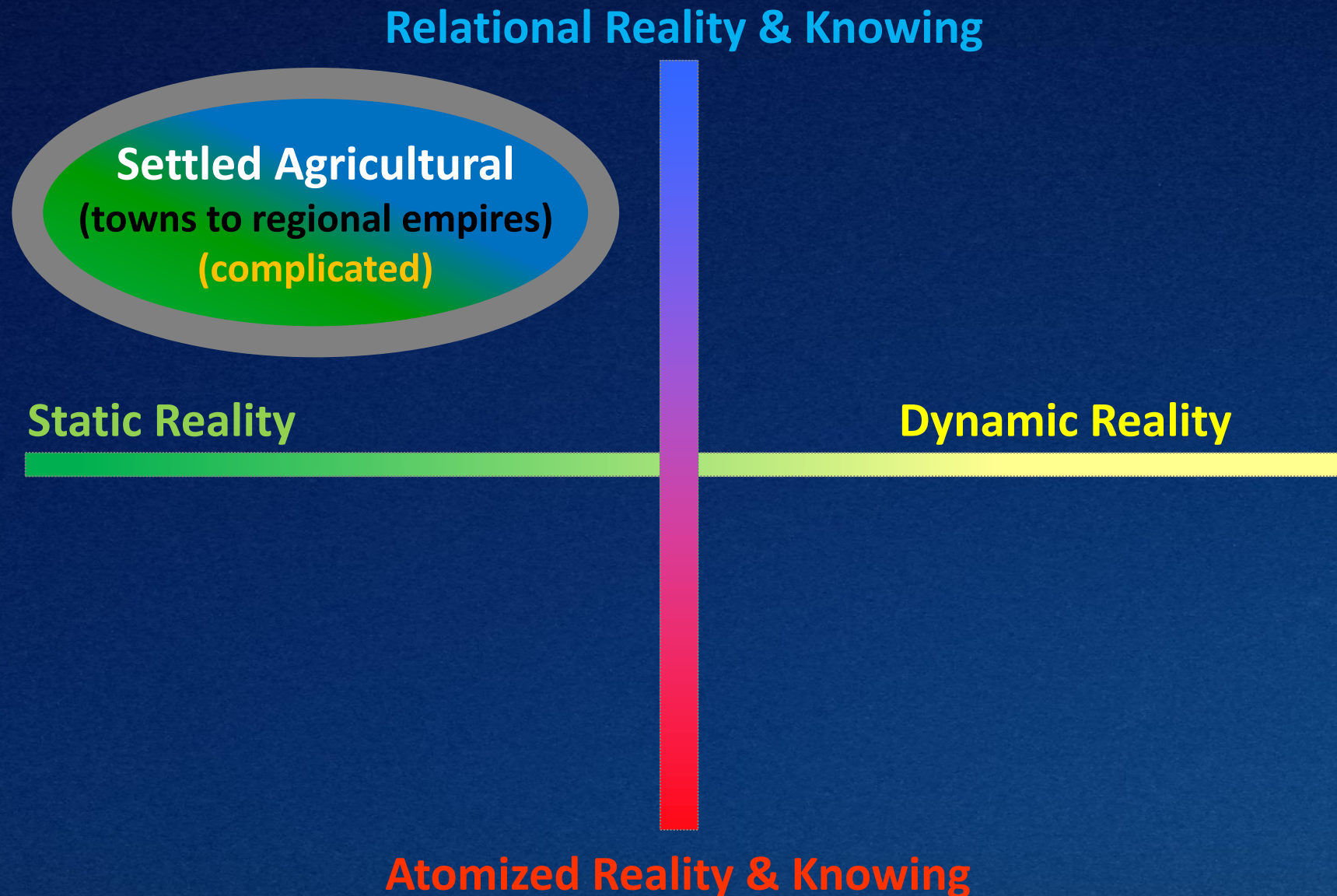
Questions for Small Groups

1. In which Civ_F did Hunter-Gatherers emerge?
2. *In Which Civ_F did permanent hierarchies 1st emerge?*
3. *In which Civ_F is Social Contract Theory required?*
4. *Which Civ_F can you see and work with complex living systems?*
5. *Why does the red/yellow quadrant have a dotted line around it?*
6. *In which Civ_F did writing 1st emerge?*
7. *What questions emerge for you?*

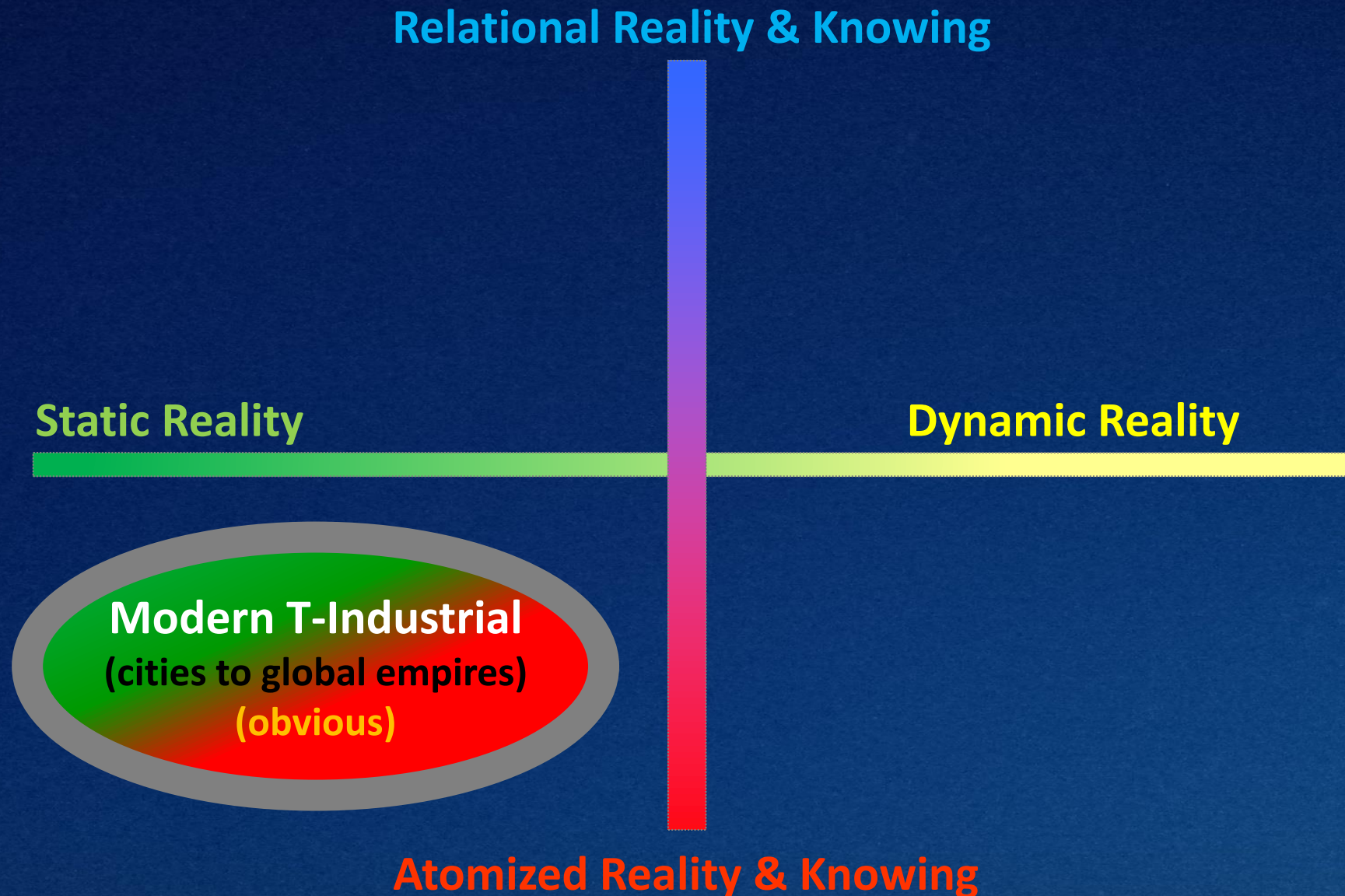
Who was/is Where?



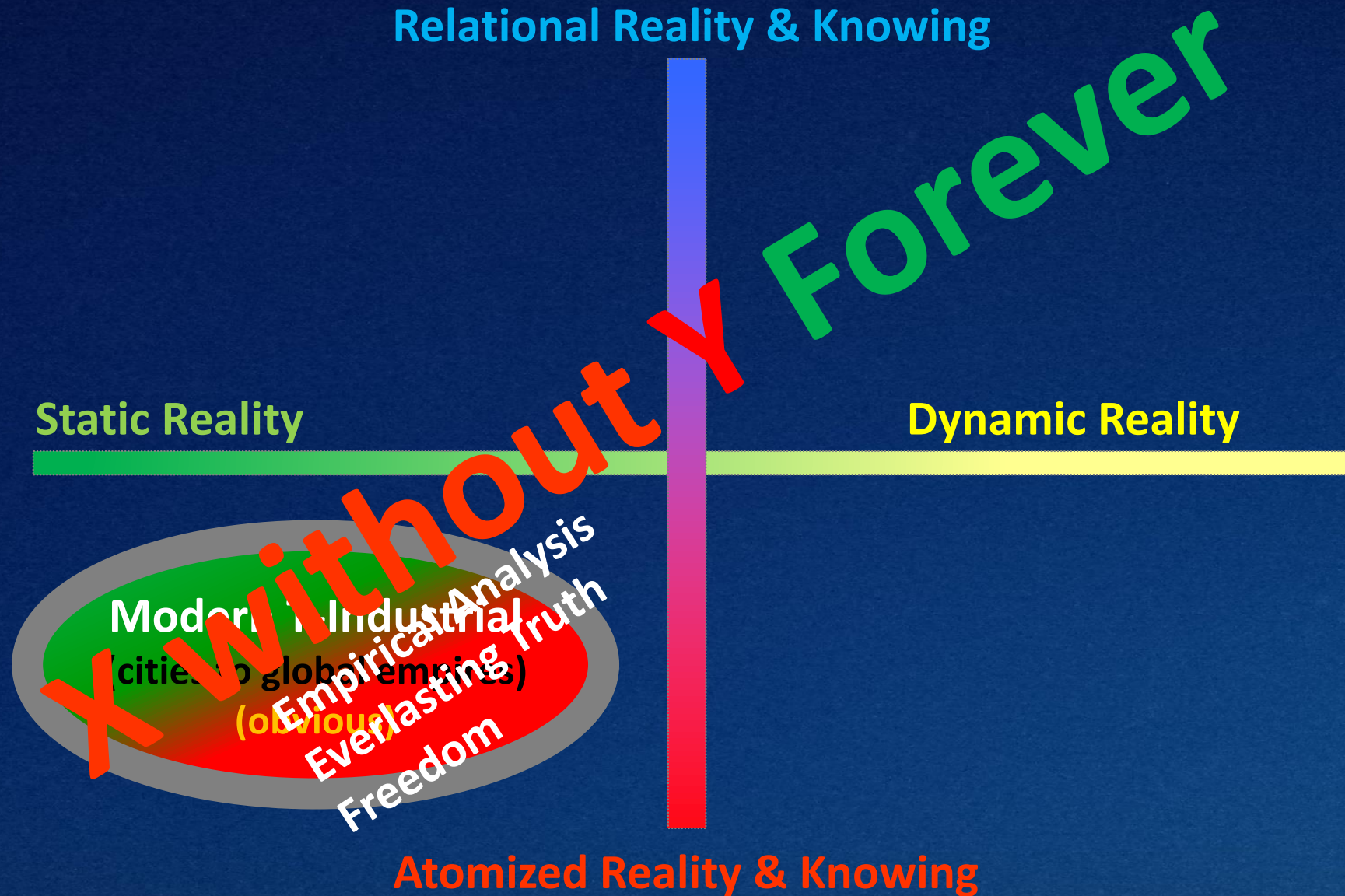
Who was/is Where?



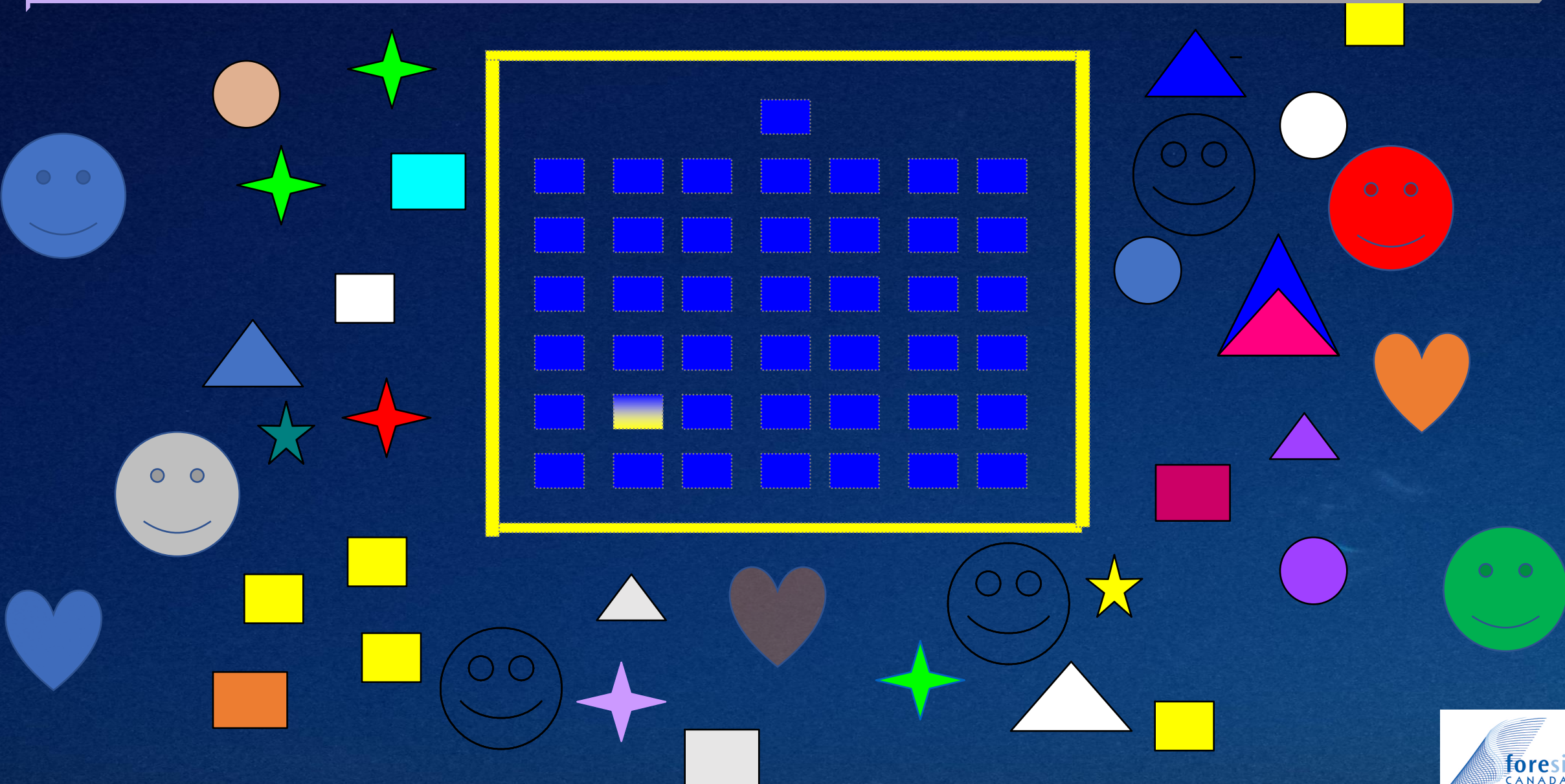
Who was/is Where?



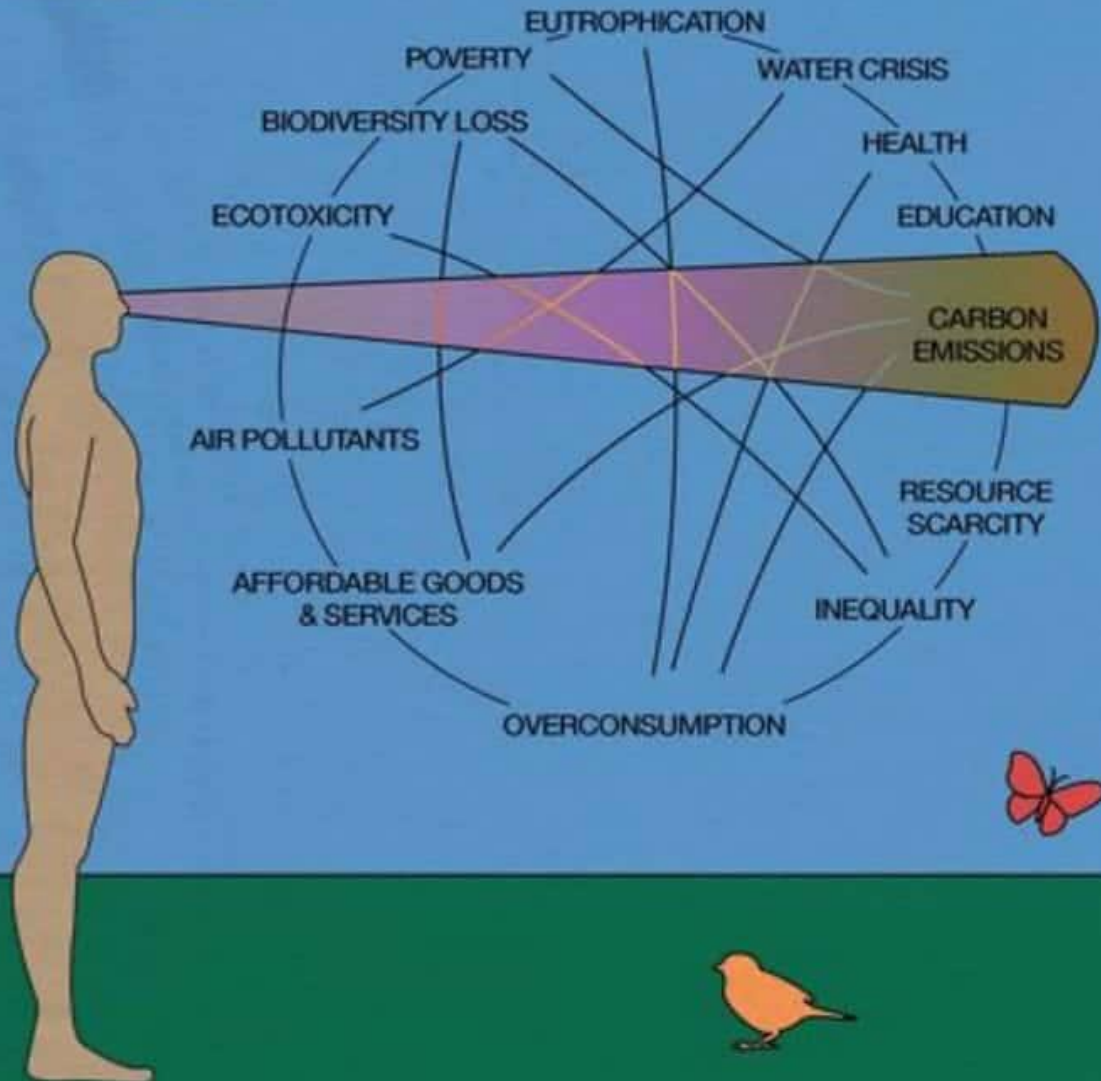
Who was/is Where?



MTI Imagination of a Whole Culture



SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION



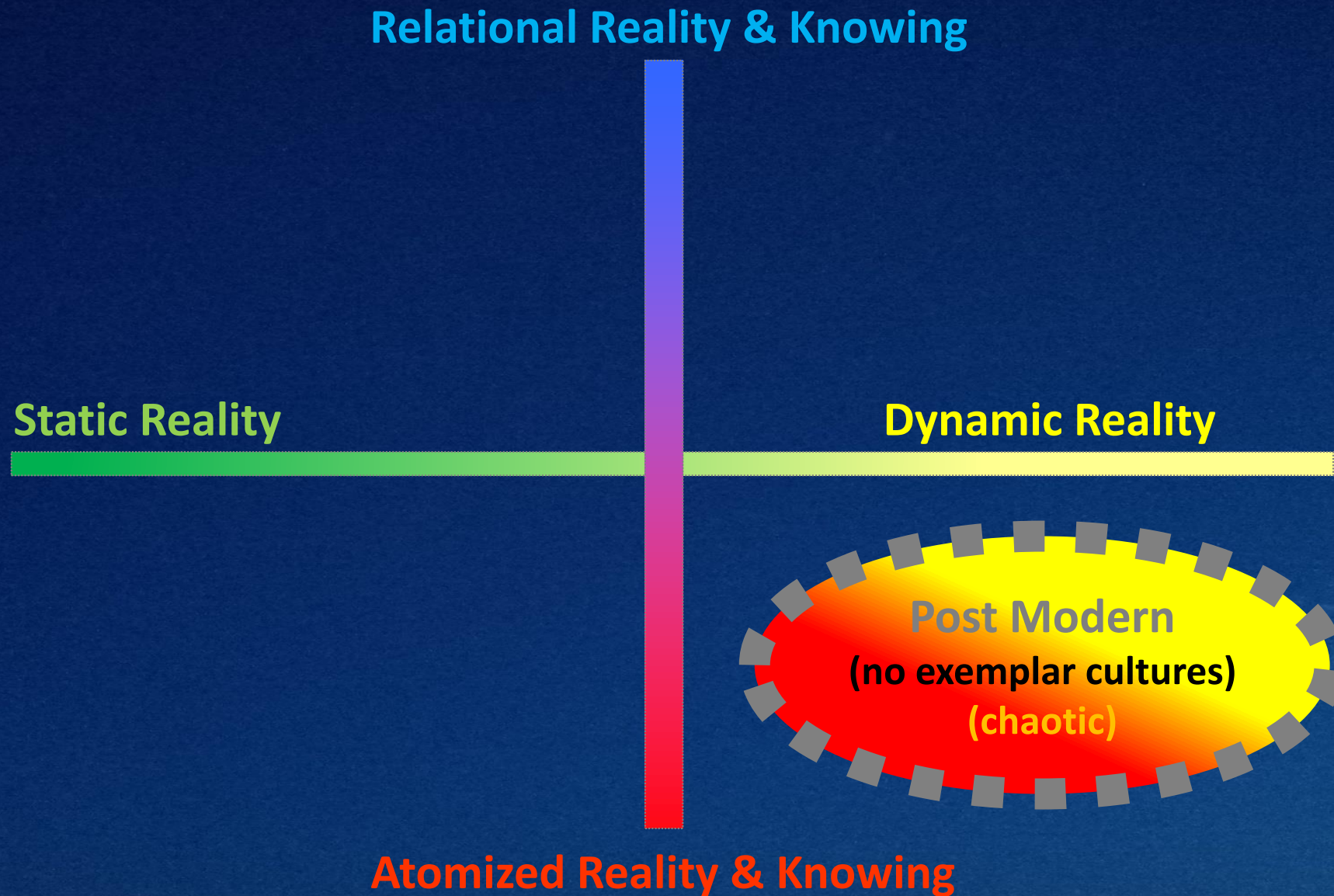
Climate change is a narrow view that looks only at one part of the whole

“One thing at a time.”

Counterfactual Context
Our cultural tendency is to focus on one detail at a time by deliberately removing messy contextual links so that we may scrutinize the internal logic of each piece in isolation (see Iain McGilchrist’s *The Master and His Emissary* for insights into this phenomenon). I’m sure any of the previous sections could be made to seem less scary/dire in such a piecemeal way by intentionally ignoring the full context. But guess what: the actual real biophysical world we live in does not operate as tidy, isolated, non-interacting domains—rendering invalid many of our analysis efforts, however elegant.

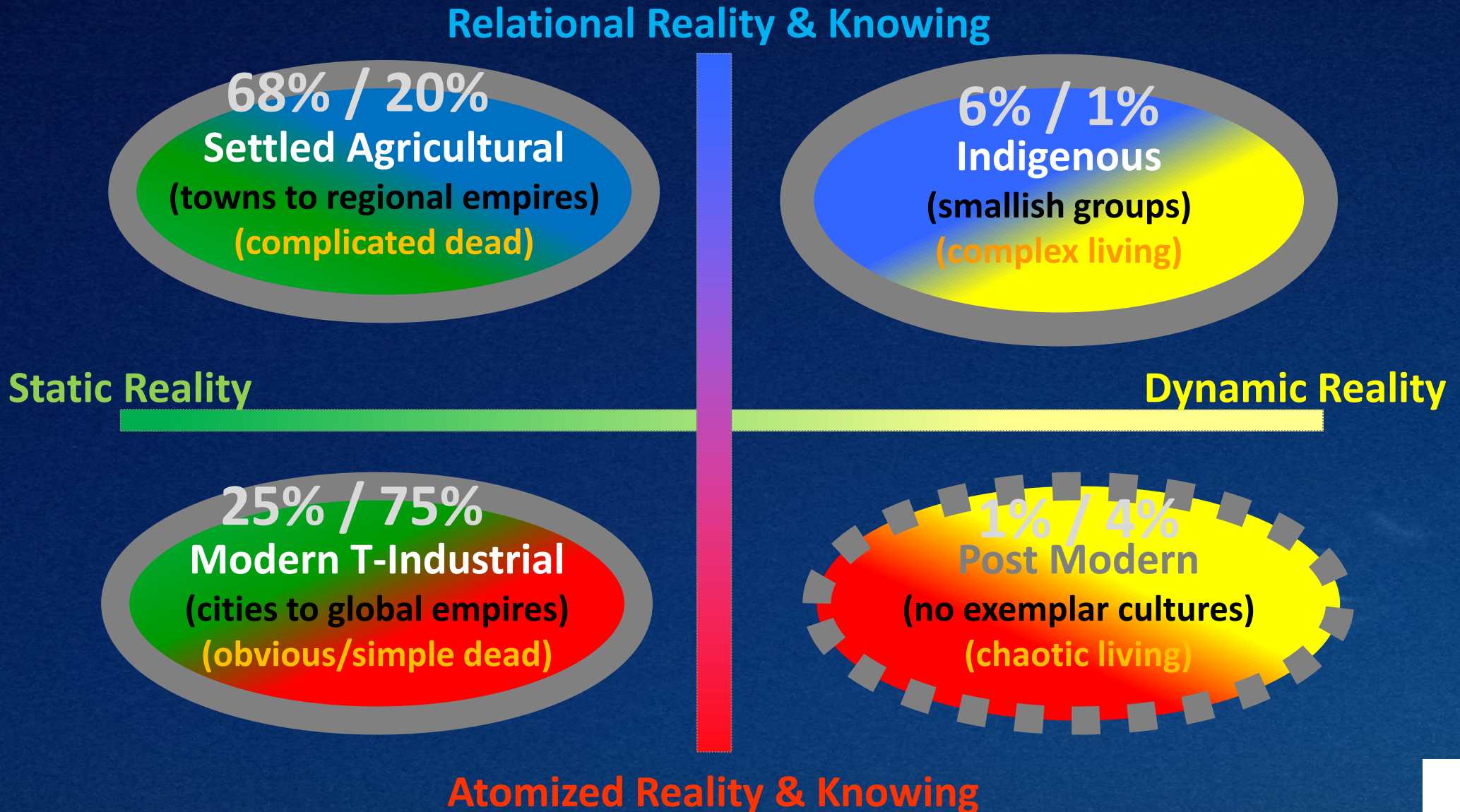
Tom Murphy
Metastatic Modernity
2024

Who was/is Where?

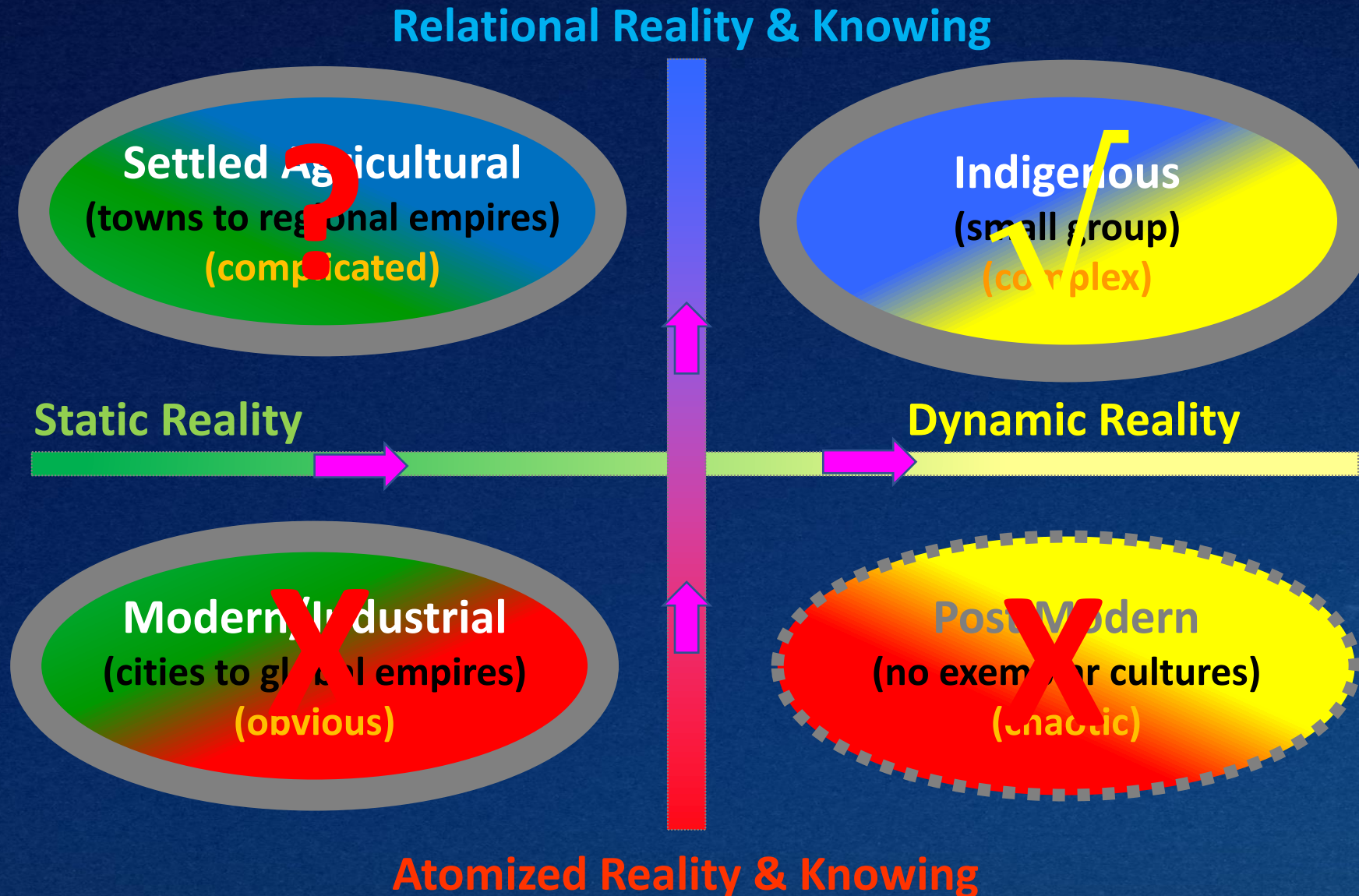


Applying these Concepts

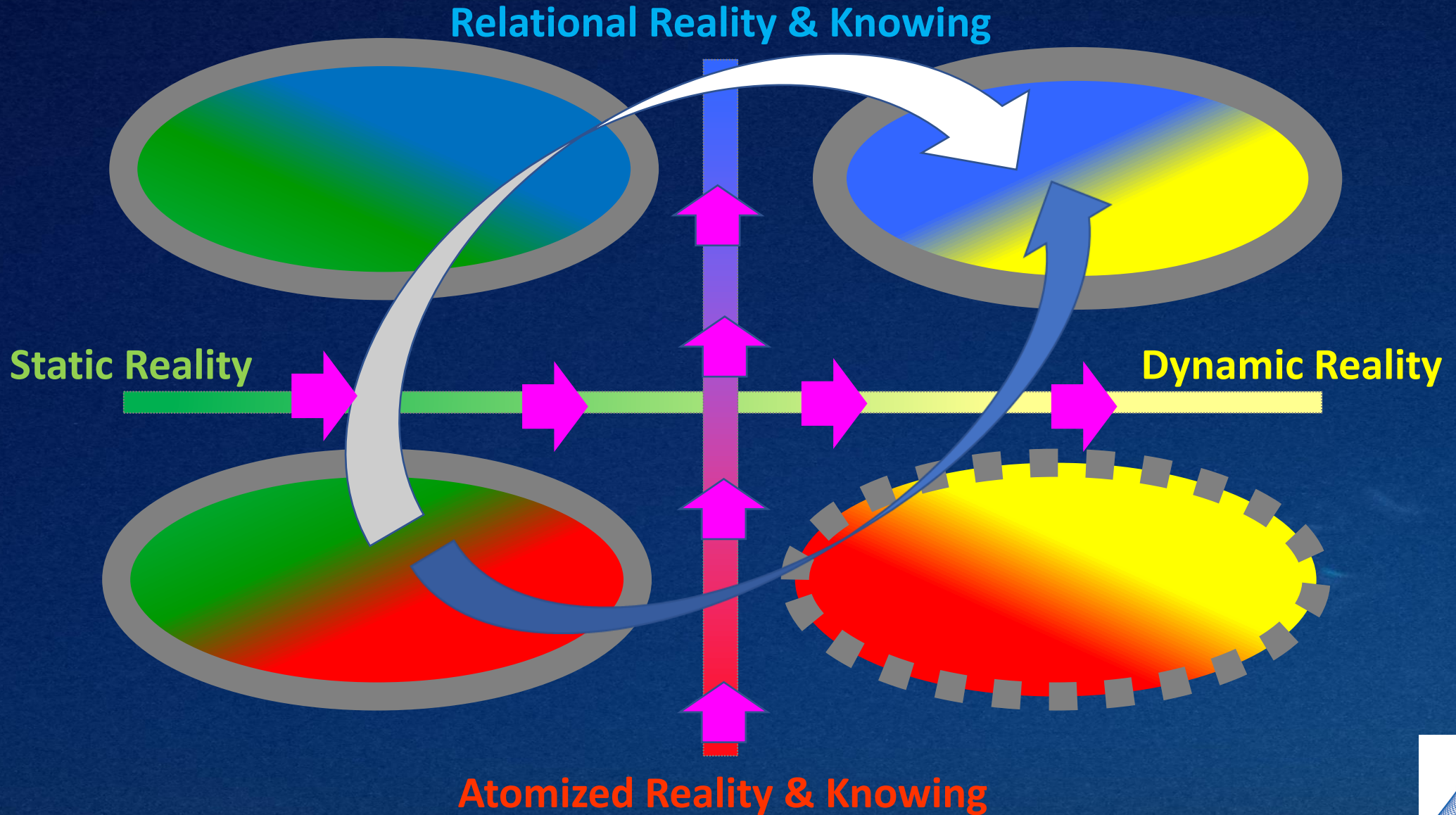
Relative Population & Power (est.)



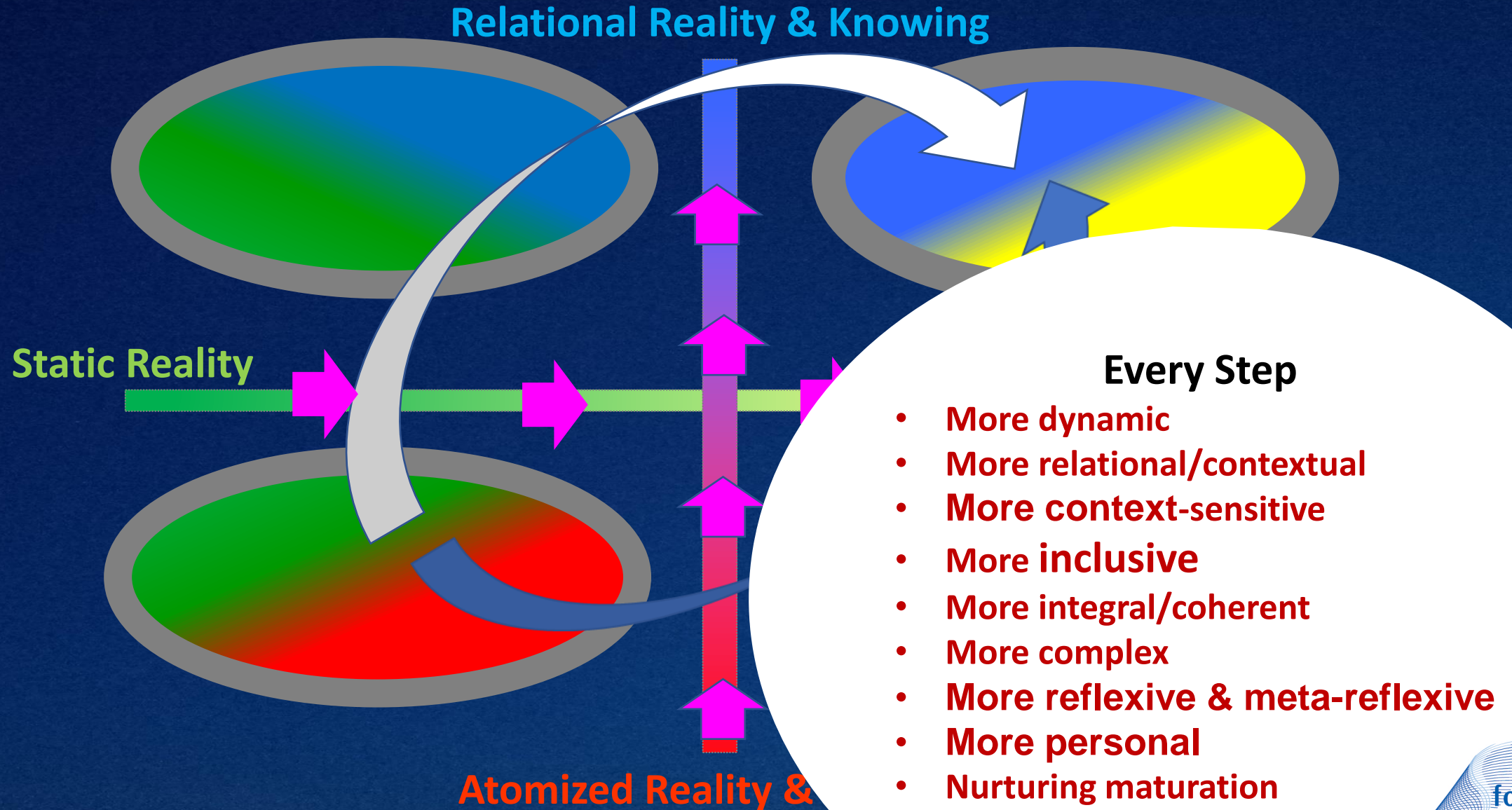
Truly Sustainable Civilization_F ?



The Deep Drift Since ca 1800



The Deep Drift Since ca 1800



Closing Comments

An Insight

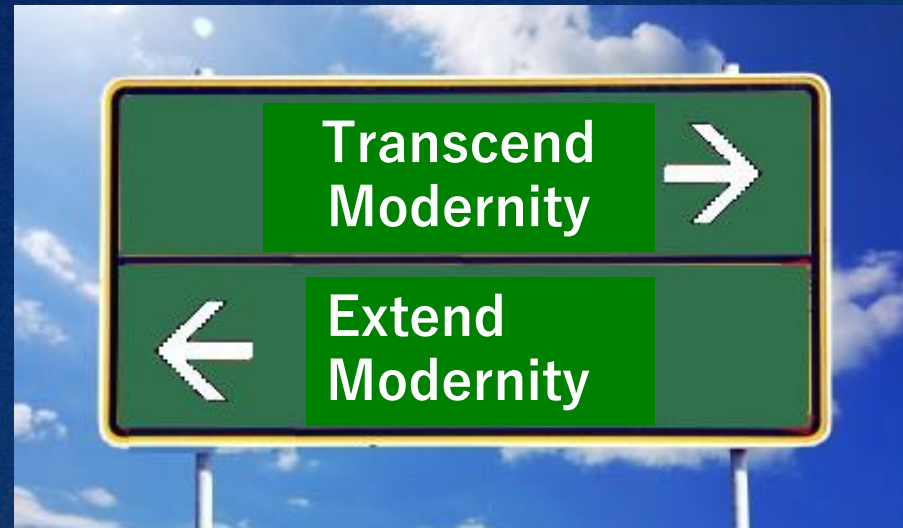
“ ‘Human freedom in history’
never means the freedom to avoid
the fundamental trends of an epoch.”

Langdon Gilkey

Our Core Work in the 21st Century:

1. Learn to know, **imagine**, **think through** and **respond to** the actual situation we Modern Techno-industrial (MTI) peoples and cultures are in.
2. Let go of and out-grow our own MTI formation as persons/cultures.
3. Commit to the work of consciously co-creating the next form of human civilization^{new} by nurturing into being “**meta-reflexive co-creative persons and cultures**”.

- Optional
- Unconscious
- Long Time
- Local/Regional



- Required
- Meta-Conscious
- Fast
- Scalable

Inspiration

**To be rid of illusions,
if it does not break our courage,
is a liberating experience.**

**John Macmurray
Conditions of Freedom
1949**



Over to YOU!

Our Future **is** in Our Hands, Minds, Hearts and Spirits

Thank You!

Ontological/Epistemological Presuppositions

Relational Reality & Knowing

Reality is Relational/Contextual
"Parts" are always in Context
Persons-in-relations
Intersubjective reliable knowing

Emergent Reality in time
At different speeds
Truths (f) Time_T in Place_P and Community_C
For those who "get" the faith of the community
Coherence indicates Truth
Humility ex ignorance + ambiguity
Living Complexities

Static Reality

Unchanging/Perfect Reality
Essence/Appearance
Timeless/Universal/Truths
For all who truly know
Correspondence indicates Truth
Humility ex ignorance
Dead Hierarchies

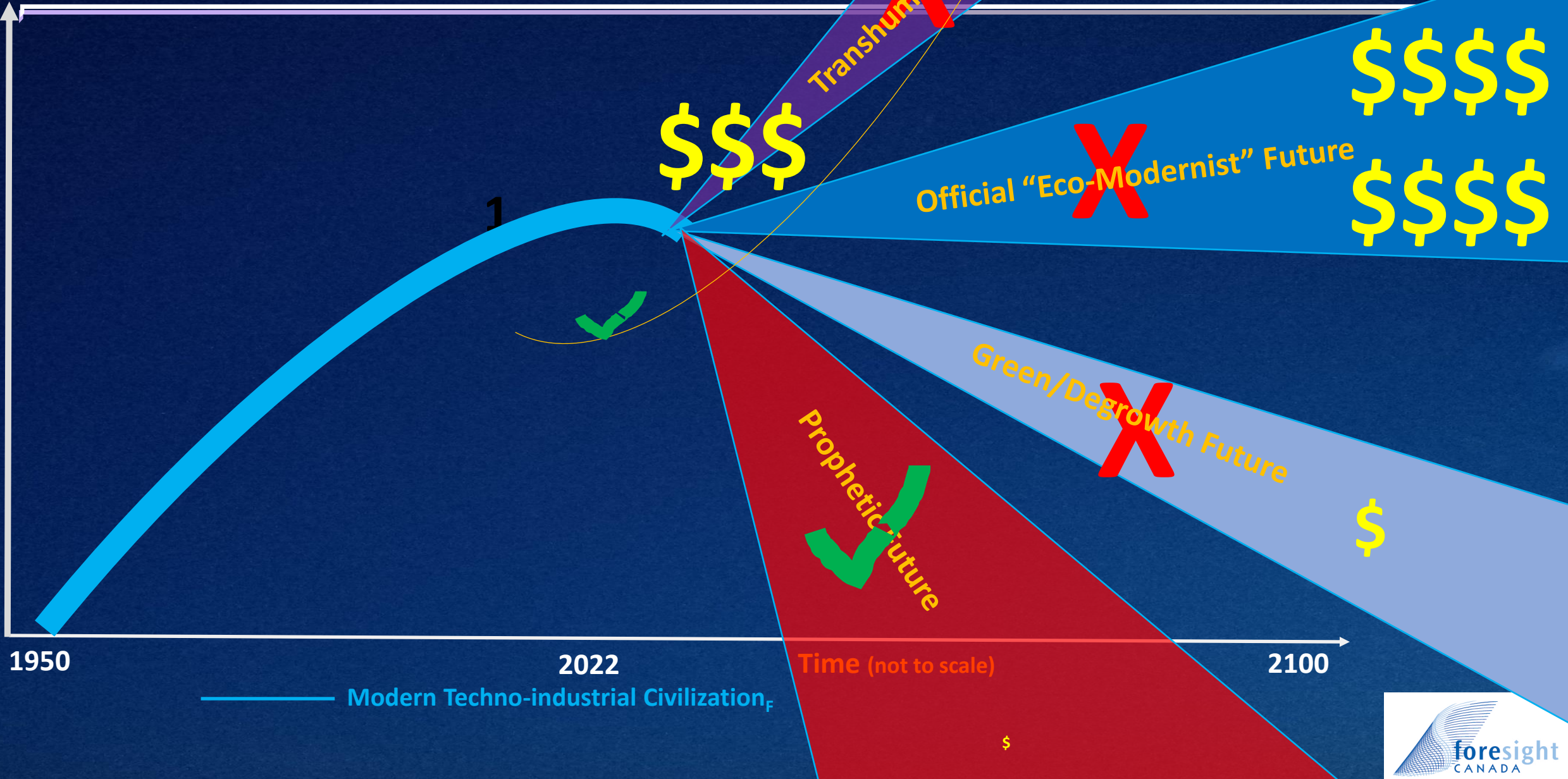
Dynamic Reality

Reality is atomized, separate pieces
Individual, siloed, primordial, context-independent
Individual persons
Individual reliable knowing

Atomized Reality & Knowing

Our (MTI) Possible Futures

Sacle of complicated systems can cope with.



1950

2022

2100

Modern Techno-industrial Civilization

Time (not to scale)