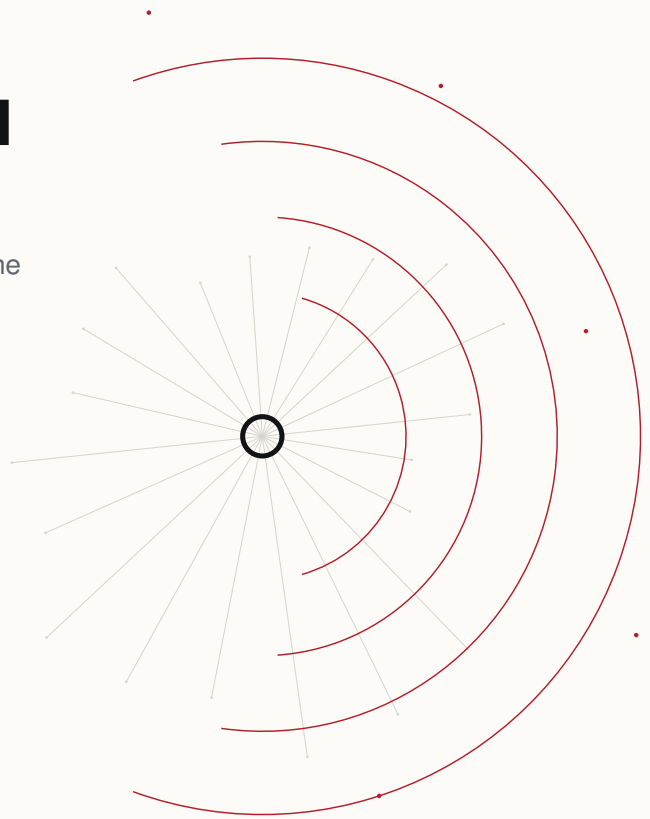


THE NETWORKED HUMAN CONDITION

Collective consciousness, cultural reality, and the
meaning of civilizational transition



CENTRAL CONCLUSION

Humanity is becoming a more tightly coupled cognitive ecology, not demonstrably one mind. Technology amplifies collective intelligence and collective error. Biology, culture, institutions, and ecology form reciprocal causal loops, but synchronization is not unity, selection is not progress, and interdependence is not destiny.

Contents

This report separates observation, mechanism, interpretation, and metaphysics. Bracketed numbers refer to the numbered bibliography. Evidence grades apply to individual claims, and a claim established at one level is not thereby established at the next.

Abstract	7
1. Scope, method, and standards of inference	12
1.1 What kind of research this is	12
1.2 Evidence grades	13
1.3 The four-question causal audit	13
1.4 A note on humane language	13
2. The bridge from individual reality to collective reality	14
2.1 What Parts I and II established	14
2.2 Three realities that must not be collapsed	14
2.3 Generative does not mean unconstrained	15
2.4 Process, phenomenology, and realism: three compatible corrections	15
3. A causal staircase from neurons to civilization	17
3.1 Downward causation without magic	18
3.2 Upward emergence without a hidden commander	18
3.3 Recursive causation	18
3.4 Predictive processing and active inference: how expectation becomes worldly action	18
3.5 Precision, power, and self-confirming worlds	19
3.6 The predictive-social reality loop	20
4. What could “collective consciousness” mean?	21
4.1 Meaning one: shared cultural consciousness	21
4.2 Meaning two: collective intentionality and agency	21
4.3 Meaning three: distributed cognition	21
4.4 Meaning four: Jung’s collective unconscious	22
4.5 Meaning five: a literal phenomenal group mind	22
4.6 The conclusion on collective consciousness	22
4.7 Group agency does not require group experience	23
4.8 What hyperscanning actually measures	23
4.9 More synchrony is not always better	24
5. How shared belief becomes culturally real	25
5.1 Recognition, rules, and enforcement	25
5.2 Norms are expectations plus conditional behavior	25
5.3 Language and categories act by changing affordances	25
5.4 Power decides whose reality becomes infrastructure	26
5.5 Social construction does not abolish truth	26
5.6 Cultural transmission reconstructs; it does not merely copy	26

5.7	Identity converts shared meaning into collective action	27
5.8	System justification and pluralistic ignorance complicate awakening narratives	27
5.9	Collective trauma is cultural memory, not a single injured brain	27
6.	When groups become intelligent — and when they become confidently wrong	28
6.1	Collective intelligence is measurable but conditional	28
6.2	The wisdom-of-crowds conditions	28
6.3	Social influence can destroy the very diversity aggregation needs	28
6.4	Tipping points and conventions	29
6.5	Collective memory is reconstruction, not a perfect archive	29
6.6	Emotional contagion is real but often overstated	29
6.7	The Global Consciousness Project as a boundary case	30
6.8	A compact network diagnosis	30
6.9	Collective intelligence is an institutional achievement	30
6.10	Accuracy prompts show that architecture can change behavior	31
7.	Technology as a planetary coupling infrastructure	32
7.1	What is genuinely new	32
7.2	Coupling is not convergence	32
7.3	The acceleration of collective attention	32
7.4	Falsehood, novelty, and amplification	33
7.5	Homophily is not contagion	33
7.6	The asymmetry of the connected world	33
7.7	Artificial intelligence changes mediation, not human plurality by definition	34
7.8	Four futures of networked humanity	34
7.9	Platform effects are causal, heterogeneous, and sometimes persistent	35
7.10	Generative AI can raise individual performance while narrowing collective variation	35
7.11	Cognitive infrastructure requires constitutional governance	36
8.	The biology of accelerated social change	37
8.1	The brain has no timeless natural setting	37
8.2	A mechanistic stress pathway	37
8.3	Information overload is a systems mismatch, not a weak character	37
8.4	Culture becomes biology through repeated experience	38
8.5	Trauma is an important analogy with strict limits	38
8.6	Does digital life cause a population-wide brain malfunction?	38
8.7	Adaptation has more than one meaning	39
8.8	The alternative to forced adaptation	39
8.9	Regulation is socially scaffolded	39
8.10	What causal mental-health evidence does and does not show	40
8.11	From belief to chemistry: a disciplined timescale model	40
9.	Those who cannot, do not, or will not “catch up”	43
9.1	There is no single population of non-adapters	43
9.2	Disability exposes the environment-person relation	43
9.3	Connection without accessibility is not inclusion	43

9.4	Isolation changes evidence and opportunity	44
9.5	Refusal can be rational	44
9.6	The justice test	44
9.7	Temporal justice: who is permitted to move slowly?	44
10.	Biological selection, cultural selection, and the danger of a category error	46
10.1	Natural selection has necessary components	46
10.2	Selection is not one process	46
10.3	What evidence would a digital genetic-selection claim require?	48
10.4	What is already plausible without genetic selection	48
10.5	The anti-teleological correction	48
10.6	The ethical red line	49
10.7	Cultural attraction, selection, and cumulative change	49
10.8	When could social sorting become biological evolution?	49
11.	Could current instability be an adaptation crisis?	51
11.1	The strongest defensible formulation	51
11.2	Why the hypothesis deserves investigation	51
11.3	Why the hypothesis can become unfalsifiable	51
11.4	Stress can occupy four causal positions	52
11.5	Levels of explanation are complementary, not competitors	52
11.6	A symmetric warning: do not psychologize only the public	53
11.7	Competing models	53
11.8	The civilizational stress braid	53
11.9	What would make this hypothesis distinctively successful?	54
11.10	Meaning threat is neither imaginary nor a universal cause	55
12.	War, economies, and environmental disaster: where collective belief enters causality	56
12.1	War: minds matter through organization	56
12.2	Economic crises: performative expectations and real constraints	56
12.3	Climate change: collective belief changes physics through industry and policy	57
12.4	Natural hazard is not identical to disaster	57
12.5	Ecological crisis is not the planet mirroring our emotions	57
12.6	A causal matrix	58
12.7	Climate anxiety: signal, suffering, and agency	60
12.8	The moral boundary against victim-blaming	60
13.	Breakthrough, breakdown, or apocalypse?	61
13.1	These are evaluations, not raw observations	61
13.2	Breakthrough as coordinated pluralism	61
13.3	Breakdown as synchronization without agency	61
13.4	Apocalypse originally means more than annihilation	62
13.5	“End of the world” often means end of a world	62
13.6	Religious traditions should not be collapsed into one prophecy	63
13.7	Is there a choice?	63
13.8	The psychology of end-of-world belief is multidimensional	63

13.9	Existential openness without fatalism	64
13.10	Revelation as an ethical diagnostic	64
14.	Ancient civilizations, lost knowledge, and historical loops	65
14.1	What archaeology really permits us to say	65
14.2	Collapse is usually transformation, not disappearance	65
14.3	Recurring mechanisms are not a cosmic loop	65
14.4	Clodynamics: promising ambition, contested inference	66
14.5	How to test an ancient-precedent claim	66
14.6	The strongest historical conclusion	66
14.7	Consilience: how historical claims become stronger	66
14.8	Critical transitions and the danger of false alarms	67
14.9	Collapse as loss, reorganization, and uneven continuity	67
15.	Are we in a looped simulation or undergoing a test?	68
15.1	Bostrom's argument is conditional	68
15.2	The probability cannot outrun the premises	68
15.3	Is simulation scientifically testable?	68
15.4	Simulation would not make life unreal	69
15.5	Loop, test, and simulation are different ideas	69
15.6	The existential use of recurrence	69
15.7	What remains legitimately open	70
15.8	Restricted models can be tested; simulation in general cannot	70
15.9	The loop hypothesis and memory problem	70
16.	Spiritual and yogic lenses: resonance without false equivalence	72
16.1	Spiritual traditions ask a different family of questions	72
16.2	Yoga: transformation of the mind, not proof of a global network	72
16.3	Advaita Vedanta: nonduality is not network synchronization	72
16.4	Buddhism: interdependence need not imply one self	73
16.5	Spiritual unity and political plurality	73
16.6	The noosphere and global-brain metaphor	73
16.7	Where science and contemplative practice can genuinely meet	73
16.8	A comparison of explanatory logics	74
16.9	Contemplative science: mechanisms, evidence, and limits	76
16.10	Adverse and difficult experiences belong inside the model	76
16.11	A dual literacy: first-person discipline and third-person correction	76
17.	The academic debate ledger	78
17.1	The steelman of the overall thesis	83
17.2	The strongest skeptical reply	83
17.3	The synthesis	83
17.4	Questions on which evidence does not choose values for us	83
17.5	Four philosophical objections the synthesis must survive	84
17.6	The burden-of-proof ladder	84
18.	A scientific research program	86

18.1	Replace the grand noun with measured constructs	86
18.2	A multilevel longitudinal design	86
18.3	Preregistered core hypotheses	87
18.4	Designs that can improve causal inference	87
18.5	A decisive experiment on “synchrony versus mind”	88
18.6	Testing civilizational phase change	88
18.7	Falsifiers	88
18.8	Ethical safeguards	89
18.9	The ideal research collaboration	89
18.10	A global network-and-regulation observatory	89
18.11	Measurement must resist the seduction of convenient proxies	90
18.12	Causal diagrams before causal stories	91
18.13	A staged portfolio of decisive studies	91
18.14	Open science and adversarial collaboration	92
18.15	Ethics is part of validity	92
19.	A public reasoning and practice framework	93
19.1	The translation rule	93
19.2	The five boundaries a reader should protect	93
19.3	A scientific practice of collective “manifestation”	93
19.4	A weekly personal-network audit	94
19.5	When to slow down	94
19.6	When not to turn a worldview into self-treatment	94
19.7	A structured public deliberation protocol	95
19.8	A three-column discipline for extraordinary experiences	95
19.9	Collective manifestation as democratic prototyping	96
20.	Final synthesis	97
	References	99
	Declarations	109

Abstract

This report investigates a powerful but easily confused proposition: if individual experience is biologically constructed, and if societies construct shared realities through language, norms, institutions, and communication, could humanity's expanding technological interconnection be producing a unified collective consciousness that alters reality itself? Could the strain of adapting to that transition help explain war, economic breakdown, psychological disorder, or environmental catastrophe? Could people who cannot or do not adapt be subject to biological selection? And should the present be understood as breakthrough, apocalypse, recurrence of an ancient cycle, or evidence of a simulated test?

The most defensible answer is neither a simple yes nor a simple no. Human beings do construct experienced and social reality, but the word construct names several different causal processes. Brains infer the causes of sensory signals; people coordinate meanings; groups stabilize conventions; institutions allocate rights and resources; technologies reorganize attention and action; and material environments constrain every layer. Money, borders, offices, diagnoses, reputations, and laws depend substantially on collective recognition, yet their consequences are not imaginary. Earthquakes, pathogens, atmospheric physics, and other people's independent agency do not become optional because observers interpret them. Reality as lived is generated through organism-world interaction; reality as shared is partly instituted; reality as material resists both.

Likewise, collective consciousness has at least three meanings. The first is sociological: shared classifications, norms, memories, symbols, and expectations. Its existence is well supported. The second is functional: a network can remember, solve problems, coordinate, and select information in ways no isolated member can. This is also supported, but its quality depends on diversity, independence, communication rules, incentives, and power. The third is phenomenal or metaphysical: humanity forms one subject that literally has a unified field of experience. Current neuroscience, network science, and social science do not establish such a subject. Interpersonal synchrony, emotional contagion, distributed cognition, and emergent group performance are not equivalent to merged consciousness.

Digital technology is therefore best described as a coupling infrastructure, not proof of a planetary mind. It reduces communication delay, expands common memory, and synchronizes salience across enormous populations. The same architecture can support collective intelligence or collective error. Independent judgments and epistemic diversity can improve aggregate accuracy, while feedback, homophily, prestige bias, algorithmic amplification, and concentrated control can create cascades, false consensus, polarization, and confident error [1–6,23–27]. Humanity is becoming more mutually observable and behaviorally interdependent, but not necessarily culturally uniform or phenomenally unified. In 2025, almost three quarters of the world was online while 2.2 billion people remained offline, and major gaps in affordability, quality, skills, gender, and geography persisted [28]. Any theory of universal convergence that ignores this asymmetry mistakes the most connected populations for humanity as a whole.

Biology participates in these processes without dictating their meaning. Culture and institutions repeatedly shape attention, stress, learning, development, gene regulation, health, and behavior [33–43]. Rapid change can produce allostatic load when demands exceed control, resources, predictability, and recovery. Yet there is no single new state of

brain function to which every person must advance. Human neural systems are plastic, heterogeneous, and socially scaffolded; adaptation can mean learning, accommodation, withdrawal, resistance, or collective redesign. Average associations between digital use and mental health are generally small, heterogeneous, and sensitive to person and context [37,38]. Exclusion is primarily an accessibility, distributive, political, and institutional problem, not evidence of biological inferiority.

Natural selection also has a precise meaning: heritable variation must contribute to differential reproductive success across generations. Unequal access, algorithmic sorting, cultural prestige, occupational displacement, and psychological adaptation may be forms of social or cultural selection, but they are not automatically genetic evolution [44–50]. Gene-culture coevolution is real in cases with demonstrable mechanisms, such as dairying and lactase persistence [48]. No comparable evidence shows that inability or refusal to join a digital collective is currently producing a biologically “advanced” and

“obsolete” humanity. Treating inequality or disability in those terms repeats the logic of Social Darwinism and eugenics rather than evolutionary science.

Collective beliefs can nevertheless change external events through ordinary but powerful causal bridges. They can move markets, create bank runs, mobilize armies, legitimize institutions, alter emissions, determine preparedness, and shape who is exposed to hazards [57–66]. Collective stress and threat narratives may therefore contribute to conflict and institutional failure. They are not sufficient explanations: state capacity, incentives, inequality, geography, resources, leadership, military organization, and ecological conditions matter. Nor do emotions directly cause geophysical events. Anthropogenic climate change is a behavioral-industrial alteration of physical systems; disaster losses arise from hazards interacting with exposure, vulnerability, and capacity [63–65]. Calling all of this an “internal biological conflict” erases the mechanisms that would make the hypothesis testable.

Apocalypse, ancient recurrence, and simulation remain intellectually valuable when their status is explicit. Apocalyptic traditions often interpret crisis as revelation, judgment, inversion, and renewal rather than only planetary destruction [75,76]. Archaeology documents recurrent collapse, transformation, resilience, network fragility, and loss of knowledge, but not a prior global digital consciousness [67–74]. The simulation argument is a conditional philosophical trilemma, not an empirical discovery; its probability depends heavily on unverified assumptions about computation, consciousness, reference classes, and the behavior of hypothetical civilizations [90–92]. These frameworks can expose values and assumptions. They should not be presented as scientific conclusions without discriminating predictions.

The report’s central thesis is therefore this: humanity is becoming a more tightly coupled cognitive ecology, not demonstrably one mind. The transition changes what people notice, believe, feel, coordinate, and build; those changes feed back into biology, institutions, and environments. Whether the result is collective intelligence, managed unanimity, plural adaptation, or stratified fragmentation is not biologically ordained. It is partly a problem of network architecture, political economy, accessibility, ethics, and choice.

Executive reconstruction: the strongest version of the question The original argument is intentionally exploratory. Its ideas become clearer when reconstructed as a sequence rather

than treated as one claim.

- 1 Individual perception is not a passive copy of a finished world. The brain actively infers, predicts, attends, and regulates a body in continuous exchange with an environment.
- 2 Beliefs are biologically implemented and can alter attention, emotion, physiology, action, and learning. Through action and social feedback, they can change some external outcomes.
- 3 People do not construct meaning alone. Language, norms, roles, collective memory, institutions, and shared expectations create an intersubjective layer of reality.
- 4 Communication technologies connect these systems at unprecedented speed and scale. Humanity may therefore be becoming a more integrated cognitive network.
- 5 Greater integration could require rapid biological and psychological adaptation. Unequal capacity or willingness to adapt might produce exclusion, stratification, or selection.
- 6 Widespread stress during this transition could contribute to global instability. War, economic crisis, social fragmentation, and environmental harm might be downstream expressions of a maladapted collective system.
- 7 The transition may be interpreted as progress, coercion, apocalypse, civilizational recurrence, spiritual transformation, or a stage in a simulation.

This reconstruction reveals that the argument does not stand or fall as a whole. Each arrow requires its own mechanism and evidence.

The key methodological rule: a true claim at one level does not automatically validate the next level. Constructed perception does not by itself prove constructed physics; coordinated groups do not by themselves prove a group subject; social exclusion does not by itself prove natural selection; recurring collapse does not by itself prove a cosmic loop.

Keywords: collective consciousness; cognitive ecology; network science; social ontology; hyperscanning; cultural evolution; collective intelligence; civilizational transition; evidence synthesis

Six research questions

The compressed answer

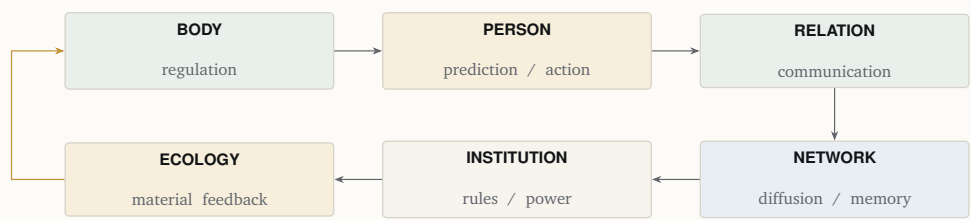
The project becomes scientifically strongest when it replaces the image of a single collective mind with a nested feedback system:

bodies ↔ persons ↔ relationships ↔ networks ↔ institutions ↔ ecologies

Information and influence move in both directions, but not without translation. A platform

Table 1. Six research questions and the best current answers

Research question	Academic form	Best current answer
How does a private model become a public reality?	Through shared attention, language, imitation, sanctions, status assignment, law, infrastructure, and repeated practice.	Well supported, provided “reality” means intersubjective and institutional reality, not arbitrary control of matter.
Is global communication creating one consciousness?	Test whether integration produces shared information, coordinated agency, global memory, or a single phenomenal subject.	Functional integration is supported; one phenomenal subject is not established.
Is technological acceleration changing the brain?	Examine learning, attention, stress, development, and neuroplasticity under altered environments.	Yes, as all sustained environments do; effects are heterogeneous and not evidence of a new human essence.
Will non-adapters be biologically selected out?	Distinguish plasticity, social sorting, cultural selection, differential health, reproductive selection, and genetic change.	Social and cultural sorting are plausible and visible; a directed digital genetic selection claim is unsupported.
Is instability an internal collective biological conflict?	Identify paths from shared threat and stress to mobilization, policy, markets, violence, emissions, and vulnerability.	Possible as one mediated contributor; insufficient as a general explanation and false if proposed as direct mind-to-disaster causation.
Is this breakthrough, apocalypse, recurrence, or simulation?	Separate empirical forecasts, historical analogies, existential interpretations, and metaphysical hypotheses.	All are interpretive possibilities; none follows uniquely from present evidence.



Every transition requires a carrier, mechanism, timescale, and counterfactual.

Figure 1. The nested cognitive ecology. Influence is reciprocal, but every crossing between levels requires an identifiable causal bridge.

notification can alter attention; repeated attention can alter learning and arousal; many users' actions can alter rankings; rankings can alter public salience; salience can alter votes or markets; policy can alter infrastructure and emissions; those material changes return as bodily conditions. This is a genuine route by which collective belief participates in the production of history. It requires no quantum intention effect, no telepathy, and no denial of material causation.

1. Scope, method, and standards of inference

Reader’s guide to claim classes

This report contains four kinds of statement that are deliberately kept distinct:

Table 2. Reader’s guide to claim classes

	Question it answers	Typical warrant	What it cannot establish by itself
Empirical	What happens, for whom, under which conditions?	Observation, experiment, longitudinal or comparative evidence	Ultimate meaning, moral value, or metaphysical necessity
Mechanistic	Through which steps does an effect occur?	Interventions, mediation, temporal ordering, convergent models	That the mechanism is the only cause or applies at every scale
Interpretive	What does an experience or historical condition mean?	Phenomenology, hermeneutics, conceptual coherence, situated testimony	Population prevalence or physical causation
Normative	What should people and institutions protect or pursue?	Ethical argument, rights, consequences, public justification	A value conclusion forced by biological data alone

The argument becomes strongest when these classes inform one another without collapsing into one another. A stress response can be measured; its meaning to a community must be interpreted; whether an institution may deliberately induce it is a normative question. A reader may accept the empirical account while rejecting the metaphysics, or accept a spiritual interpretation while acknowledging that it is not a causal estimate.

1.1 What kind of research this is

This is a critical integrative review and philosophical synthesis, not a registered systematic review or a claim of exhaustive coverage. It draws on social ontology, collective intentionality, cultural psychology, cultural neuroscience, network science, collective intelligence, communication research, stress biology, disability studies, cultural evolution, conflict studies, economics, disaster-risk science, archaeology, philosophy of technology, religious studies, existentialism, consciousness science, and simulation arguments. Primary experiments, major reviews, scholarly monographs, official statistical reports, and authoritative reference works were prioritized. Literature was checked through 5 September 2026.

Three different tasks are kept separate:

- Description: What patterns exist — synchrony, convergence, exclusion, stress, conflict, or collapse?
- Causal explanation: Through what carrier, mechanism, timescale, and counterfactual does one event produce another?
- Interpretation: What does the pattern mean for freedom, identity, progress, spiritual

unity, or the end of a world?

An interpretation can be profound without being a measured mechanism. A mechanism can be real without settling its moral meaning.

1.2 Evidence grades

Table 3. Evidence grades used in this report

Grade	Meaning in this report
A — established	Convergent evidence or a well-supported causal principle with clear operational meaning.
B — supported with limits	Replicated, experimental, or synthetic support with important boundary conditions or heterogeneity.
C — plausible or suggestive	A defensible mechanism or preliminary association that needs stronger identification or replication.
D — unsupported as stated	The evidence does not establish the claim, a necessary bridge is absent, or the interpretation exceeds the data.
M — metaphysical or meaning claim	Not straightforwardly decidable by current empirical methods; assess coherence, implications, and compatibility with evidence.

1.3 The four-question causal audit

For every proposed connection, ask:

- 1 Carrier: What moves between levels — signals, words, money, law, hormones, pathogens, weapons, carbon, or something else?
- 2 Mechanism: What transformation connects cause to outcome?
- 3 Timescale: Seconds, developmental years, institutional decades, or genetic generations?
- 4 Counterfactual: What observation would be expected if the proposed cause were absent or altered?

If no carrier or counterfactual can be specified, the proposition may be metaphorical, metaphysical, or too vague to test. It should not be labeled scientific merely because it uses words such as energy, frequency, chemistry, evolution, or quantum.

1.4 A note on humane language

The terms “adapted,” “advanced,” and “selected” easily smuggle a hierarchy into description. Biological fitness means relative reproductive success in a defined environment; it does not mean intelligence, dignity, virtue, worth, or entitlement. Disability is not a single biological deficit, and technology can create disability by building environments around a narrow model of the user. A society that excludes people has demonstrated a design and justice failure, not the inferiority of those excluded [29–32].

2. The bridge from individual reality to collective reality

2.1 What Parts I and II established

The earlier stages of this project established two boundaries.

First, quantum physics describes a dynamic, relational, probabilistic, and nonclassical physical world, but it does not show that desire selects macroscopic outcomes. The scientific route from intention to outcome runs through attention, action, feedback, other agents, institutions, and material conditions.

Second, belief is biologically real. Expectations, appraisals, learned predictions, autonomic regulation, neuroendocrine processes, habits, and action can modify perceived reality and behavior-mediated outcomes. Yet belief is not a command sent from an immaterial observer to a chemical machine. The brain is an embodied, developmental, electrochemical control system. Conviction can bias data processing, recruit physiology, and organize behavior; it cannot make an arbitrary proposition true or directly command an independent event without a causal bridge.

A social fact must be added here: much of the evidence a brain samples is produced by other brains and by institutions. A person's predictions are trained not only by sensory regularities but also by parents, schools, rituals, media, laws, interfaces, markets, and collective memory. The loop is therefore not merely brain-body-world. It is brain-body-social-world.

2.2 Three realities that must not be collapsed

Table 4. Three realities that must not be collapsed

	Examples	Dependence on observers	Form of resistance
Physical-material	gravity, viruses, atmospheric chemistry, tectonic movement, another organism's body	Observation may be required to know it; ordinary existence and causal behavior are not normally dependent on collective endorsement.	Measurement, injury, energy constraints, failed prediction, other causal systems.
Experiential-phenomenal	pain, color experience, fear, felt meaning, presence, selfhood	Constitutively depends on a living subject and its processing.	Sensory evidence, physiology, learned priors, attention limits, pathology.
Intersubjective-institutional	money, citizenship, offices, property, grades, reputations, norms	Depends substantially on shared recognition, rules, enforcement, records, and practice.	Sanctions, law, infrastructure, unequal power, path dependence, dissent.

Calling all three “constructed” conceals more than it explains. Experienced color is constructed through a nervous system; currency is instituted through shared rules and enforcement; atmospheric warming is physically produced by greenhouse gas accumulation. These are different ontologies and causal pathways.

2.3 Generative does not mean unconstrained

Perception is generative because a nervous system must infer hidden causes from incomplete signals. Social order is generative because people continuously reproduce, revise, and contest meanings. History is generative because interacting agents create outcomes not contained in any single intention. None of these claims implies that anything can become anything.

A useful formula is:

generated outcome = prior structure + present input + interaction rules + feedback + constraint + contingency

The formula protects two truths at once. Human beings are not passive spectators of a fixed realm, and human beings are not omnipotent authors of an obedient realm.

2.4 Process, phenomenology, and realism: three compatible corrections

The phrase “reality in motion” can point to several philosophical positions, and intellectual clarity requires that they not be blended into a single doctrine.

Process philosophy treats becoming, event, activity, and relation as metaphysically basic rather than treating stable substances as the whole of reality. In the tradition associated with Whitehead, apparently enduring things can be understood as organized continuities within processes [106]. This gives philosophical depth to the intuition that reality is not a finished inventory. It does not show that human intention selects physical outcomes. A process ontology can be realist: processes may unfold independently of what any person wants.

Phenomenology begins from how a world is disclosed in lived experience — through embodiment, temporality, attention, practical involvement, and relations with others [107]. It resists the picture of an

inner spectator reconstructing a completely external scene from nowhere. Yet phenomenology does not imply that the experienced world is a private hallucination. It asks how objects, other persons, and a common world acquire sense for situated subjects.

Scientific and critical realism preserve a mind-independent causal order while accepting that knowledge of it is theory-laden, historically situated, and fallible [108,109]. Hacking’s question “the social construction of what?” is valuable because different objects — classifications, institutions, experiences, technologies, and physical entities — are socially involved in different ways [110]. A concept can be socially constructed while its referent resists the concept; an institution can be constituted by rules while producing bodily effects; an observation can be mediated by instruments while still answering to a reality not created by the instrument.

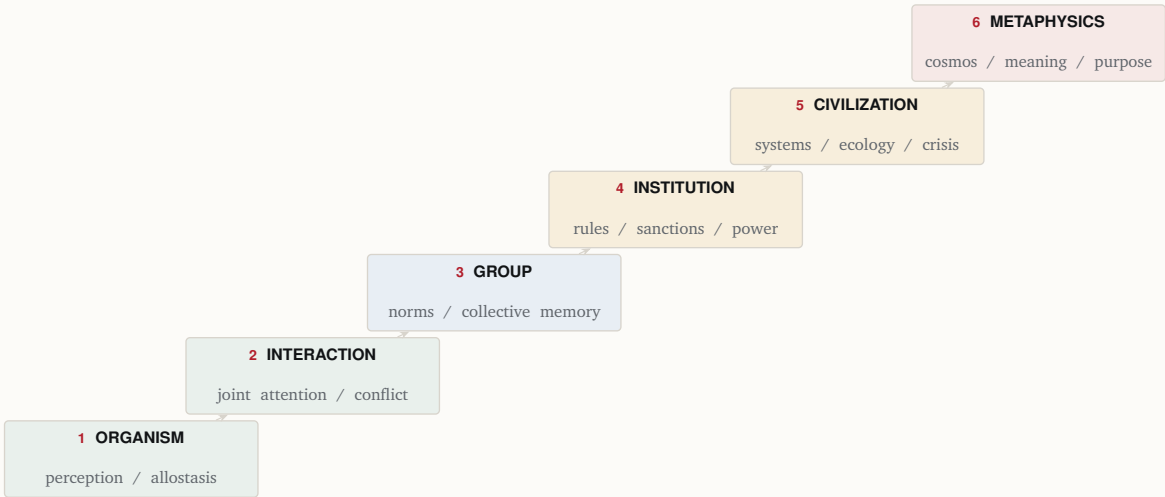
These positions need not cancel one another. A defensible synthesis is:

The world is dynamic; access to it is embodied and perspectival; social worlds are historically instituted; and inquiry remains accountable to constraints that no community can simply vote away.

This is a stronger philosophical foundation than either naive objectivism, which imagines unmediated access to a finished world, or unrestricted constructivism, which treats resistance as merely another story.

3. A causal staircase from neurons to civilization

The project becomes vulnerable when it jumps directly from neural plasticity to planetary destiny. A six-level staircase shows where additional explanations are required.



Truth at one step does not cross the next step without an additional mechanism.

Figure 2. The causal staircase. Evidence cannot be carried upward by metaphor alone.

Table 5. The causal staircase: legitimate inferences and illegitimate jumps

	Unit and process	Legitimate inference	Illegitimate jump
1. Organism	perception, emotion, learning, allostasis, action	Experience and practice can alter processing and behavior.	One person’s conviction controls unrelated external events.
2. Interaction	imitation, communication, attachment, conflict, joint attention	People coordinate meanings and regulate one another.	Synchrony proves telepathy or fusion of subjects.
3. Group	norms, conventions, collective memory, group problem-solving	Groups can exhibit stable patterns and emergent performance.	Group-level function proves a conscious group self.
4. Institution	law, markets, bureaucracy, platforms, religion, education	Rules and power make classifications materially consequential.	Institutional reality is merely imaginary or equally chosen by all.
5. Civilization	technological systems, political economy, ecology, war, trade	Coupled systems can cascade, adapt, fragment, or collapse.	One psychological condition is a sufficient cause of every crisis.
6. Metaphysics	cosmic mind, apocalypse, simulation, recurrence	Frameworks can organize meaning and generate conditional questions.	Existential resonance counts as empirical confirmation.

3.1 Downward causation without magic

Higher-level arrangements can change lower-level conditions. A law changes behavior by reorganizing incentives, surveillance, legitimacy, and punishment. An economic recession changes bodies through unemployment, food insecurity, housing stress, care access, uncertainty, and social status [66]. An interface changes attention through salience, timing, reward cues, and friction. No mysterious force must travel from “society” into a neuron; institutions alter the streams of energy, information, threat, opportunity, and practice to which organisms are exposed.

3.2 Upward emergence without a hidden commander

Macro-patterns can arise from local rules even when nobody intends them. Schelling’s segregation models famously show how relatively mild local preferences can yield strongly segregated outcomes [17]. A traffic jam has structure without a traffic-jam mind. A market price aggregates actions without necessarily expressing wisdom. Emergence explains how organization appears at a higher scale; it does not automatically add consciousness, purpose, or moral progress [87].

3.3 Recursive causation

The stronger model is circular rather than bottom-up or top-down:

biological dispositions → attention and action → relationships and networks → norms and institutions → environments and opportunities → biological development and regulation

Each pass changes the conditions of the next. Because the loop is recursive, small interventions can sometimes compound. Because it is multilevel, no one intervention is sovereign.

3.4 Predictive processing and active inference: how expectation becomes worldly action

action Predictive-processing theories propose that perception depends on hierarchical expectations about the hidden causes of sensory input, revised by discrepancies between prediction and signal [100,101]. Active-inference formulations add that organisms do not only revise models; they also act to sample expected evidence, regulate their bodies, and alter their environments [100,102]. These frameworks remain theoretically contested, and the free-energy principle is not a license to redescribe every behavior as automatically explained. Their value here is narrower: they formalize why belief can influence experience and behavior without granting belief arbitrary control over the world.

When evidence conflicts with a prediction, at least four things can happen:

- 1 the belief can be revised;
- 2 attention can be redirected toward or away from the discrepant signal;
- 3 action can change the sampled environment;
- 4 the environment itself can be altered so that the prediction becomes more accurate.

The fourth route is the scientifically defensible bridge to a limited form of “manifestation.” A person who expects rejection may avoid contact, communicate defensively, elicit distance, and thereby create evidence consistent with the expectation. A community that expects a bank to fail may withdraw funds and help produce failure. A government that treats a population as dangerous may increase surveillance and coercion, generating resistance that appears to confirm the classification. None of these outcomes is caused by thought alone. Prediction organizes sampling and action; action changes relations and niches; changed niches supply new evidence.

Extended active-inference accounts explicitly place prediction across organism-environment loops and socially constructed cognitive niches [102]. The extended-mind thesis similarly argues that reliably integrated artifacts can become parts of a cognitive process, not merely external aids [104]. Enactive approaches emphasize that cognition is sense-making through embodied engagement rather than passive internal representation [103,105]. These theories disagree on important details, but jointly undermine an isolated-brain picture.

3.5 Precision, power, and self-confirming worlds

In predictive models, not every signal receives equal weight. Precision refers roughly to estimated reliability. Attention, arousal, habit, authority, repetition, and context can change which prediction errors matter. At the social level, power influences precision indirectly: a state record, expert judgment, platform ranking, or employer evaluation may carry more practical weight than a dissenter’s testimony because institutions attach consequences to it.

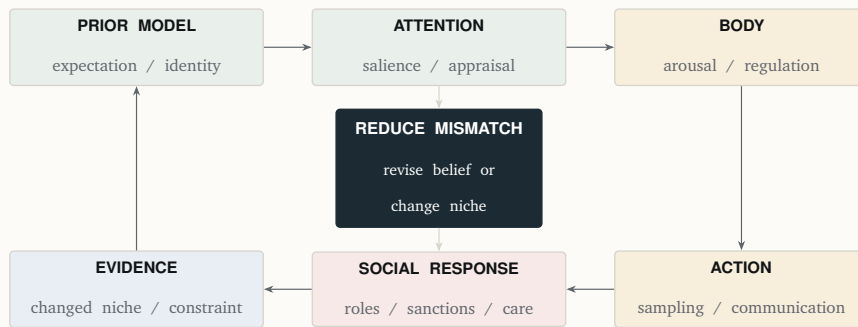
This produces three importantly different outcomes:

Table 6. Accurate learning, selective perception, and performative realization

	What changes?	Example	Epistemic status
Accurate learning	belief moves toward independently constrained evidence	a forecast is calibrated after repeated error	adaptive model revision
Selective perception	attention or interpretation favors prior-consistent evidence	ambiguous criticism is read as persecution	possible bias; external fact unchanged
Performative realization	action and institutions make part of a prediction true	expected withdrawal contributes to a bank run	reality changed through an identified causal loop

Strong conviction can stabilize any of the three. Intensity therefore does not distinguish truth from distortion. The scientific practice is not to maximize certainty but to improve calibration: expose beliefs to informative error, preserve alternative models, and examine whether the apparent confirmation was independently discovered or behaviorally produced.

3.6 The predictive-social reality loop



Belief changes reality only when attention, action, other agents, and material conditions complete the loop.

Figure 3. The predictive–social reality loop. Expectations influence experience and outcomes through embodied attention, action, social response, and material feedback.

The resulting model is neither “mind creates everything” nor “mind only observes.” It is a recursive loop:

prior model → attention and appraisal → bodily regulation → action and communication → response from other people and institutions → changed material and informational environment → updated or defended model

At every pass, several agents with different models act on the same partly independent world. Their projects can cooperate, collide, or cancel. This is why collective reality is generative but not centrally authored.

4. What could “collective consciousness” mean?

4.1 Meaning one: shared cultural consciousness

In the sociological sense associated with Durkheim, collective representations and a collective conscience refer to the categories, sacred distinctions, obligations, and symbols through which a group recognizes itself [10]. These are not stored in a supernatural container. They persist through language, ritual, memory, education, architecture, records, and sanctions. Individuals inherit a world already named and normatively organized, then reproduce or contest it.

This meaning is empirically and historically defensible. Communities clearly share calendars, kinship categories, taboos, myths, national narratives, scientific standards, and expectations of conduct. They can also misperceive what others believe. Pluralistic ignorance occurs when many privately reject a norm

while mistakenly believing that most others accept it, so public conformity sustains a reality almost nobody individually endorses [19]. Collective reality is therefore not simply the arithmetic mean of private minds.

4.2 Meaning two: collective intentionality and agency

Philosophers use collective intentionality for ways minds are jointly directed toward objects, facts, goals, or values, including shared intention, attention, belief, acceptance, and emotion [8]. A quartet plays a movement, a court issues a decision, a laboratory tests a hypothesis, and citizens maintain a currency because roles and commitments coordinate action. Shared agency can often be analyzed through interlocking individual intentions, mutual responsiveness, common knowledge, plans, and normative commitments [7,12–14].

This does not require every member to have the same mental state. Indeed, a functioning collective often requires differentiated roles and disagreement. The orchestra is coordinated because the violinist and percussionist do different things at the right relation to one another, not because they become neurologically identical.

4.3 Meaning three: distributed cognition

Some cognitive tasks are accomplished by systems that include people, artifacts, representations, and environments. Navigation on a ship, aviation, scientific collaboration, and a legal archive distribute memory and computation across participants and tools [15]. Network topology changes what groups remember and how beliefs or solutions spread [5]. A team can possess task-relevant information no member holds in isolation.

It is therefore reasonable to say that a group or institution has a functional memory or solves a problem. This is a claim about organized performance. It does not yet show that the system has a private point of view.

4.4 Meaning four: Jung's collective unconscious

Jung's collective unconscious is not Durkheim's public norms. It proposes inherited archetypal structures common to humanity beneath personal experience [11]. It has had enormous interpretive influence in psychology, religion, art, and myth studies. In contemporary empirical terms, some recurring motifs can also be investigated through shared embodiment, evolved predispositions, developmental regularities, common social problems, diffusion, and convergent cultural invention. Those mechanisms do not prove or disprove every Jungian interpretation, but they mean recurrence alone cannot identify a unique inherited archetypal substrate.

4.5 Meaning five: a literal phenomenal group mind

The strongest claim is that a community, humanity, or the planet is one subject with a unified stream of experience. Current consciousness science has not established this. Even for individual human consciousness, theories disagree about necessary mechanisms, and a major adversarial collaboration published in 2025 challenged distinctive predictions of both global neuronal workspace theory and integrated information theory without delivering a final theory [88,89].

Interpersonal neural synchrony is real in a limited statistical sense: during communication or shared activity, time-varying signals in different people can become correlated [53]. The causes may include shared stimuli, reciprocal prediction, coordinated movement, turn-taking, common arousal, and learning. Correlation across brains is not a new brain, and synchrony is not identity. Two musicians can entrain to a beat while retaining different thoughts.

4.6 The conclusion on collective consciousness

Table 7. Proposed meanings of collective consciousness and their status

Proposed meaning	Status	What would strengthen it?
Shared symbols, norms, and public memory	A	Already supported by observation, history, and social science.
Joint attention, intention, and coordinated agency	A/B	Clear operational measures of commitments, roles, and coordination.
Distributed collective cognition	B	Evidence that system-level performance depends on organized interactions, not mere aggregation.
Archetypal collective unconscious	M/C, depending on formulation	Predictions distinguishing inheritance from diffusion, common embodiment, and convergent learning.
Unified phenomenal human or planetary subject	D/M under current evidence	A theory specifying integration, boundaries, reportability, causal effects, and tests that differ from ordinary communication.

The scientifically responsible statement is not “humanity is becoming one consciousness.” It is: human cognitive systems are becoming more densely coupled through shared technical infrastructures, and this changes collective attention, memory, coordination, conflict, and power.

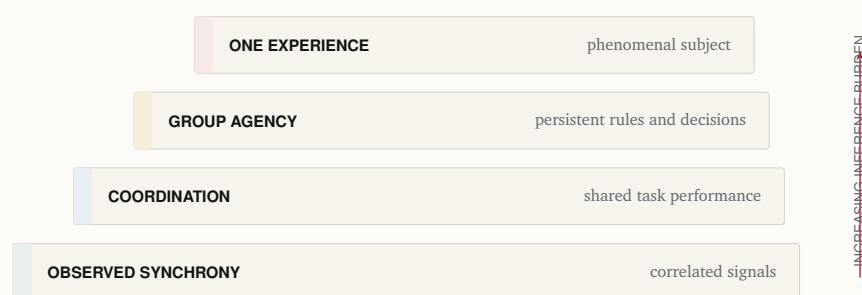
4.7 Group agency does not require group experience

Organizations can satisfy functional and normative criteria for agency when they maintain representations, deliberate under procedures, form commitments, act through authorized roles, and revise policy in response to reasons [111,112]. A corporation can sign a contract; a court can reverse a judgment; a scientific collaboration can retract a result. These predicates are not merely poetic because rules identify how the group’s state persists when individual members change.

But organizational agency and phenomenal consciousness answer different questions. Agency concerns coordinated control and attribution: can the system decide, act, and be held responsible? Phenomenality concerns whether there is something it is like to be that system. A committee may reach one official decision while its members experience doubt, fatigue, relief, and dissent separately. Nothing in the decision procedure demonstrates an additional subject who feels the vote.

This distinction has ethical importance. Denying a literal group mind does not remove institutional responsibility. Conversely, attributing a mind to “the nation” can obscure the persons and offices that made decisions. Group agency should be used to clarify accountability, not mystify it.

4.8 What hyperscanning actually measures



Evidence for one rung cannot be promoted to the next without a new theory and test.

Figure 4. The inference ladder. Synchrony, coordination, agency, and phenomenal unity are distinct propositions with increasing evidential burdens.

Hyperscanning records neural or physiological signals from two or more people during interaction. Studies have associated interpersonal coherence with cooperation, teacher-student engagement, conversation, shared attention, and relationship quality [113–115]. These are scientifically valuable findings: social interaction has measurable temporal structure across bodies.

The inference ladder, however, becomes weaker at each step:

Table 8. What hyperscanning actually measures

Observation	Defensible interpretation	Additional evidence still needed
Signals covary in time	statistical synchrony or shared temporal structure	rule out common stimulus, movement, artifact, and autocorrelation
Synchrony predicts joint performance	coupling may track coordination	manipulate coupling or communication to establish causal direction
A group maintains coordinated goals	functional group agency may exist	specify boundaries, decision rules, memory, and accountability
A group has one experience	phenomenal group consciousness	a theory and discriminating evidence not supplied by correlation alone

Novembre and Iannetti argue that hyperscanning alone cannot establish causality; multi-brain stimulation or other interventions are needed to test whether one participant’s neural dynamics causally affect another’s behavior through specified channels [116]. Even causal interbrain influence would not by itself establish a merged subject. Conversation already involves causal influence between distinct minds.

4.9 More synchrony is not always better

An especially useful correction comes from real-world conversation. Speer and colleagues found that friends and strangers could show different neural and linguistic dynamics: strangers tended toward convergence, whereas friends could explore a semantic space more divergently while maintaining successful interaction [115]. The lesson is not that synchrony is unimportant. It is that coordination can require complementary difference rather than maximal alignment.

A healthy collective may need oscillation between integration and differentiation: enough shared reference to cooperate, enough independence to discover error, and enough protected plurality to generate alternatives. A single scalar called “collective coherence” would miss this structure.

5. How shared belief becomes culturally real

5.1 Recognition, rules, and enforcement

Social ontology studies entities that arise through interaction and asks what makes them the things they are [9]. A banknote's paper has physical properties, but its monetary status depends on collective rules, institutions, records, enforcement, and trust [12,16]. A border can be invisible in the soil yet determine movement, detention, taxation, and survival. A diagnosis is not only a word; it can organize care, identity, insurance, stigma, research, and law.

This is the first defensible sense in which collective belief alters reality. The effect is not produced by belief alone. Shared recognition is joined to repeated action, infrastructure, power, material records, and sanctions.

5.2 Norms are expectations plus conditional behavior

Norms persist partly because people expect others to follow them and expect approval or punishment around compliance [18]. A norm can therefore survive through several different configurations:

- sincere endorsement by most members;
- reluctant conformity under sanction;
- pluralistic ignorance;
- strategic performance by institutions or elites;
- habit and default rather than explicit belief;
- unequal capacity to dissent.

Calling a norm "collective consciousness" can hide these differences. Consensus achieved by coercion is not the same as agreement reached through reasons. Uniform public behavior does not demonstrate uniform private belief.

5.3 Language and categories act by changing affordances

Naming can make patterns available for attention and coordination. A legal category can authorize a benefit; a medical label can bring care or stigma; a social identity can enable solidarity or exclusion. Categories also loop: once people are classified, they may respond to the classification, institutions revise it, and the category changes. The reality created is neither merely verbal nor independent of people. It is an interactive, historically maintained arrangement.

5.4 Power decides whose reality becomes infrastructure

Collective reality is not produced by a vote among equal observers. States, corporations, professions, platforms, religious authorities, property owners, and media institutions differ dramatically in their capacity to define defaults, archive memory, rank speech, and impose consequences. Habermas's ideal of communication oriented toward reasons highlights the difference between understanding and strategic manipulation [20]. Arendt's account of political action places plurality — distinct people appearing and speaking together — at the center of freedom [21,79].

Any theory of collective consciousness that omits power risks describing domination as spontaneous unity. The crucial question is not only, "What does the group believe?" It is also, "Who designed the setting in which belief becomes visible, rewarded, censored, or compulsory?"

5.5 Social construction does not abolish truth

A community can construct a currency and still miscalculate inflation. It can construct a court and still convict an innocent person. It can construct a scientific institution and still be corrected by nature. Socially organized inquiry is capable of both bias and self-correction because claims encounter evidence, replication, criticism, and consequences.

The public-friendly distinction is simple:

Some facts exist because people collectively maintain a rule. Other facts exist whether or not people accept them. Many historical outcomes arise where the two meet.

5.6 Cultural transmission reconstructs; it does not merely copy

Ideas do not spread like intact biological particles. People attend selectively, infer intentions, simplify, elaborate, mistranslate, and rebuild representations from prior knowledge. Cultural-attraction theory emphasizes that repeated reconstruction can make some forms recur because cognitive, ecological, and communicative factors pull transmission toward similar outcomes [117]. Cumulative cultural evolution, by contrast, asks when modifications are preserved and combined so that practices or technologies become more complex or effective across generations [118–121].

These processes produce both convergence and divergence. Similar human bodies and problems can generate recurrent motifs without direct contact. Teaching and records can preserve highly arbitrary conventions. Institutions can stabilize a standard; identity can motivate deliberate differentiation. Therefore a globally repeated symbol may reflect diffusion, common constraints, cultural attraction, strategic branding, or convergent invention. Recurrence alone does not establish an archetype, telepathy, or civilizational memory.

5.7 Identity converts shared meaning into collective action

The social identity model of collective action integrates three recurring predictors: perceived injustice, group efficacy, and identification with the relevant group [122]. A grievance becomes politically causal when people interpret it as shared, believe coordinated action is possible, and occupy networks capable of mobilization. Emotion matters, but identity and efficacy organize where emotion is directed.

The same mechanism helps explain why a period of rapid change can yield solidarity in one context and exclusion in another. A threatening event does not contain its own political meaning. Leaders, institutions, histories, and peer networks identify an agent, victim, remedy, and possible “we.” Collective consciousness in this sense is a contested process of category formation and coordinated agency.

5.8 System justification and pluralistic ignorance complicate awakening narratives

People do not only resist systems. They can rationalize existing arrangements, including arrangements that disadvantage them, because legitimacy, predictability, identity, dependence, and perceived alternatives shape judgment [123]. At the same time, pluralistic ignorance can sustain a public norm that many individuals privately reject [19]. These mechanisms point in opposite directions but share a lesson: visible stability is not transparent evidence of private endorsement.

Nor is dissent transparent evidence of superior awareness. People may reject a system for accurate, self-interested, identity-protective, conspiratorial, or principled reasons. The labels “awake” and “asleep” conceal this variation and pre-judge the argument. Research should measure beliefs, perceived norms, incentives, dependence, and available alternatives separately.

5.9 Collective trauma is cultural memory, not a single injured brain

Collective trauma can name the enduring transformation of a group’s narratives, identities, institutions, rituals, and expectations after mass violence, displacement, catastrophe, or oppression [124]. Individuals may have clinical trauma symptoms, but a group does not need one nervous system for the event to organize public memory. Transmission can occur through caregiving, silence, education, commemoration, material loss, segregation, law, continuing threat, and media.

This concept must retain causal discipline. A historical wound can influence present appraisal without making every current behavior a symptom. Descendants vary; memories are contested; political actors can mobilize or revise narratives; and material disadvantage may persist independently of memory. The clinically informed principles proposed for mass-trauma response — safety, calming, individual and collective efficacy, connectedness, and hope — are useful precisely because recovery is social as well as intrapersonal [125]. They are not proof of a supra-individual brain.

6. When groups become intelligent — and when they become confidently wrong

6.1 Collective intelligence is measurable but conditional

Across 22 studies involving 5,279 people in 1,356 groups, Riedl and colleagues found evidence for a general collective-intelligence factor that predicts performance across different group tasks [1]. Earlier work by Woolley and colleagues reported a related factor associated not simply with the average or maximum intelligence of members, but with interactional properties including social sensitivity and a more even distribution of conversational turns [2]. These findings justify a functional concept of group intelligence.

They do not prove that every crowd is wise, that one scalar captures all collective competence, or that the group is conscious. Task selection, membership, communication, coordination, and measurement determine what the factor means. A mob, jury, research team, market, neighborhood, and platform population solve different problems under different constraints.

6.2 The wisdom-of-crowds conditions

Aggregation is most likely to improve judgment when several conditions are present:

- members possess partly independent information or errors;
- relevant perspectives are genuinely diverse;
- people can express judgments without severe retaliation or prestige pressure;
- a suitable rule aggregates the judgments;
- feedback rewards accuracy rather than virality, loyalty, or confidence;
- manipulation and coordinated inauthentic behavior are limited;
- the problem is decomposable or benefits from distributed knowledge.

Diversity is not merely demographic decoration. It can increase the range of models, information, and error directions available to a system [95]. Independence does not mean isolation; it means that errors are not all copied from the same source before aggregation.

6.3 Social influence can destroy the very diversity aggregation needs

Lorenz and colleagues experimentally showed that seeing others' estimates could reduce group diversity without improving collective error while increasing participants' confidence [3]. The result is epistemically dangerous: convergence can feel like learning even when accuracy has not improved. A synchronized crowd can be more certain and no more correct.

The opposite result is also possible. In experiments by Almaatouq and colleagues, adaptive

social networks allowed participants to change whom they consulted, and under studied conditions the feedback between network ties and performance improved group estimates [4]. Network plasticity can therefore rescue or degrade collective intelligence. The outcome depends on how influence is allocated and whether competence becomes visible without creating a prestige monopoly.

6.4 Tipping points and conventions

Conventions can shift discontinuously. Centola and colleagues found experimental evidence that a committed minority could trigger change in an established social convention once a context-specific threshold was crossed [6]. This gives a scientific mechanism for an experience often described as a “shift in collective consciousness.” A population may appear stable until enough visible dissent changes expectations about what others will do.

The finding does not establish a universal minority percentage, moral progress, or psychic field. It establishes a coordination dynamic: because the payoff to one person’s action depends on expectations about others, changing public expectations can reorganize behavior rapidly.

6.5 Collective memory is reconstruction, not a perfect archive

Groups remember through stories, commemorations, curricula, search engines, databases, monuments, and silences. Network structure influences which memories become shared and which are lost [5]. Digital storage greatly expands retrievability but does not abolish selection. Ranking systems, language dominance, deletion, ownership, format obsolescence, and attention determine which stored traces become usable memory.

The internet is therefore not humanity’s neutral memory. It is a contested mnemonic infrastructure.

6.6 Emotional contagion is real but often overstated

Large-scale observational studies have found clustering and temporal patterns of emotion in online communication [51]. A controversial Facebook experiment that altered the emotional composition of feeds reported statistically detectable changes in users’ subsequent language, but the effects were very small and the study raised lasting ethical concerns about consent and platform experimentation [52]. Such evidence supports weak emotional influence through exposure; it does not show that platforms transmit a single mood into passive brains.

Shared emotion can arise through at least four routes:

- 1 a common event affects many people independently;
- 2 emotional expression supplies information about threat or value;
- 3 people imitate language, attention, and behavior;
- 4 platforms selectively amplify emotionally engaging content.

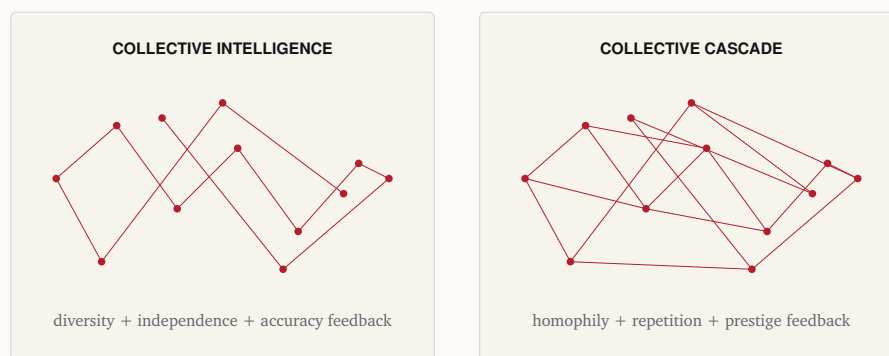
These routes can interact. Without a design that separates them, “contagion” may be confused with homophily or common exposure [25].

6.7 The Global Consciousness Project as a boundary case

The Global Consciousness Project has reported statistical anomalies in networks of random-number generators around major world events and interpreted them as possible effects of global consciousness [54]. This is directly relevant to the strongest version of the user’s hypothesis. It is also contested. Analyses have questioned event selection, analytical flexibility, independence, effect stability, and the inference from anomalies to a planetary mind; at least one long-run assessment concluded that the data did not support the proposed global-consciousness explanation [55,56].

The appropriate conclusion is not ridicule, but evidential discipline. Even if an anomaly were replicated, three further steps would remain: demonstrate that it is not an artifact, identify a physical coupling mechanism, and show that a global conscious subject explains the data better than alternatives. At present, accepted evidence for a mind-to-random-system planetary field is absent.

6.8 A compact network diagnosis



Connectivity amplifies the network’s epistemic conditions; it does not guarantee wisdom.

Figure 5. Two outcomes of social coupling. Network structure, incentives, and error independence determine which pattern dominates.

6.9 Collective intelligence is an institutional achievement

The phrase “wisdom of crowds” can imply that aggregation automatically discovers truth. In practice, a collective needs an epistemic constitution: rules determining who may speak, what counts as evidence, how claims are aggregated, who can challenge decisions, when uncertainty is displayed, and how errors are corrected. Scientific peer review, citizen assemblies, courts, markets, forecasting systems, and open-source communities implement different constitutions with different failure modes.

No design maximizes every value. Independence can protect error diversity but impede learning. Expertise can improve accuracy but become unaccountable authority. Speed can save lives during an emergency but suppress deliberation. Anonymity can protect dissent

Table 9. A compact network diagnosis

	Likely epistemic tendency	Psychological experience	Political risk
Diverse evidence, protected dissent, accuracy feedback	Error cancellation and discovery	Productive uncertainty	Slower decisions, but better correction
Homophily, prestige copying, repeated claims	Correlated error and false consensus	Familiarity mistaken for truth	Polarization and exclusion
Rapid global salience with weak verification	Fast coordination and fast cascades	Urgency, arousal, attention capture	Panic, manipulation, volatile mobilization
Centralized ranking and opaque incentives	Efficient focus under one controller	Learned dependence on platform cues	Agenda capture and managed unanimity
Adaptive ties with visible performance and safeguards	Expertise can be found and updated	Agency and feedback	Gaming, metric capture, new elites

and enable abuse. The scientific question is therefore

comparative: which architecture performs which task, under which incentives, with which distribution of voice and harm?

6.10 Accuracy prompts show that architecture can change behavior

In large social-media experiments, brief prompts that redirected attention toward accuracy improved the quality of news people subsequently said they would share [126]. The intervention did not make participants perfectly rational or eliminate motivated reasoning. It demonstrated that some misinformation sharing reflects inattention to truth at the moment of choice, not stable belief in every shared claim.

This matters for the project's practical direction. If a network rewards immediate expression, identity signaling, and engagement, individual willpower is not the only intervention point. Friction, provenance, delayed forwarding, visible uncertainty, independent judgments, and accuracy reminders can change the cognitive ecology in which choices occur.

7. Technology as a planetary coupling infrastructure

7.1 What is genuinely new

Humanity has long had trade routes, empires, diasporas, religions, scripts, markets, and long-distance rumor. The contemporary difference is not the invention of collective influence. It is the compression of time, expansion of reach, persistence of records, automation of selection, and density of feedback.

A message can now become globally visible within minutes; engagement can be measured immediately; recommendation systems can personalize exposure; institutions can coordinate across continents; and artificial systems can generate, summarize, translate, rank, and act on information at machine speed. These changes alter the effective topology of human interaction.

7.2 Coupling is not convergence

Two systems are coupled when the state of each can affect the other. Coupling may produce synchronization, but it can also produce oscillation, competition, segmentation, or instability. Greater communication does not guarantee agreement. It can make disagreement more visible, help dispersed minorities find one another, and enable identities to organize across geography.

The idea of one global public sphere is therefore better replaced by a network of overlapping publics with unequal visibility, resources, and access [22]. Some moments create global attention; most communication remains linguistically, politically, culturally, and algorithmically partitioned.

7.3 The acceleration of collective attention

An analysis across multiple cultural domains found that popular topics rise and fall faster as content supply and competition for attention increase [23]. This is not proof that individual attention spans have universally deteriorated. It is evidence that collective attention cycles have compressed. The distinction matters: a system can churn rapidly even if many individuals still sustain deep attention in protected settings.

Acceleration changes the conditions of public reasoning. Verification, institutional deliberation, due process, and scientific replication are slow; outrage, novelty, and imitation can be fast. When the public clock is set by engagement rather than investigation, the speed difference becomes a structural vulnerability.

7.4 Falsehood, novelty, and amplification

Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral found that false news diffused farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than true news on Twitter in the studied period, with novelty and human sharing playing important roles [24]. This does not mean every false claim outperforms every truth or that one platform and period define all communication. It demonstrates that an information system can select for transmissibility rather than truth.

Algorithmic influence also requires precision. Large collaborative experiments around the 2020 United States election found that changing feed order substantially changed what people saw but produced limited short-term changes in several measured political attitudes [26]. Research on like-minded exposure similarly shows that segregation in information sources can be prevalent without every exposure change producing immediate polarization [27]. Platforms can have major agenda, behavioral, market, and institutional effects without functioning as simple attitude-injection machines.

7.5 Homophily is not contagion

People who resemble one another often form ties. Therefore, similarity after connection does not prove that one person caused the other to change. Aral, Muchnik, and Sundararajan demonstrated why influence must be separated from homophily and shared environment [25]. The same warning applies to claims that networked consciousness is synchronizing humanity. Similar posts or emotions may result from common news, selection into communities, platform targeting, imitation, or reciprocal influence. A causal design must distinguish them.

7.6 The asymmetry of the connected world

The International Telecommunication Union estimated that almost three quarters of the global population was online in 2025, leaving 2.2 billion people offline; quality, affordability, gender, rural-urban, and skill gaps persisted [28]. Connection is also not binary. A person with expensive intermittent mobile data, limited literacy, inaccessible interfaces, or state-filtered access does not inhabit the same network as a wealthy multilingual user with broadband, privacy, and computational tools.

Consequently, technological “unification” can simultaneously generate:

- a shared layer of global symbols;
- deeper transnational cooperation;
- niche fragmentation and identity intensification;
- new dependencies on private infrastructure;
- asymmetric surveillance and persuasion;
- a hierarchy between those who can shape systems and those merely scored by them.

7.7 Artificial intelligence changes mediation, not human plurality by definition

AI systems increasingly mediate search, language, translation, work, education, administration, and cultural production. They may broaden access to expertise and reduce linguistic barriers. They may also homogenize style, reproduce dominant datasets, increase synthetic persuasion, concentrate infrastructure, and make provenance harder to judge.

The central research question is not whether AI “joins collective consciousness” in the abstract. It is which functions are delegated, whose values and data become defaults, how errors propagate, whether users retain contestability, and how benefits and risks are distributed.

7.8 Four futures of networked humanity

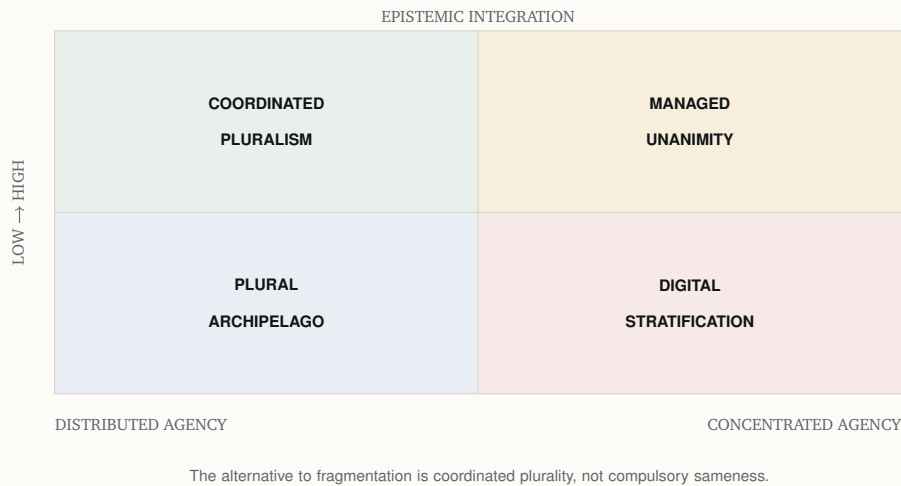


Figure 6. A scenario matrix, not a forecast. Integration and agency distribution are independent dimensions.

The following scenarios are not predictions. They are a way to prevent the words breakthrough and apocalypse from hiding different variables.

Table 10. Four futures of networked humanity

	Distributed agency	Concentrated agency
High epistemic integration	Coordinated pluralism: shared evidence standards, interoperable institutions, protected dissent, accessible participation.	Managed unanimity: efficient synchronization, common narrative, opaque ranking, surveillance, weak exit and dissent.
Low epistemic integration	Plural archipelago: diverse communities experiment and coexist, but translation and common action are difficult.	Digital stratification: fragmented realities governed by a few infrastructures; unequal groups receive different information, rights, and opportunities.

The desirable alternative to fragmentation is not sameness. It is the capacity to coordinate around shared problems while preserving plural perspectives, revisability, and rights.

7.9 Platform effects are causal, heterogeneous, and sometimes persistent

The strongest current evidence rejects two simple stories: that algorithms determine minds at will, and that changing algorithms has no meaningful effect. Large field experiments around the 2020 United States election found that substantial changes in Facebook feed composition did not reliably move several short-term political attitudes [26,27]. A separate preregistered deactivation experiment during the same election found many effects near zero for polarization and attitudes, alongside reductions in political knowledge and changes in well-being and time use [131]. Earlier Facebook deactivation research also found tradeoffs rather than a single welfare verdict [129].

By contrast, a seven-week randomized experiment on X reported in 2026 found that turning the algorithmic feed on increased engagement and shifted several policy attitudes in a conservative direction while leaving partisanship and affective polarization without statistically significant change [127]. Exposure also encouraged following accounts promoted by the feed, offering a mechanism through which an initially temporary intervention could leave a durable informational trace. Turning the feed off did not produce a simple reverse image of turning it on.

These findings are not contradictory once the treatment is specified. Platforms differ in user population, affordances, ranking objectives, political period, baseline habits, and the content actually promoted. Outcomes also differ: attention, following, factual knowledge, policy attitudes, partisan identity, affective hostility, and offline conduct are not interchangeable. The scientific conclusion is feature-by-context causality, not a universal dose of “social media.”

Evidence that exposure to opposing political views increased rather than reduced polarization in a field experiment provides a further warning against intuitive interventions [128]. Contact can correct caricature when it is cooperative and structured; algorithmically delivered counter-attitudinal content can instead

activate identity defense. Network design changes minds through psychologically mediated pathways, not hydraulic information pressure.

7.10 Generative AI can raise individual performance while narrowing collective variation

variation Experiments with generative AI have found a tension directly relevant to collective consciousness. AI assistance can improve average individual creative performance, especially for lower-performing participants, while making outputs more similar to one another and reducing the collective diversity of ideas [132]. This is not a universal law of every model or task. It demonstrates a possible composition effect: many locally beneficial choices can reduce the option diversity available to the population.

The same tension can occur in writing, design, programming, diagnosis, education, and administration. If millions of people begin from similar model suggestions, dominant framings can become cognitive infrastructure. Subsequent models may then train on AI-shaped material, potentially creating recursive homogenization. Alternatively, systems designed to elicit contrasting hypotheses, preserve provenance, expose minority knowledge, and let communities control models could widen the search space.

The relevant research outcomes are therefore plural:

- individual quality and accessibility;
- between-person diversity and originality;
- factual calibration and source traceability;
- distribution of gains across language, disability, class, and expertise;
- dependence, deskilling, and ability to operate without the system;
- concentration of agenda-setting and model ownership.

Calling AI a planetary intelligence compresses all of these into a flattering metaphor. Measuring them reveals which capacities are actually increasing and whose autonomy pays the cost.

7.11 Cognitive infrastructure requires constitutional governance

When ranking, recommendation, identity, translation, and generative systems mediate access to work, education, speech, and public services, they function as cognitive infrastructure. Governance then cannot be reduced to model accuracy. UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, the United Nations Global Digital Compact, the NIST AI Risk Management Framework, and the Council of Europe's binding framework convention each emphasize, in different legal forms, human rights, risk governance, transparency, accountability, inclusion, and human oversight [133–136].

A research-grounded constitutional test for such systems asks:

- 1 **Legibility:** Can affected people know that mediation occurred and understand the relevant basis?
- 2 **Contestability:** Can they challenge an output before irreversible harm?
- 3 **Plurality:** Are minority languages, values, and forms of knowledge represented without forced assimilation?
- 4 **Proportionality:** Is the intensity of surveillance or automation justified by the risk?
- 5 **Exit:** Does a meaningful non-digital or alternative route exist?
- 6 **Auditability:** Can independent investigators test disparate impact, manipulation, and failure?
- 7 **Repair:** Who bears responsibility and provides remedy when the system harms?

These questions convert an abstract fear of technological unification into assessable institutional design. They also preserve the possibility that refusal is a civic stance rather than a biological defect.

8. The biology of accelerated social change

8.1 The brain has no timeless natural setting

There is no single “natural processing state” to which every healthy brain should return. Nervous systems developed across sleep and waking, hunger and satiety, solitude and cooperation, exploration and defense. Allostasis describes stability achieved through anticipatory change: brains and bodies allocate resources in relation to expected demands [33,34]. The relevant sign of health is often flexible regulation and recovery, not chemical stillness.

Technology changes the environment in which this regulation occurs. Continuous alerts, uncertain social evaluation, information abundance, remote work, algorithmic reward, economic precarity, and sleep disruption can increase demands. Technology can also provide social support, assistive communication, education, income, safety, health information, and belonging. The same device is not one exposure.

8.2 A mechanistic stress pathway

A defensible pathway from social acceleration to biology is:

rapid or uncontrollable demand → threat and uncertainty appraisal → autonomic and endocrine mobilization → altered sleep, attention, immunity, metabolism, and behavior → recovery or cumulative allostatic load

Acute mobilization can be useful. Cost rises when demands are chronic, uncontrollable, socially evaluative, and poorly followed by recovery [33,34]. The pathway is probabilistic. Social support, resources, prior learning, health, age, disability, meaning, and agency change the outcome.

8.3 Information overload is a systems mismatch, not a weak character

Information overload occurs when the volume, complexity, uncertainty, or interruption rate of information exceeds a person’s or organization’s capacity to select and act [35]. The result can include delay, shallow processing, stress, omission, reliance on heuristics, and avoidance. “Technostress” research similarly links demands such as overload, invasion, complexity, insecurity, and uncertainty to strain, though measures and causal designs vary [36].

This is not evidence that a new frequency is forcing the brain to evolve. It is evidence that task environments can exceed current resources and that changing the environment may be as important as training the individual.

8.4 Culture becomes biology through repeated experience

Cultural neuroscience documents how culturally patterned attention, self-construal, language, emotion, and social practice are associated with differences in neural recruitment [39,40]. Social environments can also influence gene expression through neural, endocrine, immune, and behavioral pathways [41]. These findings support biological embedding: experience gets under the skin because the organism learns and regulates within a social world.

Biological embedding is not genetic rewriting of chosen beliefs. Changes in gene expression are context-dependent regulation, not necessarily changes in DNA sequence; brain differences are not permanent or inherently better; and group averages cannot diagnose an individual. Culture influences biology while biology, ecology, institutions, and individual action also influence culture.

8.5 Trauma is an important analogy with strict limits

Traumatic events can recalibrate threat learning, memory, avoidance, interoception, arousal, and stress regulation. The analogy is useful because it shows that experience can become persistent biology. It is misleading if it equates social-media repetition with trauma or assumes that sufficient belief intensity must produce the same plasticity.

Trauma commonly includes extreme threat, surprise, loss of control, physiological mobilization, consequential learning, and altered safety behavior. Many people are resilient, symptoms vary, and

recovery is possible. Evidence for intergenerational effects is important but human claims of epigenetic inheritance remain difficult to separate from prenatal exposures, family behavior, material conditions, and cultural transmission [42,43].

8.6 Does digital life cause a population-wide brain malfunction?

Current evidence does not support that general claim. In a large adolescent dataset, digital technology use accounted for at most a very small fraction of variation in well-being [37]. An umbrella review concluded that associations between social-media use and adolescent mental health are generally small, inconsistent, and dependent on how use, outcome, and individual susceptibility are measured [38]. This does not mean no person is harmed or no platform feature matters. Average exposure-time measures can conceal intense effects in vulnerable subgroups and ignore content, context, sleep, harassment, displacement, and active versus passive use.

The scientifically mature conclusion is heterogeneity:

- some people obtain connection, competence, accessibility, or identity support;
- some experience compulsion, comparison, harassment, sleep loss, or overload;
- many experience mixtures that change across time;
- institutional and design variables can matter more than a universal “screen time” dose.

8.7 Adaptation has more than one meaning

Table 11. Adaptation has more than one meaning

	Timescale	Example	Does it imply improvement?
Physiological regulation	seconds to days	arousal and recovery during information demand	No; useful acutely, costly if chronic.
Learning and plasticity	days to years	new attentional habits, interface skill, media literacy	No; people can learn harmful or helpful patterns.
Developmental accommodation	years	childhood development within a digitally mediated culture	No; tradeoffs and sensitive periods matter.
Social accommodation	immediate to decades	captions, flexible work, community support, right to disconnect	It can improve participation without changing the person.
Institutional adaptation	years to decades	platform rules, education, labor protections, public infrastructure	Depends on goals, legitimacy, and distribution.
Genetic adaptation	many generations	allele-frequency change under differential reproduction	Fitness is environment-specific, not moral progress.

8.8 The alternative to forced adaptation

If a setting repeatedly dysregulates large populations, one response is to train people to tolerate it. Another is to redesign the setting. Biology does not determine which burden must move. Slow institutions, accessible interfaces, protected rest, deliberative friction, privacy, community care, and economic security are biological interventions in the broad causal sense because they alter exposure and regulation.

8.9 Regulation is socially scaffolded

Human regulation is not an entirely private achievement. Social Baseline Theory proposes that nervous systems normally expect access to relationships that distribute risk and effort; isolation or unreliable support can therefore increase the perceived and metabolic cost of action [137]. Attachment, co-regulation, shared labor, trusted expertise, and public services are not decorative additions to an autonomous brain. They are parts of the environment in which regulation developed.

This provides a biological interpretation of institutional trust without reducing trust to a molecule. Reliable systems reduce uncertainty and effort because people need not individually monitor every hazard, verify every record, or defend every right. When institutions become unpredictable, corrupt, inaccessible, or contradictory, the resulting load is carried by bodies through vigilance, delay, lost sleep, and repeated self-advocacy. Conversely, solidarity can buffer stress without making group members one organism.

The same relationship creates vulnerability. Dependence on a group can make exclusion physiologically costly; charismatic certainty can feel regulating; a synchronized community can provide safety while discouraging corrective evidence. Felt relief is therefore evidence about regulation, not proof that the group's worldview is true.

8.10 What causal mental-health evidence does and does not show

Observational associations between technology use and distress are confounded by selection, prior symptoms, family context, socioeconomic conditions, and measurement error. Stronger designs reveal a mixed picture. The staggered rollout of Facebook across United States colleges was associated with worse student mental health in a quasi-experimental analysis, with social comparison proposed as an important mechanism [130]. Randomized deactivation studies have found modest changes in well-being and time use alongside losses in information and social connection [129,131]. Broad average effects can coexist with substantial benefit or harm for particular persons and uses.

These studies still do not measure a unitary substance called digital exposure. Removing an entire platform changes many things at once: social contact, news, entertainment, habit, status monitoring, work, and displaced activities. A mechanistic program must distinguish features such as:

- nighttime interruption and sleep displacement;
- harassment, exclusion, and social evaluation;
- passive comparison versus reciprocal interaction;
- compulsive variable reward;
- access to identity-affirming or assistive communities;
- political threat and moral outrage;
- livelihood dependence and inability to exit.

This is why “technology changed the brain” is simultaneously trivial and insufficient. Sustained experience changes learning and regulation; the scientific task is to identify which experience, which pathway, which person, and which functional outcome.

8.11 From belief to chemistry: a disciplined timescale model

The user’s biological question can now be answered across timescales. A consciously rehearsed belief may alter attention and appraisal within seconds; those appraisals can recruit autonomic and endocrine changes over seconds to hours; repeated patterns can alter learning, habits, sleep, and stress regulation over days to months; developmental environments can shape enduring capacities over years. None of these stages requires a global “chemical imbalance,” and no single neurotransmitter contains a worldview.

Table 12. From belief to chemistry: a disciplined timescale model

	Candidate process	Plausible effect of repeated belief or practice	Main evidential caution
Seconds-minutes	attention, appraisal, autonomic response	changes salience, heart rate, action readiness, felt meaning	demand characteristics and common stimulus
Hours-days	endocrine regulation, sleep, memory consolidation	changes recovery, recall bias, learning opportunity	reverse causality and lifestyle confounding
Weeks-months	reinforcement, extinction, habit, psychotherapy, skill learning	changes prediction, avoidance, coping, and behavior	improvement may reflect action and context, not belief alone
Years-development	plasticity, social learning, biological embedding	changes regulatory tendencies and available repertoires	sensitive periods, inequality, and many correlated exposures
Generations	cultural transmission or genetic evolution	preserves norms or, under strict conditions, allele-frequency change	cultural inheritance must not be mislabeled genetic

Conscious intervention is possible because attention, reappraisal, exposure, behavior, relationships, sleep, exercise, psychotherapy, and medication can enter these loops. Control is partial rather than absolute. A person can train responses and redesign niches; they cannot consciously dial a neurotransmitter to a precise target or guarantee an external outcome. The desired scientific endpoint is flexible, reality-sensitive regulation — not biochemical obedience to a preferred story.

9. Those who cannot, do not, or will not “catch up”

9.1 There is no single population of non-adapters

The phrase includes importantly different situations:

- people excluded by poverty, geography, war, censorship, or infrastructure;
- people facing inaccessible sensory, motor, cognitive, or linguistic design;
- people with illness, fatigue, trauma, or caregiving burdens;
- older adults or newcomers who need time and support;
- communities protecting local knowledge, sovereignty, or language;
- people making a principled choice to limit surveillance, automation, or speed;
- people whose work or social position is displaced by technological systems.

Treating all of them as biologically unable to advance turns political causes into natural defects.

9.2 Disability exposes the environment-person relation

The World Health Organization estimates that about 1.3 billion people, 16 percent of the world population, experience significant disability [29]. Disability may involve bodily or cognitive variation, but disabling outcomes also depend on environments. A staircase disables a wheelchair user where a ramp enables access; an uncaptioned lecture disables a deaf participant where accurate captions change the task; a timed opaque interface can exclude people who would perform well under another design.

AI and data systems can reproduce able-bodied and neurotypical assumptions through labels, proxies, training datasets, benchmark tasks, and inaccessible interfaces [31,32]. If those systems allocate jobs, insurance, credit, education, or public services, algorithmic exclusion can acquire material force. That is institutional selection, not evidence that the excluded are biologically less fit.

9.3 Connection without accessibility is not inclusion

The global digital divide concerns availability, affordability, device quality, speed, privacy, skills, language, safety, and meaningful control, not merely a network signal [28]. Assistive technology is also extremely unequally distributed; the WHO and UNICEF report major gaps in access between high- and low-income settings [30]. A theory of converging consciousness that relies on universal digital participation must therefore confront its absent members and unequal terms.

9.4 Isolation changes evidence and opportunity

Communal or geographic isolation can protect identity and continuity, but involuntary isolation can reduce access to information, care, labor markets, political representation, and diverse ties. Its biological effects occur through loneliness, stress, material deprivation, infectious exposure, nutrition, and care — not through disconnection from a metaphysical field.

Research should not assume that more connection is always better. Connection can expose people to harassment, coercion, misinformation, and extraction. The relevant variables are agency, quality, reciprocity, safety, and the ability to exit.

9.5 Refusal can be rational

Some people will reject acceleration because they value slowness, embodied community, privacy, religious continuity, local sovereignty, craft, ecological restraint, or freedom from constant evaluation. Calling this failure to adapt presupposes that the technological direction is obligatory and good.

Existential freedom is always situated rather than unlimited [78]. A meaningful choice requires viable alternatives. If employment, education, health care, and citizenship require one platform or cognitive style, nominal refusal may carry punitive costs. A humane society preserves analog routes, accessible design, interoperability, contestability, and the right not to be continuously optimized.

9.6 The justice test

Before describing a person's difficulty as biology, ask:

- 1 Was the system designed with that person?
- 2 Could an accommodation remove the barrier?
- 3 Who benefits from the current speed or complexity?
- 4 Who bears adaptation costs?
- 5 Is participation voluntary and reversible?
- 6 Can decisions be appealed to a human institution?

These questions do not deny biology. They identify the part of the causal system that can be changed without ranking human worth.

9.7 Temporal justice: who is permitted to move slowly?

Acceleration distributes time unequally. Some people buy speed through assistants, automation, broadband, secure housing, and flexible work; others absorb queues, unstable schedules, caregiving, inaccessible forms, translation burdens, and repeated verification. The demand to “keep up” may therefore measure purchased support more than neural capacity.

Temporal justice asks who controls tempo, whose delay counts as failure, and whether institutions provide time for comprehension, recovery, dissent, and appeal. A system that updates faster than a person can contest it converts speed into power. Protecting slower routes, human review, phased transitions, advance notice, interoperability, and paid training can reduce biological strain while improving legitimacy.

The ethical presumption should be accommodation before elimination. If a person does not adapt to an imposed tempo, the causal unit under evaluation is the person-in-environment, not the person alone.

10. Biological selection, cultural selection, and the danger of a category error

10.1 Natural selection has necessary components

For a trait to change in frequency by natural selection, there must be variation, relevant heritability, and differential reproductive success associated with that variation across generations. Contemporary human populations are still subject to evolutionary processes [47]. But observing that some people flourish economically or use technology more easily does not demonstrate genetic selection.

At least five alternatives must be ruled out:

- unequal education, wealth, health care, or network access;
- developmental plasticity and practice;
- migration or population structure;
- discrimination and institutional sorting;
- cultural transmission rather than genetic inheritance.

10.2 Selection is not one process

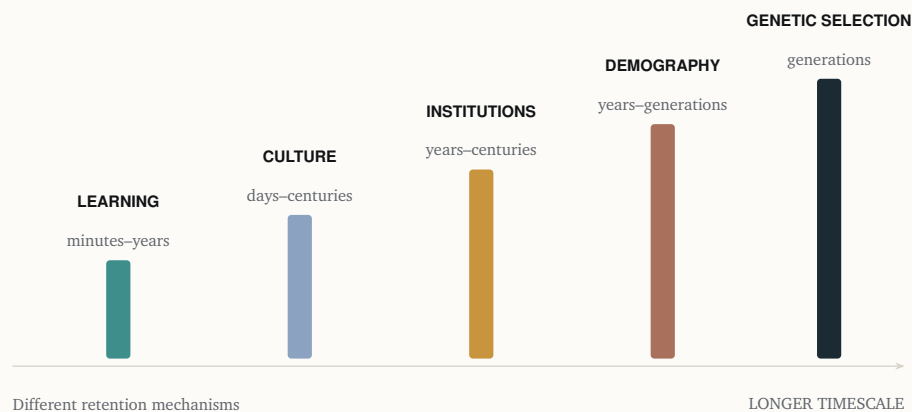


Figure 7. Selection-like processes operate on different units and timescales. Only genetic selection requires heritable biological variation and differential reproduction.

Table 13. Selection is not one process

	What varies	What is retained or reproduced	Typical timescale	Example
Learning	responses within a person	behavior strengthened by consequence	minutes to years	checking a feed after notifications
Cultural selection	ideas, practices, tools, norms	transmission through imitation, teaching, prestige, conformity	days to centuries	spread of a convention or ritual
Institutional selection	organizations, rules, standards	survival, expansion, imitation, or legal entrenchment	years to centuries	a platform standard becoming infrastructure
Demographic sorting	people across places or roles	differential movement, access, morbidity, or family formation	years to generations	migration toward opportunity
Natural selection	heritable biological variation	differential genetic contribution to later generations	generations	allele-frequency change under a defined pressure
Gene-culture coevolution	cultural practice and genetic variation	reciprocal changes in environment and selection	many generations	dairying and lactase persistence [48]

Culture can change far faster than genes and can produce group-level adaptation under specified conditions [44–46]. It can also spread maladaptive practices. The word selection describes differential persistence, not a ladder toward perfection.

10.3 What evidence would a digital genetic-selection claim require?

To show that technological participation is driving genetic evolution, researchers would need to identify:

- 1 a measurable heritable trait relevant to participation;
- 2 a reproducible association between the trait and reproductive success, not merely income or platform use;
- 3 control for social stratification, education, discrimination, migration, and assortative mating;
- 4 allele-frequency change across generations;
- 5 a credible mechanism connecting the technological environment to that differential reproduction;
- 6 replication across populations without turning socially imposed categories into biological essences.

No current evidence establishes the user's proposed trajectory at this level.

10.4 What is already plausible without genetic selection

Technological change can still produce severe selection-like consequences:

- hiring systems select which cognitive styles receive employment;
- attention markets select transmissible content;
- institutions select which records become official memory;
- recommender systems select which cultural forms become visible;
- economic systems select which organizations survive;
- communities select membership through norms and status.

These processes can alter health, partnership, fertility, and developmental environments. In principle, sustained social conditions could eventually contribute to evolutionary pressures. That possibility is not evidence of a present genetic split, and it provides no moral permission to intensify exclusion.

10.5 The anti-teleological correction

Evolution has no built-in destination called higher consciousness. A trait is advantageous only relative to an environment and tradeoffs. Rapid responsiveness may help in one setting and impair sustained reasoning in another; conformity may coordinate a group and preserve a disastrous norm; sensitivity may increase overload and social insight at once.

Human cultural success has depended heavily on cumulative knowledge, teaching, cooperation, and institutions rather than isolated biological superiority [49,50]. A civilization that designs only for one kind of mind may reduce its own diversity and resilience.

10.6 The ethical red line

Claims that poverty, disability, isolation, or dissent reveal evolutionary unfitness have historically licensed eugenics, forced assimilation, segregation, and neglect. Science can study differential outcomes without converting them into a hierarchy of persons.

If technology creates an environment in which only a narrow class can participate, the first inference should be design failure and unequal power — not the natural selection of a superior humanity.

10.7 Cultural attraction, selection, and cumulative change

Cultural evolution is not one mechanism. A variant may spread because it is easier to remember, emotionally compelling, prestige-associated, institutionally enforced, materially useful, compatible with prior beliefs, or repeatedly reconstructed into a familiar form [117–121]. Calling all persistence “selection” can hide these causal differences.

Three questions sharpen an evolutionary analogy:

- 1 Variation: What alternatives actually exist and who can generate them?
- 2 Transmission or reconstruction: Through teaching, imitation, records, coercion, inference, or algorithms, how does a form recur?
- 3 Differential persistence: Is the form retained because it improves a relevant outcome, captures attention, serves power, or merely fits the transmission channel?

Digital systems can increase mutation by lowering production costs while decreasing visible variety by ranking a narrow subset. Generative AI can improve individual output while creating population-level convergence [132]. Institutions can preserve a maladaptive convention because switching costs and coordination dependencies are high. Cultural success therefore does not imply truth, welfare, or biological fitness.

10.8 When could social sorting become biological evolution?

The possibility should neither be sensationalized nor dismissed. If a technologically structured environment produced long-lasting, differential reproduction associated with heritable traits, genetic change could occur. But the same observed pattern could arise from education, discrimination, wealth, migration, assortative mating, health care, or cultural inheritance. Genetic evidence would need to distinguish those routes across generations.

More immediate biological consequences do not require genetic evolution. Institutional sorting can produce unequal exposure to nutrition, pollution, chronic stress, violence,

medical care, and reproductive autonomy. These shape morbidity and development now. Calling them natural selection can make preventable injustice appear inevitable; studying their actual pathways preserves both scientific accuracy and responsibility.

11. Could current instability be an adaptation crisis?

11.1 The strongest defensible formulation

The user's hypothesis can be restated without assuming its conclusion:

As communication, economic, and technical systems accelerate, they increase informational demand, social comparison, uncertainty, and interdependence. Where control, trust, material security, institutional capacity, and recovery fail to keep pace, population stress and distorted social learning may increase. These conditions can contribute to polarization, institutional distrust, maladaptive policy, violence, and economic volatility.

This is scientifically plausible because every arrow can be operationalized. It is not the claim that a new collective brain is malfunctioning or that stress is the single cause of world events.

11.2 Why the hypothesis deserves investigation

Several evidence streams make the hypothesis credible enough to test:

- collective attention cycles have accelerated in multiple domains [23];
- network influence can reduce epistemic diversity and create overconfidence [3];
- false information can diffuse efficiently under some platform conditions [24];
- chronic uncontrollable demand can produce allostatic load [33,34];
- economic recessions are associated with adverse mental-health outcomes through unemployment, insecurity, debt, and service cuts [66];
- misperceptions about political opponents can increase hostility, while correction can reduce support for partisan violence [58,59];
- low resilience and interacting feedbacks recur in historical cases of societal transformation [67–70].

Together, these findings support a contribution model: accelerated coupling changes risk conditions within already complex systems.

11.3 Why the hypothesis can become unfalsifiable

The phrase “collective biological conflict” can explain everything after the fact. War is called aggression, recession is called anxiety, wildfire is called imbalance, and disagreement is called resistance to evolution. A theory that redescribes every adverse event in psychological

language but cannot predict which event, where, when, or through what mechanism has not explained the event.

A scientific version must specify:

- which acceleration exposure is measured;
- whose stress changes and by how much;
- whether stress is a cause, mediator, moderator, or outcome;
- which behavior or institution carries the effect;
- what competing explanations are tested;
- what finding would count against the hypothesis.

11.4 Stress can occupy four causal positions

Table 14. Stress can occupy four causal positions

Position	Example	Identification problem
Cause	threat arousal increases punitive or impulsive choice	Selection: already-threatened people may enter certain information environments.
Mediator	economic shock → insecurity → distrust → political mobilization	The shock also changes material interests directly.
Moderator	misinformation has stronger effects under uncertainty or low trust	Stress must be measured before or independently of the response.
Outcome	war, unemployment, and disaster produce population distress	Reverse causality makes distress look like the origin of the crisis.

The last position is particularly important. It is ethically and scientifically backward to infer that a distressed population biologically caused the catastrophe that injured it without demonstrating the intervening mechanism.

11.5 Levels of explanation are complementary, not competitors

A civil conflict can be described at several levels:

- individual fear, humiliation, identity, and moral cognition;
- interpersonal recruitment and peer influence;
- propaganda networks and out-group narratives;
- organizational capacity and armed-group strategy;
- state weakness, repression, and political institutions;
- resource, geographic, demographic, and international conditions.

The psychological level matters, but it cannot replace the others. Fear does not deploy an army without organization, weapons, logistics, authority, and opportunity.

11.6 A symmetric warning: do not psychologize only the public

Adaptation discourse often treats ordinary people as the malfunctioning component while leaving platform design, concentrated wealth, surveillance, insecure work, and political incentives unexamined. Institutions also fail to adapt. Their failure may impose biological costs on populations.

The causal question is therefore bidirectional:

Are people unable to tolerate a changing world, or are powerful systems externalizing the cost of badly governed change onto human nervous systems?

Both can be partly true. The distribution of agency decides which explanation leads to humane intervention.

11.7 Competing models

Table 15. Competing models of civilizational stress

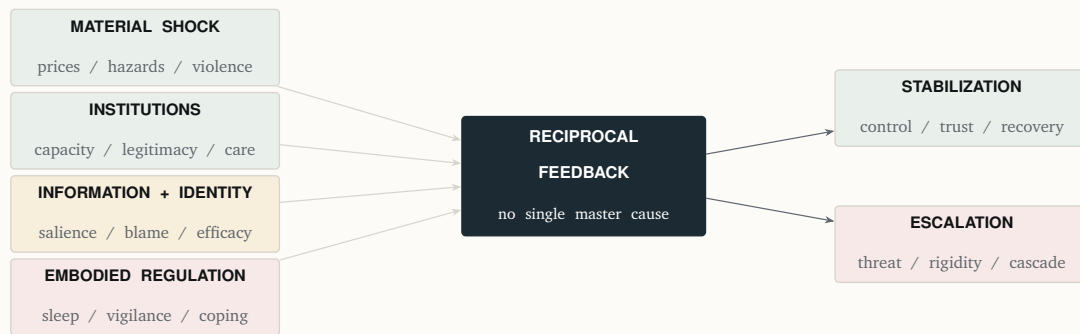
Model	Core prediction	Evidence that would weaken it
Acceleration-stress model	Rapid, uncontrollable change predicts dysregulation and conflict beyond material shocks alone.	No association after measuring control, resources, prior conflict, and reverse causality.
Material-interest model	Distributional loss, resource competition, and institutional incentives explain instability.	Strong effects of information/stress interventions despite unchanged material conditions.
Institutional-capacity model	Similar shocks yield different outcomes according to legitimate, capable institutions.	Instability remains equal across large, credible differences in capacity and inclusion.
Network-cascade model	Topology and amplification determine synchronization and escalation.	Network interventions change exposure but not coordination or outcomes.
Civilizational-transition model	Multiple systems show coherent phase change, not merely unrelated crises.	Alleged indicators do not covary, lead, or replicate outside selected cases.

The models can interact. A rigorous project compares their incremental explanatory power instead of naming one total cause.

11.8 The civilizational stress braid

The adaptation-crisis hypothesis becomes more realistic when represented as a braid rather than a line. Four streams repeatedly cross:

- 1 Material shocks: prices, employment, disease, displacement, climate hazards, resource constraints, and violence.
- 2 Institutional mediation: welfare capacity, corruption, policing, labor protection, public health, education, and legitimacy.
- 3 Informational-identity dynamics: salience, rumor, propaganda, group boundaries,



Similar shocks diverge because buffers, meanings, institutions, and action change the feedback structure.

Figure 8. The civilizational stress braid. Material, institutional, informational, and embodied processes recursively stabilize or escalate one another.

metaperceptions, and narratives of blame or efficacy.

- 4 Embodied regulation: sleep, vigilance, affect, health, coping, family interaction, and capacity for deliberation.

No stream is simply internal or external. A material shock becomes information; institutions interpret and distribute it; identities organize collective response; stress changes attention and action; action changes institutions and material exposure. The loop can stabilize when trustworthy communication, social support, efficacy, and material protection permit recovery. It can destabilize when every response confirms threat, weakens trust, and narrows the available repertoire.

This model explains why a similar technological or economic change can yield different outcomes across societies. The effect depends not only on the rate of change but on buffers, histories, inequality, institutional competence, and whether affected people can influence the transition.

11.9 What would make this hypothesis distinctively successful?

A broad systems narrative is easy to fit after events. To add knowledge, the adaptation-crisis model must outperform simpler alternatives. It would gain support if, across comparable shocks:

- objective acceleration and unpredictability predicted later dysregulation rather than merely correlating with it;
- perceived control, trusted support, and recovery opportunity moderated the effect prospectively;
- measured strain mediated specific behavioral or institutional outcomes after material incentives were modeled;
- interventions that restored control, sleep, accurate metaperception, or collective efficacy reduced escalation without changing the original shock;

- effects replicated across cultures while allowing different meanings and baselines;
- forecasts succeeded in held-out cases rather than only explaining selected crises.

It would weaken if material and institutional variables explained the outcomes while biological-strain measures added no predictive value; if strain consistently followed rather than preceded crisis; or if every disconfirming case were relabeled a hidden form of adaptation. The hypothesis is therefore a candidate middle-range theory, not a master explanation of history.

11.10 Meaning threat is neither imaginary nor a universal cause

Rapid change can violate expectations about identity, moral order, status, continuity, and the future. Meaning-maintenance accounts propose that people respond to such violations through reinterpretation, affirmation of other commitments, or construction of new order [150]. Apocalyptic, nationalist, conspiratorial, revolutionary, therapeutic, and spiritual narratives can all offer causal closure and agency under uncertainty.

The existence of a psychological function does not decide a narrative's truth. A belief may regulate anxiety and be true, regulate anxiety and be false, or increase anxiety while identifying a real danger. Functional explanation and truth evaluation are separate. This principle prevents a symmetrical error: believers should not treat existential force as proof, and skeptics should not dismiss a claim merely because it meets an emotional need.

12. War, economies, and environmental disaster: where collective belief enters causality

12.1 War: minds matter through organization

War requires more than aggressive chemistry. It is a coordinated institutional achievement, involving authority, logistics, weapons, recruitment, finance, territorial claims, state capacity, external actors, and strategic expectations. Comparative research on civil war emphasizes conditions that enable insurgency and shape state reach rather than treating ancient ethnic hatred as a sufficient explanation [60,61].

Psychology still matters. Dehumanization can make instrumental violence appear permissible or useful [57]. Threat narratives change what actions seem defensive. Inaccurate beliefs about an opposing group can create reciprocal escalation: each side reacts to an extremity it overestimates in the other. Experiments suggest that correcting some partisan metaperceptions can reduce support for undemocratic practices or violence [58,59].

The causal chain is:

narrative and identity → threat appraisal and moral permission → recruitment and collective action → organizational decision → material violence

The chain makes collective belief consequential without making it omnipotent. Break any link and the outcome can change.

12.2 Economic crises: performative expectations and real constraints

Economic systems are especially clear examples of intersubjective reality meeting material consequence. Depositors' expectations can help generate a bank run: if enough people expect others to withdraw, withdrawal becomes individually rational and can damage an otherwise functioning institution. Diamond and Dybvig formalized how multiple equilibria and coordination problems can make runs self-fulfilling [62].

Markets, credit, inflation expectations, and confidence are partly reflexive. However, "the economy is belief" is too strong. Balance sheets, production capacity, energy, debt contracts, regulation, demographics, technology, trade, and distribution impose constraints. Narratives can select among possible trajectories or amplify shocks; they do not create resources from nothing.

Economic collapse can then feed back into biology through unemployment, debt, food and housing insecurity, care disruption, status loss, and uncertainty [66]. This creates a loop:

expectations → financial behavior → institutional outcome → material insecurity → stress and political behavior → new expectations

12.3 Climate change: collective belief changes physics through industry and policy

The climate case shows why a causal bridge matters. Beliefs about consumption, growth, risk, technology, and political responsibility shape votes, investment, infrastructure, land use, and energy demand. Those behaviors change greenhouse-gas emissions. Accumulated gases alter radiative forcing and climate systems. Human influence on warming and many extremes is established [64].

The route is not consciousness directly changing weather:

values and beliefs → policy, production, and consumption → emissions and land use → atmospheric and ecological processes → hazards and losses

Climate can also contribute to conflict risk, but expert assessment suggests it is one factor among development, state capacity, inequality, and political conditions rather than a universal dominant cause [63].

12.4 Natural hazard is not identical to disaster

UNDRR defines disaster risk as a probabilistic function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability, and capacity [65]. This distinction answers one of the project's hardest questions.

- A tectonic event is a geophysical hazard. There is no credible evidence that collective emotion generates it.
- Settlement patterns, building codes, corruption, poverty, warning systems, and emergency response strongly affect whether the hazard becomes mass disaster.
- Anthropogenic climate change alters probabilities and intensities of many weather and climate hazards through physical pathways [64].
- Belief can change preparedness, denial, evacuation, infrastructure, and recovery, thereby changing losses.

Human consciousness can therefore participate causally in a disaster without being the physical origin of the hazard.

12.5 Ecological crisis is not the planet mirroring our emotions

The metaphor that Earth externalizes collective inner conflict can express moral interdependence. As science, it mislocates the mechanism. Environmental damage arises through extraction, emissions, land conversion, pollution, invasive species, consumption, gover-

nance, and unequal exposure. These activities are organized by values and institutions, but ecosystems respond through biogeochemical and biological processes.

The metaphor becomes useful when translated:

“inner conflict becomes outer damage” → competing values and incentives produce inconsistent policy and harmful behavior → material systems accumulate the consequences.

12.6 A causal matrix

Table 16. A causal matrix for shared belief and ecological crisis

	Role for shared belief	Required mediators	Major non-psychological causes	Unsupported extension
War	threat, legitimacy, identity, morale, moral permission	recruitment, command, logistics, weapons, state action	territory, resources, institutions, geopolitics	emotion alone materializes war
Bank run	expectations about others' withdrawals	withdrawal behavior, liquidity structure, communication	regulation, solvency, balance sheets	positive thinking restores solvency without action
Recession	confidence, expectations, political narratives	spending, investment, credit, policy	productivity, shocks, debt, energy, trade	national mood is a sufficient cause
Climate change	norms and beliefs shape emissions and policy	industry, consumption, infrastructure, land use	atmospheric physics, technology, population, political economy	consciousness directly changes weather
Disaster mortality	risk perception, trust, preparedness	warnings, evacuation, building and response systems	hazard intensity, exposure, poverty, infrastructure	victims' fear caused the hazard
Public-health crisis	trust and norms shape prevention and care	behavior, services, communication, treatment	pathogen biology, health systems, inequality	belief alone cures or creates infection

12.7 Climate anxiety: signal, suffering, and agency

Climate distress is a particularly important case because a psychologically painful appraisal may accurately track a material threat. In a 2021 survey of 10,000 people aged 16–25 across ten countries, climate worry was widespread, many respondents reported impaired daily functioning, and negative judgments of governmental response were associated with distress [138]. The design was cross-sectional and self-reported, so it cannot by itself prove that government inaction caused individual symptoms. It does show that environmental threat and institutional trust enter young people's experienced futures together.

It is therefore misleading to define all climate anxiety as malfunction. Researchers and clinicians can distinguish:

- proportionate concern that motivates learning and action;
- persistent distress that impairs sleep, concentration, relationships, or function;
- grief for actual or anticipated ecological loss;
- moral injury or betrayal linked to perceived institutional failure;
- avoidance, fatalism, or compulsive exposure that reduces effective agency.

The intervention target depends on the pattern. Emotion regulation may help an individual remain functional; collective action may restore efficacy; accurate risk communication may reduce uncertainty; material adaptation may reduce exposure; policy can address the source. Treating a real hazard only as distorted thinking individualizes a public problem. Treating every fearful claim as accurate abandons calibration.

12.8 The moral boundary against victim-blaming

Claims that a population's fear, negativity, or low vibration caused war, illness, disaster, or poverty reverse the burden of proof and can assign moral responsibility to those most exposed. A scientifically valid mediated effect must identify behavior, institution, and physical process. Without that chain, metaphoric language should not be used to explain why particular victims were harmed.

Collective belief can increase or reduce vulnerability: it can sustain unsafe construction, delay evacuation, normalize violence, organize mutual aid, support public health, or change emissions. Those causal powers create responsibility for institutions and actions. They do not imply that suffering reveals defective consciousness.

13. Breakthrough, breakdown, or apocalypse?

13.1 These are evaluations, not raw observations

The same transformation can be experienced as liberation by one person and destruction by another. Remote communication may enable a disabled worker and dissolve a local workplace; translation may connect cultures and weaken a minority language; automation may remove drudgery and eliminate livelihood. “Advancement” is a judgment about valued outcomes and distribution.

A serious assessment needs explicit criteria:

- Does the transition expand or reduce human agency?
- Are benefits and burdens fairly distributed?
- Can dissenting ways of life remain viable?
- Does knowledge become more accurate and corrigible?
- Are ecological costs sustainable?
- Do institutions protect dignity, privacy, access, and pluralism?
- Can the system recover from error without catastrophic loss?

There is no single progress variable that answers all seven.

13.2 Breakthrough as coordinated pluralism

The strongest case for breakthrough is not that all minds become alike. It is that humanity develops institutions capable of solving global problems while preserving plurality. Shared scientific standards, translation, open knowledge, accessible technology, planetary risk monitoring, and rapid cooperation can extend collective agency. Distributed cognition can make each participant more capable without erasing difference.

On this view, technology is civilizational scaffolding. The breakthrough occurs when network capacity is joined to epistemic humility, democratic legitimacy, inclusion, and ecological responsibility.

13.3 Breakdown as synchronization without agency

The strongest case for breakdown is that dense coupling reduces independence, centralizes attention, and accelerates cascading error. People become legible to systems they cannot understand or contest; cultural production optimizes for machine ranking; surveillance makes dissent costly; synthetic media weakens common evidence; labor and public services become dependent on inaccessible infrastructures.

This future may look unified from above while feeling fragmented from within. It is not collective consciousness in a spiritual sense. It is coordinated behavior under asymmetric

control.

13.4 Apocalypse originally means more than annihilation

In religious studies, apocalyptic literature is a diverse genre of revelation that discloses a hidden order, interprets oppression and catastrophe, promises judgment or reversal, and situates present suffering within a larger temporal drama [75]. Modern usage often reduces apocalypse to spectacular destruction. That reduction loses the genre’s political and existential functions.

Apocalyptic narratives can:

- make overwhelming change intelligible;
- distinguish a corrupt present from a redeemed future;
- sustain resistance under domination;
- intensify in-group certainty and moral polarization;
- justify passivity because history is predetermined;
- legitimize violence if opponents are cast as cosmic evil.

Psychological studies suggest that mortality concerns and religious commitments can interact with apocalyptic belief, but such effects are context-dependent and do not reduce theology to anxiety management [76].

13.5 “End of the world” often means end of a world

Civilizations, regimes, languages, and lifeways can end while humans continue. For those who lose a homeland, status order, ecosystem, or sacred institution, the phrase “world ending” may be phenomenologically exact. This is different from extinction of life or destruction of the planet.

Separating meanings improves debate:

Table 17. What “end of the world” can mean

Meaning of end	Observable indicator	Appropriate evidence
End of a personal world	identity, relationship, health, or meaning rupture	clinical, phenomenological, biographical
End of a social order	institutional breakdown or regime transformation	historical, political, economic
End of a civilization	enduring loss of complexity, centers, population, or continuity	archaeological and comparative
Human extinction	no surviving humans	demographic, ecological, existential-risk modeling
Cosmological end	terminal physical state of the universe	astrophysics and cosmology
Eschatological fulfillment	divine judgment, liberation, renewal, or revelation	theology, philosophy, lived tradition; not reducible to one scientific test

13.6 Religious traditions should not be collapsed into one prophecy

Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Indigenous, and other traditions contain internally diverse accounts of time, judgment, renewal, dissolution, liberation, and cosmic order. Similar images do not establish that every text predicted the same technological event. Interpretation requires language, genre, historical context, community, and theology.

Science can test claims about dates, material events, behavior, and psychological effects. It cannot, by measurement alone, decide every claim about divine purpose or ultimate meaning. Theology cannot substitute for physical evidence about hazards. Intellectual respect requires preserving both boundaries.

13.7 Is there a choice?

There is rarely a collective choice made by humanity as one agent. There are nested choices made by designers, governments, firms, communities, professions, families, and individuals under unequal constraints. Some pathways become locked in through infrastructure and network effects, but path dependence is not fate.

Arendt's emphasis on plurality and action is useful here: freedom appears when distinct persons can initiate, speak, and act together, not when difference is eliminated [21,79]. Habermasian deliberation adds that legitimate coordination depends on reasons that can be challenged, not only efficient behavioral prediction [20].

The practical choice is therefore architectural: which systems protect dissent, distribute agency, enable correction, slow irreversible decisions, and keep exits open?

13.8 The psychology of end-of-world belief is multidimensional

Recent preregistered research indicates that "end of the world" belief is not one scale running from irrational to rational. Billet and colleagues identified dimensions including perceived temporal closeness, human versus divine causation, personal or collective control, and emotional valence [143]. In their United States samples, different dimensions predicted different responses to global risks: believing that human causes and action mattered was associated with more preventive orientation, whereas strongly divine-causal interpretations could be associated with less prevention. These are population-level associations in a particular cultural setting, not a verdict on religious belief.

The useful lesson is methodological. Two people can both say "the end is near" while meaning:

- physical extinction is probabilistically imminent;
- a political or moral order is collapsing;
- divine judgment is approaching;
- ecological thresholds are being crossed;
- familiar identity and continuity feel unavailable;
- revelation and renewal are possible;

- the phrase expresses despair rather than prediction.

Researchers should measure these meanings separately. Public dialogue should ask what event, timescale, cause, control, and evidence the statement implies. Otherwise a theological claim may be rebutted with climate statistics, or a material risk forecast may be dismissed as mere eschatology.

13.9 Existential openness without fatalism

Existential thought contributes a different question: not whether history guarantees meaning, but how a finite person acts when guarantees are unavailable. Uncertainty can tempt two evasions. Technological providence assumes innovation will automatically solve what it creates; apocalyptic fatalism assumes the outcome is already written. Both relieve the person or institution of situated responsibility.

The alternative is neither total control nor resignation. It is commitment under uncertainty: act on the best available evidence, preserve the ability to revise, refuse to dehumanize those who disagree, and build options that survive being wrong. The future remains open partly because multiple agents and material processes exceed any single plan.

13.10 Revelation as an ethical diagnostic

If apocalypse is understood as unveiling, the present reveals at least four facts: human dependence on common infrastructures, the ecological consequences of accumulated action, the fragility of shared evidence, and the unequal distribution of adaptation costs. This interpretation does not predict supernatural timing or extinction. It uses crisis to expose what ordinary functioning concealed.

Its ethical test is practical. A narrative of unveiling is constructive when it enlarges truthful attention, solidarity, repentance, repair, and agency. It becomes dangerous when it grants infallibility, divides humanity into pure and disposable classes, licenses acceleration toward catastrophe, or treats other people's suffering as proof of a script.

14. Ancient civilizations, lost knowledge, and historical loops

14.1 What archaeology really permits us to say

Ancient societies developed sophisticated astronomy, mathematics, hydraulic systems, navigation, urban administration, philosophy, and long-distance exchange. The Antikythera mechanism demonstrates a level of ancient geared astronomical computation whose surviving examples are exceptionally sparse [74]. Knowledge can be lost, localized, rediscovered, or preserved only in fragments.

This supports humility about the past. It does not establish that ancient civilizations possessed a global digital network, modern industrial energy systems, or a literal planetary consciousness. Extraordinary equivalence claims require artifacts, datable infrastructure, energy signatures, inscriptions, and independent replication, not resemblance between symbols.

14.2 Collapse is usually transformation, not disappearance

Archaeologists debate what counts as collapse. State institutions, urban centers, population density, trade, literacy, and elite culture can contract while communities persist and reorganize. Butzer's comparative work emphasizes low resilience and cascading feedback among environmental, economic, social, and political processes [67]. Later reviews likewise warn against single-cause and cinematic accounts [68].

The Classic Maya case illustrates the pattern: drought mattered, but its consequences were mediated by land use, political organization, demography, conflict, and human-environment relations [69]. Networked Bronze Age systems may have transmitted both goods and vulnerability; multiple shocks and node failures can matter more than one universal trigger [70].

14.3 Recurring mechanisms are not a cosmic loop

History can rhyme because humans repeatedly face coordination, inequality, succession, legitimacy, ecological limits, disease, and intergroup conflict. Similar mechanisms under similar constraints can generate similar macro-patterns. That is recurrence in a scientific sense.

It differs from three stronger claims:

- deterministic cycle: societies must pass through fixed stages in a fixed order;
- exact historical repetition: the same events recur with the same identities;
- cosmic simulation loop: reality is reset until an unknown objective is met.

The first can be tested against comparative data; the second conflicts with historical contingency; the third lacks an identified reset mechanism or objective.

14.4 Cliodynamics: promising ambition, contested inference

Cliodynamics seeks quantitative tests of long-run historical dynamics. The Seshat project has identified common dimensions in the growth of social complexity across cases [71]. Turchin and Korotayev published a retrospective evaluation of forecasts about United States instability [72]. These efforts demonstrate that parts of history can be modeled and that broad hypotheses can be preregistered or tested.

They do not turn history into celestial mechanics. Data are incomplete, constructs are contestable, cases are dependent, and many models fit short time series. A 2023 empirical critique found that key structural-demographic predictions, including the proposed role of elite overproduction in recent United States instability, were not supported under alternative specifications [73]. This disagreement is productive: a theory of cycles earns scientific status by risking failure.

14.5 How to test an ancient-precedent claim

Table 18. How to test an ancient-precedent claim

Claim	Required evidence	Common false positive
Ancient long-distance network	sourced materials, routes, inscriptions, isotopes, datable exchange	assuming every similar motif requires direct contact
Lost advanced instrument	artifact, context, replicable reconstruction, wear and manufacturing evidence	interpreting a symbolic object as a machine
Prior industrial civilization	global stratigraphic, geochemical, energy, manufacturing, and waste signatures	absence of evidence converted into evidence of perfect erasure
Previous collective-consciousness transition	operational definition plus behavioral, institutional, and material indicators	reading modern concepts into ritual or cosmology
Repeating civilizational mechanism	comparable variables, cases, predictions, out-of-sample tests	selecting only cases that fit the cycle

14.6 The strongest historical conclusion

Humanity is not the first population to experience rapid connection, contested authority, ecological pressure, inequality, migration, and transformations in knowledge media. It may be the first known population to combine planetary-scale instantaneous communication, industrial modification of the Earth system, nuclear weapons, and machine-mediated cultural production.

History gives mechanisms and warnings, not a script.

14.7 Consilience: how historical claims become stronger

The strongest reconstruction of past societies combines independent archives: texts, archaeology, paleoclimate proxies, isotopes, ancient DNA, pollen, sediments, material sourcing, settlement patterns, and formal chronology. Haldon and colleagues call for consilience between history and palaeoscience while warning that records differ in resolution, dating

uncertainty, spatial coverage, and relation to human experience [139]. A drought proxy does not contain a political decision; a chronicle does not measure regional rainfall.

An ancient-recurrence claim becomes credible when multiple independent indicators converge on the proposed sequence and when mechanisms explain why similar pressures produced different outcomes. It becomes weak when a modern concept is projected onto ambiguous iconography or when absence of evidence is treated as evidence of perfect concealment.

14.8 Critical transitions and the danger of false alarms

Complex systems can sometimes approach thresholds at which small disturbances produce large changes. In some modeled and empirical systems, slowing recovery, rising autocorrelation, or variance may precede a transition [140]. These measures are not universal alarms. Methodological studies show that early-warning statistics can produce systematic false positives, depend on detrending and window choice, or appear before changes that are not catastrophic [141,151].

Societies add further difficulty: agents observe forecasts and respond; measurement systems change; institutions adapt; variables are nonstationary; and the outcome called “collapse” is normatively and historically contested. An early-warning dashboard should therefore report uncertainty, compare null models, test held-out events, and distinguish vulnerability from a dated prediction. Publicizing a warning can itself alter the system, sometimes preventing the event and sometimes intensifying it.

14.9 Collapse as loss, reorganization, and uneven continuity

Tainter’s influential account links some collapses to declining marginal returns on investments in sociopolitical complexity [142]. Other scholarship emphasizes ecological stress, conflict, trade disruption, disease, inequality, legitimacy, and reorganization [67–70]. These accounts need not describe a single universal sequence.

“Collapse” can mean loss of central administration, reduced settlement density, declining long-distance exchange, abandonment of monuments, demographic contraction, or transformation of elite institutions. People may persist, migrate, simplify, innovate, or experience liberation from an extractive center. The unit and viewpoint matter. A state’s disappearance is not the disappearance of its population, and resilience for an elite institution may be continuing oppression for others.

The most defensible recurrence thesis is therefore modular: particular mechanism bundles can recur under comparable conditions. It is not a cosmic loop, a fixed civilizational lifespan, or proof that previous societies reached the same consciousness threshold.

15. Are we in a looped simulation or undergoing a test?

15.1 Bostrom's argument is conditional

Bostrom's simulation argument proposes that at least one of three propositions is true: civilizations like ours almost never reach a posthuman capacity; posthuman civilizations almost never run many ancestor simulations; or simulated observers vastly outnumber base-level observers, making it likely that we are simulated [90]. This is a trilemma built from assumptions about technological possibility, motivation, consciousness, and how observers should be counted.

It is not an observation that the world contains glitches, repetition, quantum indeterminacy, or suffering. Those features do not uniquely follow from simulation.

15.2 The probability cannot outrun the premises

Kipping's Bayesian analysis emphasizes model uncertainty: the technical possibility of relevant simulations has not been demonstrated. Under his modeling choices, the probability of being simulated remains below 50 percent and approaches that value only as the expected number of simulations becomes very large [91]. Different priors and reference classes can change the result.

Additional unresolved premises include:

- whether consciousness can be instantiated computationally;
- what physical resources a faithful simulation would require;
- whether simulated beings count in the relevant reference class;
- whether advanced civilizations exist and survive;
- whether they would want, permit, or ethically reject ancestor simulations;
- whether nested simulations are possible;
- what level of detail must be computed.

Without answers, a precise-sounding probability can encode speculation rather than measurement.

15.3 Is simulation scientifically testable?

A hypothesis becomes scientifically productive when it predicts observations that differ from alternatives. Many proposed "signs" of simulation — mathematical laws, quantization, computational limits, coincidence, *deja vu*, or apparent fine-tuning — are compatible with an unsimulated universe. If simulators can hide all evidence or change any rule, the hypothesis becomes empirically underdetermined.

A test would need:

- 1 a specific class of simulations;
- 2 a constraint simulators could not or would not conceal;
- 3 a predicted anomaly not expected from ordinary physics;
- 4 independent replication;
- 5 a result capable of counting against the hypothesis.

No accepted evidence currently meets that standard.

15.4 Simulation would not make life unreal

Chalmers argues that a perfectly simulated world could still contain real objects, relationships, values, and meaningful lives, realized in a different substrate [92]. Even if the simulation hypothesis were true, it would not follow that suffering is irrelevant, other people are nonpersons, or action has no consequence. Local causal regularities would remain the world inhabitants must navigate.

This blocks a dangerous inference: metaphysical uncertainty is not permission for ethical carelessness.

15.5 Loop, test, and simulation are different ideas

Table 19. Loop, test, and simulation are different ideas

Idea	Core claim	Main problem
Historical recurrence	similar mechanisms generate recurring patterns	similarity can be subjective; cases and variables must be specified
Eternal recurrence	existence repeats, often used as an existential challenge	not established by modern historical or physical evidence
Educational or moral test	events have a purpose and a criterion of success	who sets the test, what is the criterion, and how could it be known?
Computer simulation	observed reality is implemented by another computational system	feasibility, consciousness, reference class, and testability remain open
Religious trial or eschatology	life and history have transcendent moral meaning	belongs to theology and lived faith unless it yields testable material claims

15.6 The existential use of recurrence

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence can be read less as a physics thesis than as a test of affirmation: could one will one's life, in all its detail, again [93]? Camus treats the absurd not as proof that life lacks value, but as a demand for lucidity and revolt without false consolation [94]. These approaches relocate the question from "Can I prove the loop?" to "How should I live under radical uncertainty?"

The shift does not answer the cosmological question. It prevents an untestable cosmology from monopolizing meaning.

15.7 What remains legitimately open

It remains possible that future theories of consciousness, computation, or cosmology will alter the evidential situation. Philosophical agnosticism is reasonable. Presenting simulation as established science is not.

The simulation idea is strongest as a conditional argument and a moral-existential lens. It is weakest when coincidence, trauma, or historical repetition is offered as direct empirical proof.

15.8 Restricted models can be tested; simulation in general cannot

Beane, Davoudi, and Savage analyzed whether a universe implemented on a particular finite lattice could leave detectable signatures in high-energy cosmic rays [148]. This is a legitimate scientific exercise because it specifies an implementation and derives consequences. It does not test every possible simulation. A negative result constrains that model class; a positive anisotropy would still require comparison with ordinary physical explanations.

Chalmers distinguishes the broad metaphysical possibility of simulation from claims that our world displays identifiable evidence of one [149]. This distinction is decisive. If the simulator may use any substrate, laws, concealment strategy, and purpose, then every possible observation is compatible with the hypothesis. General simulation becomes underdetermined. Only restricted hypotheses create risk of disconfirmation.

A responsible research sequence is:

- 1 define the simulated architecture and resource constraint;
- 2 derive a quantitative signature before examining the target data;
- 3 compare its likelihood under non-simulation models;
- 4 replicate with independent instruments and teams;
- 5 state exactly which simulation class is weakened or strengthened.

The conclusion should remain local. Neither quantum discreteness nor the use of computational models implies that nature itself is a computer program.

15.9 The loop hypothesis and memory problem

A literal repeated test raises a further epistemic problem. If each loop perfectly erases accessible memory and leaves no distinguishing trace, participants cannot learn across loops and the hypothesis predicts nothing different from a single history. If information survives, the theory should specify its carrier: artifacts, physical boundary conditions, biological inheritance, anomalous memory, or something else. That carrier becomes testable.

Psychological familiarity, déjà vu, recurring political patterns, and mythic similarity are not unique carriers. They have ordinary explanations in memory, shared human problems,

diffusion, and cultural reconstruction. A loop remains logically possible but empirically idle until it risks a discriminating prediction.

16. Spiritual and yogic lenses: resonance without false equivalence

16.1 Spiritual traditions ask a different family of questions

Network science asks how information and behavior propagate among distinguishable agents. Neuroscience asks how experience and report relate to organismic processes. Social ontology asks how practices and recognition constitute institutions. Yogic and contemplative traditions often ask how ignorance, identification, craving, suffering, liberation, and ultimate reality should be understood.

The vocabularies can illuminate one another, but they are not interchangeable data sets. A contemplative insight may change a person's life without functioning as a population-level causal estimate. A neural correlate may constrain an empirical claim without exhausting the meaning of a practice.

16.2 Yoga: transformation of the mind, not proof of a global network

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra classically defines yoga in relation to the stilling or regulation of the fluctuations of citta, the mind-field, and develops ethical restraints, observances, posture, breath, sensory withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and absorption [83]. The project is soteriological: it concerns freedom from misidentification and suffering.

Modern scientific study may examine attention, stress, interoception, behavior, and well-being associated with selected practices. Such findings neither prove the metaphysics of classical yoga nor reduce yoga to relaxation. More importantly here, an individual mind-field is not automatically a technological group mind. The same word "field" cannot carry a mechanism across traditions.

16.3 Advaita Vedanta: nonduality is not network synchronization

Advaita Vedanta, especially in Sankara's formulation, treats the deepest self as nondual consciousness and identifies it with Brahman, while ordinary plurality is understood through ignorance and appearance [84]. If this metaphysics is accepted, unity is ontologically prior to communication. Humanity does not become one by connecting devices; apparent separateness is already misconceived.

This differs fundamentally from the scientific network hypothesis, where separate organisms become more functionally coupled through signals. Better internet connectivity would be neither proof nor cause of Advaitic nonduality.

16.4 Buddhism: interdependence need not imply one self

Buddhist traditions commonly reject a permanent independent self and analyze persons and phenomena as conditioned processes [85]. Dependent arising can support a profound account of interdependence without positing one universal ego. Huayan images such as Indra's net have often been used to express mutual implication, where each jewel reflects all others; the philosophical meaning concerns interpenetration and dependent reality, not a literal telecommunications diagram [86].

This is an important correction to popular spirituality: interconnectedness does not logically require sameness, merger, or a central consciousness.

16.5 Spiritual unity and political plurality

An experience of unity can reduce rigid self-focus and motivate compassion. It can also be translated badly into politics. If "we are one" is used to silence conflict, erase history, or demand assimilation, spiritual language becomes a tool of domination. Arendtian plurality offers a counterweight: a common world is valuable because distinct people can appear within it [21,79].

The ethical synthesis is:

Practice non-separation as care, not as the erasure of difference. Build coordination that does not require uniform consciousness.

16.6 The noosphere and global-brain metaphor

Twentieth-century thinkers such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin imagined a noosphere, a layer of reflective thought developing around the Earth [99]. Contemporary "global brain" language updates the image using communication networks. As a metaphor, it highlights planetary memory, division of cognitive labor, and feedback. As a scientific model, it must specify components, integration, control, learning, boundaries, and outputs.

A global network resembles a brain only selectively:

16.7 Where science and contemplative practice can genuinely meet

There are several legitimate contact zones:

- training attention can change which signals enter deliberation;
- observing reactivity can create a pause before networked contagion becomes action;
- compassion practices can motivate prosocial behavior, subject to context and evidence;
- nonattachment can reduce identity-protective reasoning without requiring passivity;
- ethical vows can stabilize behavior when short-term incentives reward harm;

Table 20. The noosphere and global-brain metaphor

	Biological brain	Global communication system	Why the analogy breaks
Boundary	organismically regulated body	contested and porous network membership	no agreed global organism or sensory boundary
Connectivity	evolved cellular signaling	designed infrastructure, language, markets, institutions	protocols and ownership vary; many people are excluded
Learning	synaptic and cellular plasticity	cultural transmission, metrics, organizational change	no single loss function or unified controller
Action	coordinated motor and autonomic output	many competing states, firms, publics, and persons	outputs conflict and retain separate agency
Consciousness	at least individual report and wakeful organization	no agreed system-level report or point of view	functional integration does not establish phenomenality

- contemplative phenomenology can generate careful descriptions for scientific study.

These are bridges through practice and behavior. They do not validate quantum manifestation, a psychic planetary field, or every spiritual cosmology.

16.8 A comparison of explanatory logics

Table 21. A comparison of explanatory logics

	Primary object	What counts as change?	Main method	Central risk
Neuroscience	organismic prediction and regulation	altered processing, physiology, learning, behavior	experiment, measurement, intervention	neural reductionism
Social science	relations, norms, institutions, populations	changed coordination, power, distribution, culture	comparative, experimental, historical, statistical	treating categories as natural essences
Network science	topology and information flow	changed diffusion, clustering, synchronization, robustness	formal models, trace data, experiments	confusing tractable metrics with human meaning
Yoga and contemplative traditions	mind, suffering, conduct, liberation	reduced misidentification and reactivity; transformed awareness	disciplined practice, commentary, teacher-student transmission	decontextualization or spiritual bypass
Nondual metaphysics	relation of consciousness, self, and reality	recognition of what is ultimately the case	philosophical inquiry and contemplative realization	presenting metaphysical insight as laboratory proof
Existential philosophy	situated freedom, finitude, meaning	lucid commitment and responsibility	reflection, phenomenology, lived decision	romanticizing anguish or ignoring structures

16.9 Contemplative science: mechanisms, evidence, and limits

Contemplative practices can be studied without treating one modern package called “mindfulness” as equivalent to yoga, Buddhism, or meditation as a whole. Proposed cognitive mechanisms include training of attentional families, reappraisal and acceptance, changed relationships to self-related thought, and deconstruction of habitual models of self [144,147]. Outcomes depend on practice type, dose, teacher, motivation, comparison condition, culture, and participant vulnerability.

The evidence base contains promising results and substantial methodological limits. Van Dam and colleagues warned that inconsistent definitions, weak controls, selective reporting, instructor effects, and inflated public claims make broad conclusions difficult [145]. A neural difference after practice is not automatically beneficial, permanent, specific to meditation, or evidence for a metaphysical doctrine.

16.10 Adverse and difficult experiences belong inside the model

Qualitative research has documented challenging meditation-related experiences across perception, affect, cognition, sense of self, social functioning, and physical experience [146]. Such events range from transient and meaningful difficulty to impairment requiring support. Prevalence cannot be inferred from a qualitative sample, and causation may involve practice, prior vulnerability, context, expectation, sleep, substance use, or their interaction.

An ethical contemplative program therefore includes:

- informed expectations rather than promises of universal calm;
- screening and adaptation for trauma, mania, psychosis, dissociation, and severe anxiety;
- gradual dose and permission to stop;
- teachers who recognize clinical boundaries and referral needs;
- protection against interpreting every adverse reaction as spiritual failure;
- measurement of functioning and harm, not only peak experience.

This is especially important for a project about collective transition. Practices that reduce reactivity may support public reasoning, but intensive inward practice is not a substitute for material safety, political action, treatment, or institutional reform.

16.11 A dual literacy: first-person discipline and third-person correction

Contemplative inquiry trains sensitivity to the formation of experience: bodily sensation, craving, aversion, identification, and the rapid conversion of thought into apparent fact. Science trains public correction: operational definition, comparison, measurement, replication, and the willingness to expose a claim to failure. Each can identify a weakness in the other. First-person confidence can mistake intensity for universality; third-person measurement can strip experience of meaning and context.

The productive relation is not equivalence but disciplined exchange. A contemplative report

can generate a hypothesis. An experiment can estimate whether an effect generalizes. A philosophical argument can clarify what the measured variable means. An ethical tradition can ask how the capacity should be used. No one method inherits the authority of the others merely by proximity.

17. The academic debate ledger

The following ledger presents the strongest case, strongest objection, and current adjudication for the project's central propositions. It is designed to leave genuine room for judgment while preventing different kinds of claim from borrowing one another's evidence.

Table 22. The academic debate ledger

	Strongest supporting case	Strongest objection	Present adjudication
1. Reality is generated rather than fixed.	Perception is active inference; social institutions are continuously enacted; complex interactions create novel outcomes.	A physical world can be dynamic without being generated by observers; “generative” can become vague idealism.	B/A with domain restriction: experience and social order are generative and constrained; observer-dependent physics does not follow.
2. Collective belief creates reality.	Money, law, status, borders, conventions, and legitimacy depend on coordinated recognition and practice.	Material constraints and unequal enforcement mean belief is neither sufficient nor equally voluntary.	A for institutional facts; D for unmediated control of independent physical events.
3. Humanity is developing collective consciousness.	Global memory, shared attention, distributed problem-solving, and synchronization are expanding.	Function, synchrony, and metaphor do not establish a unified subject of experience.	B for networked collective cognition; D/M for one phenomenal planetary mind.
4. Communication causes cultural convergence.	Shared media, translation, trade, migration, and platforms diffuse symbols and norms.	Networks also enable niches, countermovements, identity intensification, and asymmetric filtering.	B for partial convergence; D for inevitable global uniformity.
5. Technology forces a new brain state.	Sustained environments shape learning, stress, attention, and development.	There is no single baseline brain or uniform exposure; outcomes vary and accommodation changes the task.	B for plastic adaptation; D for one compulsory evolutionary state.
6. People who cannot keep up face biological selection.	Social conditions can affect health and reproduction; culture can create selection pressures.	Present evidence mostly shows institutional sorting and inequality, not heritable trait selection across generations.	C as a future mechanism in principle; D as a demonstrated current genetic hierarchy.
7. Collective stress contributes to wars and collapse.	Threat, dehumanization, mistrust, and misperception influence mobilization and legitimacy.	Organization, state capacity, interests, resources, and geopolitics are indispensable; distress is often an outcome.	B as mediated contributor; D as sufficient universal cause.
8. Collective consciousness causes natural disasters.	Human beliefs alter emissions, settlement, preparedness, infrastructure, and vulnerability.	Tectonic and atmospheric processes require physical causes; victims’ emotions do not generate hazards.	B through behavior and exposure; D for direct psychic causation.
9. Present upheaval is apocalypse.	Rapid systemic change can end social worlds; apocalyptic traditions interpret crisis as disclosure and transformation.	The concept spans incompatible empirical and theological meanings and can be fitted after any crisis.	M as existential or theological interpretation; test each material prediction separately.
10. Ancient civilizations underwent the same transition.	Ancient networks, sophisticated technologies, collapses, and knowledge loss are documented.	No evidence demonstrates a prior digital-industrial planetary consciousness; analogy can become projection.	B for recurring mechanisms; D for technological equivalence without artifacts.
11. Humanity is trapped in a simulation loop.	Simulation is logically possible under contested assumptions; recurrence can feel structurally patterned.	Possibility is not probability; most proposed evidence is nondiscriminating and premises remain unverified.	M/C as philosophy; D as established empirical explanation.
12. Humanity can choose its trajectory.	Design, policy, collective action, norms, and institutions change feedback loops and risk.	Choices are distributed, constrained, unequal, path-dependent, and often uncoordinated.	B: situated agency is real; sovereign species-level choice is mostly a metaphor.

17.1 The steelman of the overall thesis

The world human beings inhabit is not merely given. Nervous systems generate experienced models; communities generate meanings; institutions make shared classifications consequential; and technologies reorganize the circulation of attention and action. As these layers become more tightly coupled, local states can propagate into global behavior with increasing speed. Biological stress, cultural narratives, institutional incentives, and ecological effects form recursive loops. A phase transition in civilizational organization is therefore possible, and it may be experienced as spiritual awakening, social breakdown, or both.

17.2 The strongest skeptical reply

The thesis may be a sequence of equivocations. “Reality” shifts from perception to physics; “collective consciousness” shifts from culture to a subject; “biology” shifts from stress to genetics; “selection” shifts from algorithms to evolution; “apocalypse” shifts from social change to cosmic ending; and “loop” shifts from recurring patterns to simulation. Each transition gains emotional force from the previous word while escaping its evidential limits. Complex ordinary causation may explain the phenomena without a new collective ontology.

17.3 The synthesis

The skeptical reply defeats the strongest literal version but not the entire project. Once the equivocations are removed, a significant thesis remains:

Networked civilization is a multilevel adaptive system in which biologically embodied agents collectively construct institutions and technologies that recursively reshape attention, stress, learning, opportunity, ecology, and future institutions. Greater coupling changes the scale and speed of both intelligence and error.

This thesis is empirically researchable, philosophically substantial, and ethically urgent. It does not require claiming that humanity is one conscious organism.

17.4 Questions on which evidence does not choose values for us

Even perfect causal knowledge would not decide:

- how much cultural convergence is desirable;
- which forms of slowness should be protected;
- when collective safety justifies limits on individual choice;
- whether spiritual unity is true or only transformative;
- what tradeoffs between innovation, privacy, equality, and resilience are acceptable;
- whether a meaningful human future requires preserving unpredictability and difference.

These are normative and existential questions. Evidence can reveal consequences and inconsistencies; public reasoning must still choose.

17.5 Four philosophical objections the synthesis must survive

Objection from realism: If a mind-independent world exists, talk of generative reality is unnecessary. Reply: realism constrains the thesis but does not eliminate generative perception, performative institutions, or emergent history. The claim concerns organism-world access and social causation, not creation of all existence.

Objection from constructivism: Appeals to mind-independent reality conceal the power that determines what counts as evidence. Reply: power shapes inquiry, categories, access, and credibility, but resistance, failed intervention, replication, and independent causal consequences remain resources for criticizing power. A ruler can suppress a measurement without changing the measured atmospheric concentration.

Objection from phenomenology: A third-person causal model misses the lived world in which crisis, unity, and apocalypse have meaning. Reply: correct; first-person and hermeneutic evidence are indispensable for meaning. They do not replace population inference or physical mechanism. The report therefore treats experience as data of a different kind, not noise.

Objection from spirituality: Science assumes separate material observers and therefore cannot adjudicate nondual realization. Reply: empirical science can study reports, practices, behavior, physiology, and intersubjective consequences. It cannot simply confirm or deny every metaphysical interpretation. But when a spiritual claim predicts external physical effects, public evidence becomes relevant.

The synthesis survives by becoming domain-specific. It gives up the rhetorical power of one total explanation in exchange for a network of claims that can be criticized independently.

17.6 The burden-of-proof ladder

This ladder is deliberately asymmetric. Extraordinary claims are not rejected because they are emotionally powerful; they require evidence proportionate to the number of ordinary explanations they must exclude.

Table 23. The burden-of-proof ladder

Claim	Minimum burden	Current position
Communication synchronizes attention	time-resolved behavioral or media data with an appropriate baseline	supported in specified contexts
Shared attention changes belief or action	longitudinal or experimental evidence with measured exposure	supported but heterogeneous
Networks acquire functional memory or agency	system-level performance dependent on organized relations	supported for some groups and institutions
Humanity is converging on one culture	representative cross-cultural trends that distinguish convergence from parallel change and platform sampling	not established as a universal trajectory
Humanity forms one phenomenal subject	theory of boundaries and integration plus evidence distinguishing it from shared input and communication	not established
Collective stress contributes to crisis	temporally ordered, mediated effects beyond material and institutional causes	plausible and partly supported by component mechanisms
Collective emotion directly causes geophysical hazards	replicable physical mechanism and discriminating prediction	unsupported
Present history is a repeated simulation test	specified carrier, loop mechanism, and evidence more likely than under ordinary recurrence	metaphysically open, empirically unsupported

18. A scientific research program

18.1 Replace the grand noun with measured constructs

“Collective consciousness” should not be the primary variable. It should be decomposed into constructs that can succeed or fail independently:

Table 24. Replacing the grand noun with measured constructs

Construct	Example measure
Shared salience	overlap and timing of topics attended across populations
Belief convergence	distribution and calibration of estimates before and after interaction
Network integration	modularity, path length, brokerage, cross-group exposure
Collective memory	retention, distortion, retrieval, and source diversity over time
Coordinated agency	latency, scale, persistence, and success of joint action
Phenomenal synchrony	separately reported experiences plus neural/physiological coupling under controlled shared input
Institutional power	ownership, ranking control, sanction capacity, appeal, and exit
Biological strain	sleep, ecological momentary distress, heart-rate variability, cortisol timing, function
Inclusion	affordability, accessibility, skill, language, participation, benefit, and contestability
Material outcome	conflict events, service delivery, emissions, disaster loss, health, or productivity

18.2 A multilevel longitudinal design

A strong program would recruit diverse participants across regions, languages, disability status, socioeconomic position, age, and connection quality, then follow them across technological or institutional changes. With explicit consent and data minimization, it could combine:

- ecological momentary assessments of stress, control, belonging, and perceived acceleration;
- sleep and noninvasive physiological measures where justified;
- belief-updating and source-memory tasks;
- surveys of norms, metaperceptions, trust, agency, and well-being;
- privacy-preserving communication-network measures;
- platform or news-exposure measures with provenance;
- institutional indicators such as labor protection, service access, censorship, and appeal rights;
- community-level conflict, economic, health, and environmental outcomes.

Repeated measurement is necessary because a cross-sectional correlation cannot determine whether network use caused distress, distressed people selected certain use, or a third condition caused both.

18.3 Preregistered core hypotheses

- 1 Coupling-salience hypothesis: faster and denser communication increases synchronization of attention more consistently than accuracy of belief.
- 2 Diversity-calibration hypothesis: collective estimates improve when independent evidence and protected dissent are preserved; social feedback improves confidence more readily than accuracy when errors are correlated.
- 3 Control-allostasis hypothesis: rapid change predicts biological and psychological strain most strongly when perceived control, material security, social support, and recovery are low.
- 4 Heterogeneity hypothesis: content, function, vulnerability, and context explain more outcome variance than undifferentiated total screen time.
- 5 Accessibility hypothesis: apparent individual “non-adaptation” is substantially mediated by design, affordability, language, accommodation, and institutional dependence.
- 6 Selection-timescale hypothesis: cultural and institutional sorting will be detectable over months or years; credible genetic selection evidence, if any, requires multigenerational heritable change.
- 7 Conflict-mediation hypothesis: collective threat and inaccurate metaperceptions influence conflict support through moral permission, mobilization, and institutions rather than direct biological discharge.
- 8 Disaster-boundary hypothesis: belief and trust predict preparedness, exposure, and response, not geophysical hazard occurrence after physical variables are controlled.

18.4 Designs that can improve causal inference

- Randomized network experiments: vary access to independent estimates, dissent protection, source provenance, or feedback timing.
- Platform natural experiments: analyze outages, policy changes, feed redesigns, or staggered feature releases with appropriate comparison groups.
- Difference-in-differences: compare affected and matched populations before and after an external change while testing parallel trends.
- Instrumental-variable or encouragement designs: use only when the exclusion restriction is credible and transparent.
- Longitudinal within-person models: separate stable susceptibility from changes in exposure and outcome.
- Agent-based models: formalize how local rules could generate polarization, cooperation, or exclusion, then validate against real behavior.
- Historical comparative analysis: specify cases and outcomes before coding, use negative cases, and test out of sample.
- Participatory research: include affected communities in construct definition, accessibility, interpretation, and governance.

18.5 A decisive experiment on “synchrony versus mind”

No single experiment can establish or eliminate every group-mind theory. But a useful design can separate ordinary coupling from stronger claims.

Pairs or groups would receive shared, partially shared, or independent stimuli while communication channels are experimentally controlled. Researchers would measure reports, behavior, physiology, and neural time series. Ordinary accounts predict that synchrony tracks shared input, reciprocal communication, common task structure, and learned prediction. A stronger group-field hypothesis must predict residual, replicable coupling or information transfer when those channels and artifacts are excluded.

The design requires preregistered analyses, correction for autocorrelation and multiple testing, independent replication, adversarial collaboration, and fraud-resistant data handling. An unexplained residual would be a finding to investigate, not automatic proof of consciousness.

18.6 Testing civilizational phase change

A phase-transition claim should define an order parameter: a measurable feature that changes qualitatively, such as global synchronization, institutional dependence, network modularity, or recovery time after shocks. Researchers could test for:

- nonlinear change rather than smooth trend;
- critical slowing down or increased autocorrelation before transition;
- cross-domain coherence rather than one selected series;
- robustness to alternative time windows and indicators;
- genuine prediction of held-out periods or cases.

The word phase transition should not be used only because change feels intense.

18.7 Falsifiers

The framework must be allowed to lose.

- If network coupling rises but shared salience, coordination, and error cascades do not change, the coupling thesis weakens.
- If control and institutional support do not moderate stress under repeated strong designs, the allostatic adaptation model weakens.
- If accessibility improvements do not reduce observed participation gaps, the environmental account is incomplete.
- If alleged historical cycles fail out-of-sample, deterministic recurrence should be rejected.
- If a proposed simulation test cannot distinguish simulation from ordinary physics, it is not a test.
- If a group-mind theory predicts no observation different from communication and common input, it remains metaphysical rather than experimentally supported.

18.8 Ethical safeguards

Research at this scale can become the very control system it claims to study. Minimum safeguards include:

- informed, accessible consent and meaningful withdrawal;
- data minimization and separation of identity from content;
- no covert emotional manipulation without exceptional justification and oversight;
- community governance over sensitive group data;
- protection against state, employer, insurer, or platform retaliation;
- no biological ranking of cultures, disabilities, or political dissent;
- publication of negative results and uncertainty;
- audit rights when algorithms allocate essential opportunities;
- preservation of non-digital participation routes.

18.9 The ideal research collaboration

No single discipline can own this question. The project needs neuroscience to measure organisms, psychology to study meaning and behavior, sociology and anthropology to understand norms and power, network science to formalize diffusion, political economy to identify incentives, disability studies to expose design assumptions, history and archaeology to discipline recurrence claims, religious studies to interpret apocalypse, philosophy to separate ontology from metaphor, and affected communities to define what counts as harm or progress.

18.10 A global network-and-regulation observatory

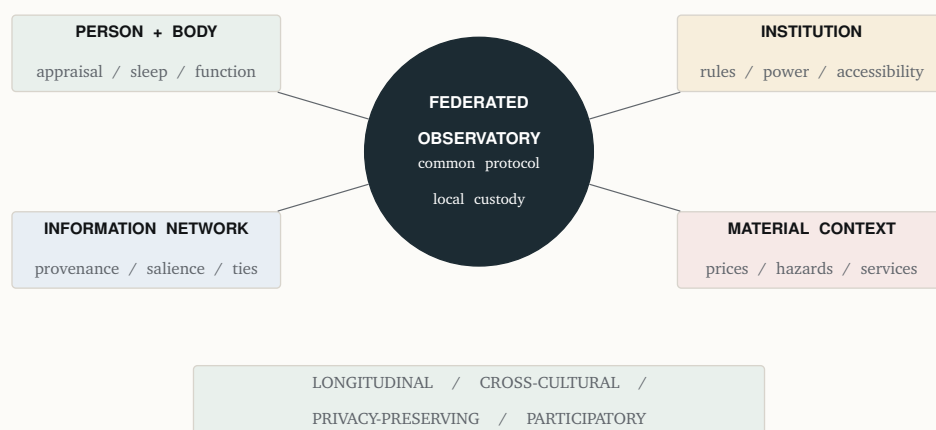


Figure 9. A federated observatory design. Four synchronized panels support multilevel causal analysis while identifiable data remain locally governed.

A feasible flagship program would be a federated observatory rather than one central database. Participating research sites would use a common core protocol while retaining identifiable data locally. Regions and communities would add measures that capture their own institutions, languages, risks, and meanings. This design supports comparison without

pretending that one Western platform population represents humanity.

The observatory would follow repeated cohorts and communities across at least five years, with intensified measurement around predefined events such as platform changes, elections, disasters, major AI deployments, connectivity expansions, labor shocks, or policy reforms. The core unit is not “screen time” but an event-centered person-network-institution panel.

Four synchronized panels would be collected:

Table 25. Four synchronized observatory panels

	Examples	Resolution	Purpose
Person and body	ecological momentary appraisal, sleep, functioning, optional heart-rate variability or cortisol	hours to months	test regulation, recovery, and heterogeneity
Information network	exposure provenance, topic salience, source diversity, tie structure, algorithm condition	minutes to months	measure coupling, cascades, and independence
Institution	rules, moderation, welfare, accessibility, labor conditions, appeal, ownership	event and annual	identify power, protection, and policy changes
Material context	prices, conflict events, emissions, hazard exposure, health services, displacement	days to years	prevent psychological variables from replacing external causes

The observatory should oversample populations routinely erased by digital trace data: low-connectivity communities, minority-language users, people using assistive technologies, displaced populations, older adults, and people who intentionally limit platform participation. Offline and qualitative routes are necessary because absence from a platform is itself socially patterned.

18.11 Measurement must resist the seduction of convenient proxies

The project’s central concepts are vulnerable to proxy substitution:

Table 26. Measurement must resist convenient proxies

	Tempting proxy	Why the proxy is insufficient	Better strategy
Collective consciousness	topic similarity	shared news or copying can mimic shared understanding	combine salience, comprehension, memory, coordination, and dissent
Belief	like, share, or search	expression may be ironic, strategic, curious, or coerced	repeated calibrated reports plus consequential choices
Stress	negative language	style and culture confound distress	validated self-report, function, context, and optional physiology
Synchrony	correlated time series	common stimulus and autocorrelation inflate coupling	shuffled baselines, independent stimuli, lag tests, intervention
Adaptation	speed or productivity	rewards one institutional goal and may hide health costs	multidimensional function, recovery, agency, and accessibility
Inclusion	account or connection	does not measure affordability, safety, comprehension, benefit, or control	capability-based participation measures
Collapse	one declining index	systems transform unevenly and indicators may lag	preregistered multivariate criteria and comparative cases

Construct validity is not a technical afterthought. If the measure defines a fast, constantly connected person as adapted, the study can rediscover its own norm and call it biology.

18.12 Causal diagrams before causal stories

Before collecting data, each hypothesis should specify a directed causal graph. For example, the association between algorithmic exposure and distress may be confounded by prior distress and platform choice; mediated by harassment or sleep; moderated by age, support, and control; and affected by an economic shock that also changes employment. The graph determines which variables should and should not be controlled.

Several common analytical errors must be anticipated:

- controlling for a mediator and then concluding there is no total effect;
- conditioning on platform use, which may select people according to both exposure and outcome;
- interpreting contemporaneous population correlations as individual change;
- using post-treatment network ties as if they were baseline covariates;
- treating statistically significant physiological change as clinically meaningful harm;
- inferring one cultural mechanism from pooled country averages;
- searching many crisis indicators until a phase-transition pattern appears.

Analyses should report effect sizes, uncertainty, missingness, measurement invariance, subgroup heterogeneity, and sensitivity to unmeasured confounding. Predictions should be tested in locations and periods not used to build the theory.

18.13 A staged portfolio of decisive studies

One enormous study would produce ambiguous averages. A better program combines linked designs:

- 1 Micro-mechanism experiments: manipulate accuracy prompts, communication delay, source diversity, controllability, or shared input; measure updating, confidence, arousal, and coordination.
- 2 Hyperscanning with causal perturbation: separate common stimulus from reciprocal interaction and test whether induced timing changes behavior, while avoiding claims about phenomenality [113–116].
- 3 Platform field experiments: randomize clearly specified ranking features with consent, independent oversight, welfare monitoring, and long follow-up; measure exposure as well as attitudes [26,27,127,131].
- 4 Natural experiments in connectivity and policy: study staggered infrastructure, outages, moderation rules, labor protections, and accessibility mandates using matched counterfactuals.
- 5 Community co-regulation trials: compare individual coping instruction with interventions that alter workload, social support, deliberation rules, or institutional control.

- 6 Historical prediction challenges: lock definitions of collapse or transition, train models on a subset of cases, and test dates and cases held out from model construction.
- 7 Qualitative mechanism studies: investigate how people interpret acceleration, spiritual unity, technological refusal, and apocalypse, then test whether proposed categories travel across cultures.

Triangulation matters because each method fails differently. Laboratory control can lose social meaning; field experiments can lack mechanism; digital traces omit people and inner experience; interviews can reveal meaning without causal prevalence; historical data are incomplete and nonexperimental.

18.14 Open science and adversarial collaboration

Claims about consciousness, crisis, and algorithms attract motivated reasoning from advocates and skeptics. High-value studies should therefore preregister primary outcomes and exclusion rules, archive code and synthetic test data, publish null results, and invite teams with opposing theoretical commitments to agree on decisive tests before seeing results. The 2025 adversarial test of major consciousness theories illustrates both the value and difficulty of this model [89].

Platform research requires added safeguards: independent access to treatment definitions and exposure logs; publication rights not controlled by the company; auditing for unreported concurrent experiments; and a public account of harms and withdrawals. A result that cannot be inspected outside the institution whose power it evaluates should receive a lower evidential grade.

18.15 Ethics is part of validity

Covertly manipulating a population's emotions or information may generate an effect while destroying the trust the system depends on. Excluding low-connectivity or disabled participants may yield a clean dataset while invalidating a claim about humanity. Centralizing sensitive political and physiological data may create surveillance risks that alter participant behavior and public legitimacy.

Ethical design therefore improves causal interpretation. Consent clarifies treatment; community governance identifies missing mechanisms; accessibility expands the target population; data minimization reduces strategic response and downstream harm; and independent appeal distinguishes research participation from compulsory infrastructure.

19. A public reasoning and practice framework

19.1 The translation rule

When a large claim feels compelling, translate it into a causal sentence.

Table 27. The translation rule

Large claim	Researchable translation
"The collective is awakening."	Which population is changing which belief, attention pattern, capacity, or institution, measured when?
"People cannot handle the new frequency."	Which demands exceed whose resources, with what stress, sleep, performance, or participation outcome?
"Our fear creates disaster."	Which fear changes which behavior, policy, exposure, or response system, and how does that affect loss?
"The system selects the evolved."	Which process selects what trait or practice, by what retention mechanism and timescale?
"History is repeating."	Which variables and sequence recur across which preregistered cases, and which cases do not fit?
"We are in a simulation."	What observation is more likely under a specified simulation than under competing physical models?

Translation does not kill wonder. It reveals where wonder becomes inquiry.

19.2 The five boundaries a reader should protect

- 1 Experience is not the entire external world. It is the organism's constrained relation to it.
- 2 Shared recognition is not equal consent. Power and sanction shape public agreement.
- 3 Emergent coordination is not automatically consciousness. Function and phenomenality require separate arguments.
- 4 Adaptation is not progress. A system can adapt to exploitation or error.
- 5 Interdependence is not helplessness. Distributed, constrained agency remains real.

19.3 A scientific practice of collective "manifestation"

The earlier stages of this project replaced magical manifestation with a causal loop of values, attention, action, feedback, and updating. At the collective level, the analogous practice is institutional rather than merely mental.

- 1 Name the desired common outcome. It must be observable and behaviorally mediated, such as reducing exclusion in a service or improving cross-group factual calibration.
- 2 Map the actors and power. Identify who is affected, who controls infrastructure, who can veto, and who is absent.
- 3 Specify the causal bridge. State how communication, norms, resources, rules, or design

could produce the outcome.

- 4 Protect independent evidence. Collect initial judgments before discussion; include dissent and disconfirming cases.
- 5 Create an accessible intervention. Change a default, interface, incentive, conversation rule, service, or institution rather than demanding belief alone.
- 6 Predefine measures and failure. Choose outcomes, comparison, timing, and a result that would count as no benefit or harm.
- 7 Act at more than one level. Pair individual practice with relationship, network, or institutional change.
- 8 Update publicly. Report uncertainty, unintended effects, subgroup differences, and revision.

This is a scientific form of bringing a social possibility into reality: not thought commanding matter, but coordinated imagination becoming testable design and accountable action.

19.4 A weekly personal-network audit

For readers who want a concrete practice, record the following once a week for eight weeks:

- Which three topics captured most of my attention, and who selected them?
- Which claim did I encounter repeatedly, and did repetition substitute for evidence?
- What source or person challenged my model?
- What bodily state accompanied my strongest certainty?
- Did I confuse shared emotion with shared fact?
- Whose absence or access barrier was invisible in my group?
- What action did our belief actually cause?
- What outcome contradicted us, and how did we update?

The purpose is not detachment from society. It is conscious participation in the feedback loops that otherwise remain automatic.

19.5 When to slow down

High arousal, sleep loss, perceived total certainty, dehumanizing language, cosmic framing of opponents, and pressure for irreversible immediate action are reasons to increase verification and widen consultation. They are not proof that a claim is false. They are conditions under which correlated error and moral disengagement become more likely.

19.6 When not to turn a worldview into self-treatment

Ideas about awakening, simulation, collective fields, or biological transformation can become destabilizing for some people, especially during sleep deprivation, mania, psychosis,

severe anxiety, trauma, or substance use. A person who feels watched by hidden systems, uniquely chosen to complete a cosmic task, or compelled to take dangerous action should seek qualified mental-health support and trusted human contact. Clinical care can respect spiritual meaning while addressing risk. This report is not medical diagnosis or treatment.

19.7 A structured public deliberation protocol

For classrooms, research groups, community forums, or policy workshops, the following 75-minute protocol turns the thesis into a testable debate:

- 1 Private baseline — 8 minutes. Participants independently define the claim, give a confidence estimate, and name one fact that could change their mind.
- 2 Domain sorting — 10 minutes. Place each statement under empirical, mechanistic, interpretive, metaphysical, or normative headings. Statements may occupy more than one box only if their parts are rewritten.
- 3 Causal mapping — 15 minutes. For each proposed arrow, identify carrier, mechanism, timescale, power holder, and counterfactual.
- 4 Steelman exchange — 12 minutes. Each side states the strongest version of the opposing view and receives correction before rebutting it.
- 5 Absent-voice audit — 8 minutes. Identify who bears the risk, who is missing, and what access or refusal would mean.
- 6 Evidence update — 10 minutes. Participants revise confidence privately before seeing the group distribution.
- 7 Action with stop rule — 12 minutes. Choose one reversible intervention, one outcome, one harm indicator, and a date for review.

Private estimates before and after discussion help reveal whether conversation added reasons or merely social pressure. The aim is not forced consensus. It is calibrated disagreement capable of coordinated action.

19.8 A three-column discipline for extraordinary experiences

Readers who experience profound synchrony, nonduality, coincidence, or a sense of historical revelation can preserve both meaning and epistemic care by writing three columns:

Table 28. A three-column discipline for extraordinary experiences

Lived report	Possible explanations	Responsible next action
What was sensed, felt, thought, and valued, without premature theory	spiritual interpretation, shared stimulus, expectation, memory, chance, interpersonal coordination, illness, or unknown	rest, verify, discuss, measure, seek support, act reversibly

The columns do not require treating the experience as unreal. They prevent one interpretation from becoming compulsory before alternatives and safety are considered.

19.9 Collective manifestation as democratic prototyping

The most scientifically defensible practice of collective manifestation is democratic prototyping: communities articulate a possible future, build a limited intervention, measure its consequences, protect dissent, and revise. Imagination matters because no institution is created without representing an alternative. Belief matters because efficacy and commitment sustain action. But accountability matters because sincere groups can produce harm.

A prototype should be small enough to reverse, large enough to test the mechanism, accessible to those affected, and explicit about tradeoffs. Success is not that participants felt aligned. Success is that a valued, observable condition improved without unacceptable harm and that the result survived independent scrutiny.

20. Final synthesis

The user's intuition contains a scientifically important core. Human reality is not a static picture passively received by isolated minds. Organisms continuously infer and act; people regulate one another; cultures supply categories; institutions solidify some meanings into enforceable facts; technologies change the speed and topology of interaction; and those arrangements return to bodies as stress, skill, opportunity, illness, belonging, and action. Humanity participates in making history because belief can become behavior, behavior can become institution, and institution can reorganize material conditions.

The intuition becomes misleading when the same words slide across levels. The constructed character of experience does not make physics obedient to thought. Collective cognition does not establish a collective subject. Synchrony does not establish unity. Cultural selection does not establish genetic selection. Shared stress does not directly generate tectonic or meteorological hazards. Ancient recurrence does not establish a simulated loop. Apocalypse as a structure of meaning does not establish an extinction forecast.

The best-supported description of the present is accelerated planetary coupling under conditions of radical inequality and persistent plurality. Coupling magnifies what passes through it. It can distribute intelligence, compassion, and warning; it can also distribute falsehood, resentment, surveillance, and panic. The outcome depends on independence, diversity, accessibility, incentives, institutional legitimacy, material security, and the capacity to correct error.

There is no evidence that every person must adopt one new biological state. There is strong reason to expect that rapidly changing demands will be embodied differently according to control, support, health, development, culture, and design. The humane response is not to sort "advanced" from "obsolete" people. It is to build environments in which more kinds of bodies and minds can participate, dissent, rest, and contribute.

The present may indeed be apocalyptic in the older sense of an unveiling: it reveals interdependence, ecological consequence, the fragility of common knowledge, and the power hidden in technical infrastructures. Whether it becomes renewal or ruin is not guaranteed by evolution, technology, or prophecy. Nor is it chosen by humanity in one moment. It is produced through innumerable situated decisions, conflicts, institutions, and feedback loops.

The deepest conclusion is therefore neither cosmic optimism nor fatalism:

We are not proven to be one mind awakening, and we are not merely isolated minds trapped in a fixed world. We are embodied, distinct, interdependent agents inside systems we inherit and continually remake. Our freedom is constrained but causal; our realities are constructed but resistant; and our future is generative without being preordained.

What this inquiry establishes, leaves open, and rejects

Established or strongly supported: brains and bodies actively regulate under learned expectations; experience and action are mutually shaping; social norms and institutions depend partly on collective recognition and enforcement; communication networks alter attention, memory, coordination, and error; chronic uncontrollable demands can become biologically embedded; cultural and institutional environments distribute adaptation costs; belief changes external outcomes through behavior, organization, technology, and physical processes.

Supported with important limits: groups can display intelligence and agency; interpersonal neural signals can synchronize; technological acceleration can contribute to strain and instability; contemplative practice can change attention and emotion regulation; cultural evolution and cumulative knowledge can reshape development; early-warning indicators can sometimes identify declining resilience. Each effect is heterogeneous, conditional, and vulnerable to measurement error.

Open as philosophy, metaphysics, or future science: whether consciousness is fundamentally nondual; whether a sufficiently integrated network could ever become a phenomenal subject; whether restricted simulation models describe our universe; whether the present deserves an apocalyptic or sacred interpretation. Openness does not equal equal evidential support for every formulation.

Rejected under present evidence: intention directly selects arbitrary macroscopic outcomes through quantum physics; neural synchrony proves a planetary mind; collective fear directly generates earthquakes or weather; current digital inequality demonstrates a biologically superior class; ancient sophistication proves a previous global technological consciousness; coincidences or recurring crises establish a simulated loop.

The practical consequence is demanding but hopeful. Human beings cannot will every event into existence, yet attention, interpretation, cooperation, infrastructure, and policy are real causal powers. The scientific form of hope is neither certainty nor passivity. It is the disciplined construction of conditions in which better possibilities can be tried, measured, corrected, and shared without making any person disposable.

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Use of generative tools. Generative language models were used as search, drafting, and consistency-checking aids. All claims, source selections, evidence gradings, and conclusions were verified and are the responsibility of the author.

Preprint status. This is an unrefereed working paper circulated for discussion. It has not been peer reviewed and should be cited as a preprint.

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