

Optimising Worldviews for a Flourishing Planet: Exploring the Principle of Right Relationship

Wendy Ellyatt ^{1,2}¹ Flourish Project, Gloucestershire GL50 2QZ, UK; wendy.ellyatt@gmail.com² Galileo Commission, 81 Larcom St., London SE17 1NJ, UK

Abstract: Worldviews, the foundational assumptions guiding human behaviour and societal systems, are pivotal in shaping planetary health and human flourishing. This paper discusses two divergent worldviews that have prevailed in human populations over time and which are still evident today: the Holistic/Non-linear Worldview, which emphasises interconnectedness and harmony with nature, and the Dualistic/Linear Worldview, which prioritises human-centric activities and the more recent exploitation of nature. The characteristics of human worldviews are explored, including how these are formed in early life via the vital role of human communication and storytelling and the expressive role of the arts. To support the future of human flourishing, this paper makes the case for an integrative worldview that would enable us to embrace paradox and complexity, to seek synthesis, and to promote an integrated approach that reconciles the tensions between seemingly opposing ways of understanding our world. The principle of “Right Relationship”—fostering reciprocal, respectful, and sustainable interactions between humans and the natural world—is examined as a possible framework that could be employed to help humanity navigate today’s global crises and create the conditions for a sustainable, flourishing future.

Keywords: worldviews; right relationship; holistic; dualistic; values; flourishing; ecology; regeneration; systems thinking; unitive narrative; planetary health



Citation: Ellyatt, W. Optimising Worldviews for a Flourishing Planet: Exploring the Principle of Right Relationship. *Challenges* **2024**, *15*, 42. <https://doi.org/10.3390/challe15040042>

Academic Editor: Susan Prescott

Received: 4 September 2024

Revised: 23 October 2024

Accepted: 24 October 2024

Published: 31 October 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

“We don’t see things as they are, we see them as we are” Anais Nin [1].

A worldview is the fundamental intellectual and intuitive/experiential understanding of an individual or society’s reality at that point in time. It serves as an internalised ‘map of the world’ based upon unique cosmology, place-based language, and perceptions [2,3]. All human belief systems and worldviews stem from a particular relational context, reflecting the environments in which we live and offering diverse interpretations of the same reality.

Humans make decisions and take actions that impact the physical and social systems around them, guided by their own perceptions of the present and the collective wisdom of the past, conveyed through lived experience, stories, and other forms of received knowledge [4]. These stories—whether genetically encoded, passed down through families, or culturally constructed—shape our worldviews, and in turn, our worldviews shape our worlds. While we interpret the world through our own unique lenses, we often forget that others may perceive and understand the world in profoundly different ways.

“We are what we think. All that we are, arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world” Buddha [5].

The term worldview comes from the German Weltanschauung, meaning a view or perspective on the world or the universe “used to describe one’s total outlook on life, society and its institutions” [6]. “A set of interrelated assumptions about the nature of the world is called a worldview” [7]. In the largest sense, a worldview is the interpretive lens one uses to understand reality and one’s existence within it [8]. It is a concept ‘whose time has come,’ and its increasing appearance in the contemporary climate change and

global sustainability debates can be understood as both a response to, and a reflection of, the challenges of our time and the solutions they demand [9]. “Everyone acts according to their worldview, an implicit set of assumptions that guide behaviour” [10].

Over time, this has evolved to encompass two key bodies of understanding that have dominated the perceptions, sensemaking, decision taking, and actions of humanity, and it has been suggested that these are deeply rooted in the way the two hemispheres of the brain perceive and interact with the world [11]. One recognises the fundamental interconnectedness of all things, and the other focuses on the detail of the parts. For the purpose of this paper, these divergent worldviews will be presented as follows:

- (a) **The Holistic/Non-linear Worldview (HNW)**, associated with right hemisphere processing, interprets information holistically, emphasising interconnectedness, context, and the relational aspects of existence. This worldview is embodied, intuitive, and deeply attuned to the flow and uniqueness of lived experiences. It fosters empathy, collaboration, and a symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, as seen in many Indigenous cultures. However, its focus on complementarity and intrinsic values can sometimes lack grounding in practical realities [12].
- (b) In contrast, the **Dualistic/Linear Worldview (DLW)**, linked to left hemisphere processing, is analytical, detailed, and sequential. It excels in breaking down information into parts, often abstracting and decontextualising knowledge. This worldview prioritises control, predictability, and the utility of the environment, viewing human beings as separate from nature. Manifested in modern cultures, it drives growth-focused economic systems that exploit the natural world for human-centric goals, emphasising extrinsic values and worth.

The aim of this paper is to explore how these worldviews differentially impact human and planetary flourishing, and whether it is possible to identify the deep characteristics of a unifying perspective that integrates the wisdom of the past with contemporary knowledge. Central to this exploration is the concept of Right Relationship, a guiding principle that may help us navigate the critical challenges of our time during this era of profound regenerative transformation.

2. Comparative Characteristics of Holistic and Dualistic Worldviews

Over time, with the increasing size, movement, and complexity of their populations, human cultures have increasingly replaced the former with the latter, and this has been exacerbated by the steady impact of industrialisation and technology. For thousands of years, however, Indigenous peoples have remained close to their lands and fought to retain their holistic perspectives, arguing that the original values were more aligned with those of the natural world and that gratitude, reciprocity, and circularity were essential for the protection of the planetary ecosystem [13–16]. For example, Table 1 describes the differences between common Indigenous worldviews and the common dominant worldview that was featured in *Restoring the Kindship Worldview*, 2022, by Professor Don Trent Jacobs (Four Arrows) and Darcia Narvaez, Ph.D.

Chart for Rebalancing Life Systems on Planet Earth Via Non-Binary Metacognitive Reflection.

Table 1. Precepts originally published in *The Red Road* by Four Arrows and presented with Dr Darcia Narvaez at the United Nations General Assembly 78 in September 2023. Collaboratively revised in May 2024 [10]. Reprinted/adapted with permission from Ref. [10]. 2022, Topa, W.; Narvaez, D.

Common Indigenous Worldview Manifestations		Common Dominant Worldview Manifestations
Egalitarian	1	Rigid hierarchy
Courage and fearless trust in the universe	2	Fear-based thoughts and behaviours
Socially purposeful life	3	Living without strong social purpose
Emphasis on community welfare	4	Focus on self and personal gain

Table 1. Cont.

Common Indigenous Worldview Manifestations		Common Dominant Worldview Manifestations
Respect for various gender roles and fluidity	5	Rigid and discriminatory gender stereotypes
Emphasis on intangible values	6	Emphasis on possessions
Earth and all systems as living and loving	7	Earth as an unloving “it”
Emphasis on heart wisdom	8	Emphasis on intellect
Competition to develop positive potential	9	Competition to feel superior
Empathetic	10	Lacking empathy
Animistic and bio-centric	11	Anthropocentric
Words as sacred, truthfulness as essential	12	Words used to deceive self or others
Truth seen as multifaceted, accepting the mysterious	13	Truth claims as absolute
Flexible boundaries and interconnected systems	14	Rigid boundaries and fragmented systems
Regular use of alternative consciousness	15	Unfamiliarity with alternative consciousness
Recognition of spirit in All	16	Imperceptive of spirit in All
Emphasis on holistic interconnectedness	17	Disregard for holistic interconnectedness
High interpersonal engagement, touching	18	Minimal contact with others
Inseparability of knowledge and action	19	Emphasis on theory and rhetoric
Resistance to authoritarianism	20	Acceptance of authoritarianism
Time as cyclical	21	Time as linear
Seeking complementary duality	22	Dualistic thinking
Intolerance of injustice	23	Acceptance of injustice
Emphasis on responsibility	24	Emphasis on rights
Generosity as way of life	25	Accumulation (hoarding) as way of life
Ceremony as life-sustaining	26	Ceremony as rote formality
Learning as experiential and collaborative	27	Learning as didactic
Trance-based learning as helpful and natural	28	Trance as dangerous or stemming from evil
Human nature as good but malleable	29	Human nature as corrupt or evil
Humour as essential tool for coping	30	Humour used for put downs
Conflict resolution as return to community	31	Conflict mitigated via revenge, punishment
Learning is holistic and place based	32	Learning is fragmented and theoretical
Personal vitality is essential	33	Personal vitality minimised
Nature’s laws are primary	34	Societal laws are primary
Holistic self-knowledge is most important	35	Self-knowledge not prioritised
Autonomy for group and future generations	36	Autonomy for self
Nature as benevolent and relational	37	Nature as dangerous or utilitarian only
All earth forms are sentient	38	Other-than-human beings are not sentient
High respect for the feminine	39	Low respect for the feminine
Honors diversity	40	Little realisation of the importance of diversity
Non-dualistic view of opposites	41	Emphasis on dualistic thinking
Connection to the land	42	Detachment from the land
Emphasis on becoming fully human	43	De-emphasising becoming fully human
Mutual dependence	44	Independence from relations
Centrality of gratitude	45	Centrality of striving

Table 1. Cont.

Common Indigenous Worldview Manifestations		Common Dominant Worldview Manifestations	
Noninterference	46	Manipulation of others	
Relational healing is self-initiated	47	Relational healing is outsourced to experts	
Understanding/embracing death and dying	48	Fearing and avoiding death to the extreme	
Reciprocity as a guiding principle	49	Competition as a guiding principle	
Practical and spiritual perspectives of cosmos	50	Scientific interest in the cosmos	

Colonialism, climate crises, violent extremism, inequity, mental health crises, and individual and collective alienation are deeply connected to the ongoing struggles between these two worldviews [17,18]. The proposed solutions to these intractable problems also emerge from one or the other. Some glorify science and technology. Others speak to coherence within the self and with nature. Each offers hope but often excludes the benefits and possibilities that might arise from the other.

Clifton's recent work on Primal World Beliefs [19] explores how foundational human beliefs shape worldviews and influence responses to contemporary global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and mental health crises. Primal beliefs, as conceptualised by Clifton, are deeply held, often subconscious convictions about the nature of the world and human existence. His theory provides a psychological foundation for understanding why individuals or cultures gravitate towards holistic or dualistic worldviews, with primal beliefs in interconnectedness and cooperation fostering holistic perspectives, while beliefs in competition and fragmentation underpin dualistic thinking.

An awareness has been steadily emerging around the world, and across all sectors of academia and civil society, of a new unitive possibility that might identify the benefits of both while mitigating the risks of either. The urgent need for such a new, emerging worldview is well documented. Iain McGilchrist, Ervin Laslow, Jude Currihan, Indy Johar, Jo-Ann Archibald, and all the chapter authors of the recent book *'The Great Upshift'* [20] have written about the vibrant possibility of a worldview that moves humanity beyond the current chasm that affects all aspects of life, leadership, choice, and action. It is suggested that this should include the mythological dynamics being endlessly played out in human conflicts [21]. It should also embrace the need to move beyond the boundaries of worldviews themselves into something much more profound [22]. And this includes ways of being and knowing that transcend linear structures and processes.

As Barbara Alice Mann is quoted as saying in a chapter on Complementary Duality in the book *'Restoring the Kinship Worldview'* (Chapter 14, p. 137 in [10,23], "Here is the first truth: nothing in the European mindset prepares westerners for anything in the Turtle Island mindset . . . Here is the second truth: the only way to grasp Turtle is to take her on her own terms . . . In truly traditional thought, there is no dichotomous Good and Evil duking it out for supremacy. The whole point of the Twinned Cosmos is to achieve balance, not the victory of one over the other. Third, either Blood or Breath is capable of injuring the Cosmos if used without balance".

In his book *'Sand Talk'*, Tyson Yunkaporta talks of *Ngak Lokath*, an Aboriginal word for the brackish water that forms in the wet season when freshwater floods into the sea . . . an example of what the Yolngu Tribe calls *Ganma*, a phenomenon of dynamic interaction when opposite forces meet and create something new [23]. He says "All humans evolved within complex, land-based cultures over deep time to develop a brain with the capacity for over 100 trillion neural connections, of which we now only use a tiny fraction. Most of us have been displaced from those cultures of origin, a global diaspora of refugees severed not only from the land, but from the sheer genius that comes from belonging in symbiotic relation to it. In Aboriginal Australia, our Elders tell us stories, ancient narratives to show us that 'if you don't move with the land, the land will move you.' There is nothing permanent about settlements and the civilisations that spawn them".

With so much of the modern media world focused on suspicion, blame, and judgement of the other, there may be much we can learn from Indigenous approaches that are both thoughtfully and respectfully open to difference and diversity [24,25].

3. The Roots of Worldviews

Human consciousness comes before the development of worldviews [26,27], which are (a) genetically predisposed [28,29] and (b) a response to environmental experiences [30,31]. Relational nurturing is therefore essential for the positive shaping of worldviews. In her ‘*Evolved Nest*’ book and research lab, the psychologist Dr Darcia Narvaez talks of restoring species typicality and the practice of ‘nestedness’ [32]:

“Human societies are built from individuals who begin life in relationship. The quality of community support for meeting children’s basic needs influences the state of health the child carries forward in all systems. Undercare in early life leads to less health in childhood and adulthood and a basic sense of disconnection—a Cycle of Competitive Detachment. This is not humanity’s heritage. Over 95% of our species history was spent in a Cycle of Cooperative Companionship, where children’s basic needs were met, leading to wellbeing in childhood and adulthood, with a deep sense of connection and skills to keep the cycle going” [32].

As we grow, we start to create a layer of beliefs about the way the world works that shape our worldviews and impact our natural development. These then become our personal mindsets and the lenses through which we interpret everything that happens to us. The first five years of human life are the most crucial for the healthy shaping of each child’s capacities, values, and worldviews, as this is when they are either optimised or limited [33]. Each child’s *personality* is formed by the unique interrelated combination of genetic, behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects that shape its capacities and potential, whereas *character* refers to the moral and ethical qualities and priorities of the cultures within which they live. *Morals* are the values, normative rules, or principles according to which human intentions or behaviours are judged to be good or bad, right or wrong. They are primarily conveyed through socially transmitted/cultural narratives.

The human life journey is ultimately about overcoming the restrictions of limiting backgrounds, worldviews, values, beliefs, and behaviours in order to restore a level of integration and wholeness. Intrinsic values are an expression of the innate natural laws and principles that are always moving us towards this original state. These include the following:

- Generative creativity;
- Complementarity;
- Unique potential;
- Learning and growth;
- Curiosity;
- Playfulness;
- Engagement;
- Flow;
- Mutuality;
- Reciprocity;
- Harmony;
- Cooperation;
- Contribution;
- Abundance;
- Circularity.

Meanwhile, extrinsic values are shaped by propensities, needs, and lived experience and create our mindsets and worldviews. They differ according to culturally transmitted narratives and priorities.

4. Human Social Communication

What sets humans apart from all other species is our ability to develop conscious awareness and communication skills that allow us to not only question who we are and what our role is but to actively participate in the process of co-creation. To do this, we have had to develop increasingly complex forms of social communication that enable us to share our thoughts, feelings, and emotions with others.

The history of communication can be traced back to the origin of speech and language circa 100,000 BCE [34]. The use of technology in communication commenced with the first use of tools and symbols about 30,000 years BCE. The symbols used include cave paintings,

petroglyphs, and pictograms, with writing then a major innovation, followed by printing technology and more recently telecommunications and the internet.

In 2011, Daniel Dor, Chris Knight, and Jerome Lewis invited twenty-four scholars from a wide array of disciplines to discuss the prehistory of the social communication of human language in an intensive workshop in London; they concluded that it was storytelling that took a primary role:

“We, as modern humans, are so used to language that we find it difficult to imagine social life without it, but the emerging picture of our pre-linguistic ancestors reveals a level of social, technological, and communicative complexity and sophistication much closer to our own than to ape societies. There is a sobering lesson here: being human is not all about language” [35].

In Dor’s 2019 paper [36], he goes on to say that *“Not all human minds have language, but all societies do. There are many human minds without language: the minds of all human children before they acquire language; autistic minds (not all of them); aphasic minds; the minds of people with a wide range of brain injuries and affective pathologies; and most importantly—the minds of human individuals who have not been exposed to the social activity of language at the right age. We may have good stories to tell about each of these, but the crucial fact is that we need these stories. As far as human societies are concerned, no stories are required. There is not a single human society that has no language. All human societies use different variations of the same technology, locally designed by cultural evolution for the universal function of the instruction of imagination. This is an absolute universal. We should start here”.*

According to Dor, our capacity for imagination determines much of what we are. It does not, however, mean that we have language coded in our genes. What we are definitely born with is the *craving for language*: the desperate need to constantly construct bridges across the experiential gaps between us.

And for that human beings have needed to create stories that make sense of their relationship to themselves, their communities, and their lands. We tell stories to ourselves and to each other that contain and reflect on the complexity of life and its fundamental interconnectedness. Stories determine our view of the world, our thoughts, and our future and have made us increasingly dependent upon interpreting and learning from experiences that are not our own [37]. Stories are not restricted to the spoken or written word but are captured in the essence of what we convey to each other through music, dance, the artistic and expressive arts, and the myriad creative expressions of how we seek to capture and share with one another our own experience and sense of the vitality, chaos, and beauty of life. It is a uniquely personal but innately social process. No other species has developed this ability, and no other species has been gifted with the choice-making capacity to so definitively shape its own future.

5. The Role of the Arts

The expressive arts have always been a celebration of human imagination and diversity. They enable us to go beyond the restriction of language to draw upon the very essence of what it is we are trying to share. Whether through the medium of music, dance, painting, drawing, gardening, or architecture, they are about us trying to capture our inner felt sense of life in an external form to either delight and sooth ourselves or to reach out and inform others. In the first of his four books on *The Nature of Order* [38], the architect Christopher Alexander talks about life existing in all structures:

“The difference in degree of life that we discern in things is not a subjective assessment, but an objective one. It describes something about the world, which exists in the world, and resides in structure. I state this by means of the following hypothesis: what we call life is a general condition which exists, to some degree or other, in every part of space: brick, stone, grass, river, painting, building, daffodil, human being, forest, city. And further: the key to this idea is that every part of space—every connected region of space, small or large—has some degree of life, and at this degree of life is well defined, objectively existing, and measurable” [38].

He also discusses how astonished he was at the initial reception to his thoughts on the existence of a Pattern Language that nourished the human spirit through the recognition

that there is a natural structure and order to life and that we should seek to create structures that resonate with human nature.

“What they saw in me was a voice saying that our shared human feeling has been forgotten, hidden in the mess of opinion and personal differences. What people find, and what moves them, in all the work which my colleagues and I have been doing for so many years, is that we have tried to honour and respect the reality of this huge ocean- this 90% of our self- in which our feelings are all alike. The fact that this huge basis, the huge ocean, has been forgotten- and has, perhaps in my own works being reawakened- that is what brought them there that day to see that film, that is what made them stand up and shout. This book, at root, is about the core of that 90% of our feeling which we all share. It is about a more realistic conception of the world and of the universe which comes into existence- and can come into existence- only when we acknowledge that to a very large degree we are all the same” [38].

From the moment that we are born, we are relational beings that have a need to share our own thoughts and experiences with others. Human flourishing relies on us being able to share who we truly are. The authenticity of our stories is therefore crucial for human vitality and wellbeing, which is the degree to which our actions are congruent with our values and desires, despite external pressures towards social conformity. We are nurtured by being able to authentically share our stories, and we are diminished by systems that seek to curb or undermine this capacity.

6. Human Flourishing

Flourishing occurs when our inner needs are aligned with the demands of the external world, allowing us to focus on what genuinely interests and pleases us, to develop, express, and share our unique skills, and to optimise our lives physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. It involves a deep sense of meaning and purpose, where our work and leisure activities are meaningful as part of our creative participation within the larger ecosystem. Flourishing is a contextually dynamic process, requiring us to adapt and respond to external stimuli as we move towards integration and growth. This journey often involves periods of challenge and difficulty as we confront and overcome our conditioning, fears, and limitations.

The positive dimensions of flourishing include physical health and vitality, mental health, positive relationships, emotional mastery, environmental mastery, autonomy, self-acceptance, contribution, personal growth, purpose in life, fulfilment of potential, and happiness. Adults who achieve an integrated level of health—where a sustainable balance is maintained between personal needs and social and environmental pressures—experience high levels of vitality and wellbeing. In contrast, adults with fragmented health tend to languish, exhibiting low vitality and wellbeing. While some of their needs may be met, it often comes at the expense of others.

Languishing, on the other hand, is frequently experienced as emptiness and stagnation, often constituting lives of quiet despair. It involves little or no sense of cohesion in one’s life, and an eroded and compromised sense of meaning and purpose, where life seems pointless and of little or no value to the wider world. It is an indication that our vitality needs are not being sufficiently met. Languishing is often discussed as primarily consisting of poor mental health [39], but based on the definition of flourishing put forward above it, it is a systemic issue that indicates that we are unable to achieve the states of balance and integration that are necessary for us to grow and feel whole [40].

Through its USD 43 million Global Flourishing Study, involving 22 countries, the Harvard Human Flourishing Program has recently become a significant contributor to the global understanding of human flourishing, originally defined as *“a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good”* [41]. It has also attracted a degree of criticism for both its predominantly Western values and presumptions relating to the contextual factors of human health [42]. Others pointed out that these definitions neglected the construct of vitality, which ‘considers all dimensions of the environment across time’ [43].

More recently, Tyler VanderWeele and other architects of the Global Flourishing Study Program's Director have expanded on their previous definition of flourishing as *"the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good including the contexts in which that person lives"* [44]. Importantly, this extends aspects of wellbeing as they pertain to that individual to also include that person's context [44].

From a whole system perspective, any approaches to human flourishing must acknowledge the fundamentally entangled nature of life, with human beings only one species in a world that is teeming with relational activity. When, in 1973, Arne Naess introduced the term deep ecology, he was seeking to embrace two ecological concepts, i.e., the need for sustainable systems and environmental ethics, including how humans should relate to nature [45]. But he also explored the concept of eco-philosophy, or what he termed 'Ecosophy', which he described as the philosophy of equilibrium harmony or equilibrium. In other words, his belief that human beings had the relational capacity to connect with a much larger sense of self that transcended the ego and that allowed us to feel a sense of connection to all other beings and the natural world itself. This was something that was then further explored by Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi in *The Systems View of Life*:

"Deep ecology does not separate humans—nor anything else—from the natural environment. It does not see the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life. Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual awareness. . . . When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness, to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence" (p. 12) [46].

Quantum theory stresses the link between the observer and the observed and the basic holism of all phenomena [47]. There are biological, cognitive, social, and ecological dimension of life that show us that no living thing can exist in isolation and that plants, animals, and micro-organisms regulate the entire biosphere within which human beings are a part.

7. Right Relationship

If the stories that we hear about who we are as human beings fundamentally shape our values, worldviews, and sense of what is right and wrong, then it seems clear that we should investigate the predominant stories that we are currently being told, who is behind them, and what the motivations are for them to be perpetuated. This is particularly so for young minds that are in the process of being shaped and for populations that are involved in conflict. We also need to better understand the processes that challenge and transform our worldviews in a world that constantly seeks to present one side as against the other.

It is only in the late 20th century that we have seen the rapid evolution of mass forms of communication that have had the ability to disrupt and distort natural forms of human relationship, and to challenge the values and norms that were previously culturally and contextually conveyed from one generation to the next. This has had a particularly significant impact on the health and wellbeing of younger generations, who are having to now navigate a bewildering array of new social narratives. There is, therefore, an urgent need for more research studies exploring the psychological and social influence of all forms of global media, together with the 'holding-to-account' for systems that are proven to substantially erode human prosocial capacities and potential. As an influential group of experts warned in their 2023 paper 'World scientists' warning: The behavioural crisis driving ecological overshoot', *"In this paper, we use the term 'behavioural crisis' specifically to mean the consequences of the innate suite of human behaviours that were once adaptive in early hominid evolution, but have now been exploited to serve the global industrial economy"*. They went on to say, *"We urgently call for increased interdisciplinary work to be carried out in directing, understanding and policing widespread behaviour manipulation"* [48].

We need to seek stories that consistently reflect the best of human values and behaviours, rather than the worst, which cultivate empathy and understanding towards diverse backgrounds and perspectives, and that compassionately embrace the social and environmental conditions that undermine our ability to live in Right Relationship, with ourselves, each other, and the planet.

One of the most significant changes that has occurred in the last five hundred years is the imposition of a story that separated man from nature and that then accepted only the narratives and evidence that supported its own version of the truth. Not only this, but it then created and enforced systems that served only that story, despite the huge body of evidence to show that this went against the natural processes of life. Such systems were accompanied by judgement, ‘othering’, and frequently the persecution of those that challenged their version of the world [49]. In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* [50], Thomas Kuhn explored how rigid paradigms in science—often rooted in dualistic frameworks of thought—had limited scientific progress, and in 1980, the physicist David Bohm argued that the fragmentation inherent in dualistic thinking had limited the potential for scientific discoveries by focusing too much on separate parts and not enough on the interconnectedness of the whole [51].

Right Relationship is a fundamental principle of all living systems and has been a central theme across numerous human philosophies, cultures, and disciplines, emphasising interconnectedness, respect, reciprocity, and harmony among all forms of life. It has also been a core tenet of ancient and Indigenous cultures for thousands of years.

We do not inhabit a mechanical universe but rather a network of relations where process is primary. In this way, as the Physicist Fritjof Capra says, the universe is “*an interconnected, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interdependent and have to be understood as patterns of a cosmic process*” (p. 363) [52]. We can never speak about nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves.

In her own seminal work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, (1993) [53], Val Plumwood’s call for an ‘Ecological Self’ further critiqued the Western philosophical tradition that separates humans from nature, reinforcing hierarchies that justify domination over the environment and marginalised groups. She argues that dualistic thinking—such as reason versus nature, male versus female—has significantly contributed to both ecological degradation and social injustice.

Indigenous teachings such as “Two-Eyed Seeing” have introduced a powerful way of understanding and practicing such Right Relationship. This concept, introduced in 2012 by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall [54], advocates for learning to see from both an Indigenous and a Western perspective, acknowledging the strength of each while finding balance between them. In *Towards Braiding* [55], Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti expand on this idea by exploring how diverse knowledge systems can be braided together in a way that respects differences without forcing them into the same mould. They emphasise the importance of humility, relational accountability, and the discomfort that can arise when engaging with different worldviews. Similarly, Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass* [56] illustrates how Indigenous knowledge is interwoven with scientific understanding, fostering a deep reciprocity with the natural world. Through these perspectives, we see that Right Relationship involves not only recognising interdependence but also honouring the diverse ways of knowing that can guide us towards a more sustainable and just future. These frameworks encourage us to embrace complexity, uncertainty, and the need for multiple approaches in our pursuit of harmony with the Earth.

In 2023, Thich Nhat Hanh further challenged the current paradigm by introducing the philosophical concept and contemplation practice of ‘*Interbeing*’, rooted in the Zen Buddhist tradition, that underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements of existence [57]. It informs ethical living, mindfulness, and compassionate actions [57] and is an example of how contemporary language is evolving to capture and convey innate ancient concepts.

8. Conclusions

To tell the right stories to both ourselves and others has become an increasingly important task in a world that is shaped by the collective. What we are seeking is a new emergent way forward for human civilisation that unites the best of human learning and wisdom from the past with the best emergent knowledge and understanding of the present/future. Such a way forward will need, however, to acknowledge the deep systemic wounding that has occurred not only in human populations but in other species and the body of the earth itself. It will need to create a new non-hierarchical and relational purpose for culture that is in service of life and that offers a ‘complementary non-duality’ [58], where multiple perspectives can coexist and contribute to a more holistic understanding of reality. One of the most destructive effects of dualistic thinking is the homogenisation of both sides of the dualism, in that it has attempted to erase the diversity within both sides, whereas what we are really seeking is the restoration of ways of being and knowing that were innate to our species when we had no sense of *being anything other than Nature*.

The suggestion of this paper is that the principle of Right Relationship could offer a powerful framework for such a way forward. By recognising the interconnectedness of all life, fostering participatory and holistic approaches to knowledge, and embedding ethical considerations into our actions, we can address contemporary global challenges more effectively. This synthesis of ancient wisdom, modern science, and holistic perspectives provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and implementing right relationships in all aspects of life. Through this integration, we can create a more harmonious and sustainable world, where all forms of life are respected and valued and where there is a deeper and more compassionate appreciation for the source and value of differing worldviews and stories.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

1. Nin, A. *Seduction of the Minotaur*; Swallow Press/Ohio University Press: Athens, OH, USA, 1961.
2. Hiebert, P.G. *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*; Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 2008.
3. Mascolo, M. Worldview. In *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*; Teo, T., Ed.; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014; pp. 1–5. [CrossRef]
4. Baer, M.B. Your Biases and Beliefs Are Impacting Your Decision-Making. *Psychology Today*. 30 June 2017. Available online: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/empathy-and-relationships/201706/your-biases-and-beliefs-are-impacting-your-decision-making> (accessed on 20 August 2024).
5. Byrom, T. *Dhammapada: The Sayings of the Buddha*; Wildwood House: London, UK, 1976.
6. Wolman, B. *Dictionary of Behavioral Science*; Van Nostrand Reinhold Company: New York, NY, USA, 1973.
7. Overton, W.F. Historical and contemporary perspectives on developmental theory and research strategies. In *Visions of Aesthetics, the Environment & Development*; Psychology Press: Hove, UK, 2013; pp. 263–311.
8. Miller, M.E.; West, A.N. Influences of world view on personality, epistemology, and choice of profession. In *Development in the Workplace*; Psychology Press: Hove, UK, 2013; pp. 3–19.
9. Hedlund-de Witt, A. *Worldviews and the Transformation to Sustainable Societies: An Exploration of the Cultural and Psychological Dimensions of Our Global Environmental Challenges*; Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2013.
10. Topa, W.; Narvaez, D. *Restoring the Kinship Worldview: Indigenous Voices Introduce 28 Precepts for Rebalancing Life on Planet Earth*; North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2022.
11. McGilchrist, I. *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions, and the Unmaking of the World*; Perspectiva Press: London, UK, 2021.
12. Hill, R.; Pert, P.; Davies, J.; Robinson, C.; Walsh, F.; Faclo-Mammone, F. *Indigenous Land Management in Australia. Diversity, Scope, Extent, Success Factors and Barriers*; CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences: Clayton, Australia, 2012.
13. Kimmerer, R. Restoration and reciprocity: The contributions of traditional ecological knowledge. In *Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration: Integrating Science, Nature, and Culture*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2011; pp. 257–276.
14. Kimmerer, R.W. Restoration and Reciprocity: The Contributions of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. In *Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration*; Island Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2011.
15. Johnson, J.T.; Howitt, R.; Cajete, G.; Berkes, F.; Louis, R.P.; Kliskey, A. Weaving Indigenous and sustainability sciences to diversify our methods. *Sustain. Sci.* **2016**, *11*, 1–11. [CrossRef]

16. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Indigenous Peoples Need Recognition and Reciprocity. 2021. Available online: <https://www.undp.org/blog/indigenous-peoples-need-recognition-and-reciprocity> (accessed on 20 August 2024).
17. Fenelon, J.V. 8: Indigenous Alternatives to the Global Crises of the Modern World-System. In *Overcoming Global Inequalities*; Routledge: London, UK, 2015; pp. 143–167.
18. Bacon, J.M. Dangerous pipelines, dangerous people: Colonial ecological violence and media framing of threat in the Dakota access pipeline conflict. *Environ. Sociol.* **2020**, *6*, 143–153. [CrossRef]
19. Clifton, J.D.; Baker, J.D.; Park, C.L.; Yaden, D.B.; Clifton, A.B.; Terni, P.; Miller, J.L.; Zeng, G.; Giorgi, S.; Schwartz, H.A. Primal world beliefs. *Psychol. Assess.* **2019**, *31*, 82. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
20. Laslow, E.; Lorimer, D. *The Great Upshift: Humanity's Coming Advance Toward Peace and Harmony on the Planet*; Light on Light Press: Bronx, NY, USA, 2023.
21. Tick, E. *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation's Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*; Quest Books/The Theosophical Publishing House: Wheaton, IL, USA, 2005.
22. Akomolafe, B. Making Sanctuary: Hope, Companionship, Race and Emergence in the Anthropocene. Keynote Speech, 'Seeking Connections Across Generations' for Spiritual Directors International at the Seattle Marriott Bellevue. 15 March 2019. Available online: <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/making-sanctuary-hope-companionship-race-and-emergence-in-the-anthropocene> (accessed on 27 August 2024).
23. Yunkaporta, T. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*; Text Publishing: Melbourne, Australia, 2019.
24. Morales, R.A.; Kumar Sunuwar, D.; Veran, C. Building Global Indigenous Media Networks: Envisioning Sustainable and Regenerative Futures around Indigenous Peoples' Meaningful Representation. *Humanities* **2021**, *10*, 104. [CrossRef]
25. UNESCO. A Global Study to Strengthen Media with Indigenous Peoples' Voices. 2023. Available online: <https://www.unesco.org> (accessed on 23 October 2024).
26. Presti, D.E. Collaborative dialogue between Buddhism and science: A contribution to expanding a science of consciousness. *J. Comp. Neurol.* **2020**, *528*, 2804–2815. [CrossRef]
27. Laszlo, C.; Waddock, S.; Maheshwari, A.; Nigri, G.; Storberg-Walker, J. Quantum worldviews: How science and spirituality are converging to transform consciousness for meaningful solutions to wicked problems. *Humanist. Manag. J.* **2021**, *6*, 293–311. [CrossRef]
28. Banerjee, S.B.; Morrison, F.G.; Ressler, K.J. Genetic approaches for the study of PTSD: Advances and challenges. *Neurosci. Lett.* **2017**, *649*, 139–146. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
29. Torday, J.S. From cholesterol to consciousness. *Prog. Biophys. Mol. Biol.* **2018**, *132*, 52–56. [CrossRef]
30. Geertz, C. The Interpretation of Cultures. In *Selected Essays/Hutchinson*; 1973. Available online: [https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5781397/mod_resource/content/1/Geertz_Clifford_The_Interpretation_of_Cultures_Selected_Essays%20\(1\).pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5781397/mod_resource/content/1/Geertz_Clifford_The_Interpretation_of_Cultures_Selected_Essays%20(1).pdf) (accessed on 23 October 2024).
31. Bronfenbrenner, U. *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1979; Volume 2, pp. 139–163.
32. Narvaez, D.; Bradshaw, G.A. *The Evolved Nest: Nature's Way of Raising Children and Creating Connected Communities*; North Atlantic Books: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2023.
33. Bowen, B. The matrix of needs: Reframing Maslow's hierarchy. *Health* **2021**, *13*, 538–563. [CrossRef]
34. Miyagawa, S.; Ojima, S.; Berwick, R.C.; Okanoya, K. The integration hypothesis of human language evolution and the nature of contemporary languages. *Front. Psychol.* **2014**, *5*, 564. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
35. Dor, D. The Social Origins of Language Workshop. In *The Social Origins of Language*; Knight, C., Lewis, J., Eds.; Oxford Studies in the Evolution of Language; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2014.
36. Dor, D. *The Instruction of Imagination: Language as a Social Communication Technology*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
37. Hasse, J. The Nexus of Storytelling and Collective Learning: A Synergistic Spark for Human Emergence. *J. Big Hist.* **2023**, *6*. [CrossRef]
38. Alexander, C. *The Nature of Order: The Phenomenon of Life (Book One, Prologue)*; Center for Environmental Structure: Berkeley, CA, USA, 2002.
39. Keyes, C.L. The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *J. Health Soc. Behav.* **2002**, *43*, 207–222. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
40. Ellyatt, W. Education for human flourishing—A new conceptual framework for promoting ecosystemic wellbeing in schools. *Challenges* **2022**, *13*, 58. [CrossRef]
41. VanderWeele, T.J. On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* **2017**, *114*, 8148–8156. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
42. Willen, S.S.; Williamson, A.F.; Walsh, C.C.; Hyman, M.; Tootle, W. Rethinking flourishing: Critical insights and qualitative perspectives from the US Midwest. *SSM-Ment. Health* **2022**, *2*, 100057. [CrossRef]
43. Logan, A.C.; Berman, B.M.; Prescott, S.L. Vitality revisited: The evolving concept of flourishing and its relevance to personal and public health. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2023**, *20*, 5065. [CrossRef]
44. VanderWeele, T.J.; Case, B.W.; Chen, Y.; Cowden, R.G.; Johnson, B.; Lee, M.T.; Lomas, T.; Long, K.G. Flourishing in critical dialogue. *SSM-Ment. Health* **2023**, *3*, 100172. [CrossRef]
45. Harding, S. *Deep Ecology in the Holistic Science Programme*; Schumacher College: Totnes, UK. Available online: <https://medium.com/activate-the-future/a-conversation-with-stephan-harding-about-deep-ecology-holistic-science-8554fdb54370> (accessed on 23 October 2024).

46. Capra, F.; Luisi, P.L. *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2014.
47. Seager, W. The philosophical and scientific metaphysics of David Bohm. *Entropy* **2018**, *20*, 493. [CrossRef]
48. Merz, J.J.; Barnard, P.; Rees, W.E.; Smith, D.; Maroni, M.; Rhodes, C.J.; Dederer, J.H.; Bajaj, N.; Joy, M.K.; Wiedmann, T. World scientists' warning: The behavioural crisis driving ecological overshoot. *Sci. Prog.* **2023**, *106*, 00368504231201372. [CrossRef]
49. McGilchrist, I. Forward: Science needs to be more scientific. In *Galileo Commission Report. Beyond a Materialist Worldview Towards an Expanded Science*; Walach, H., Ed.; 2019; pp. 4–5. Available online: https://galileocommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Science-Beyond-A-Materialist-World-View-Digital_compressed.pdf (accessed on 20 August 2024).
50. Kuhn, T.S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1997; Volume 962.
51. Bohm, D. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*; Routledge: London, UK, 2005.
52. Capra, F. *The Tao of Physics*, 3rd ed.; HarperCollins Publishers: New York, NY, USA, 1992.
53. Plumwood, V. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*; Routledge: London, UK, 2002.
54. Marshall, M.; Marshall, A.; Bartlett, C. Two-eyed seeing in medicine. In *Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social*; Canadian Scholar's Press: Toronto, ON, Canada, 2015; pp. 16–24.
55. Jimmy, E.; Andreotti, V. *Towards Braiding: Working at the Intersection of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Practices*; Mu-sagetes Press: Ontario, CA, USA, 2019.
56. Kimmerer, R. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*; Milkweed Editions: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2013.
57. Henry, P. Adaptation and Developments in Western Buddhism, Socially Engaged Buddhism in the UK. The Community of Interbeing (UK), Bloomsbury Academic. 2013. Available online: <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781472552488&tocid=b-9781472552488-0001495> (accessed on 3 October 2024).
58. Four Arrows, W.T. Restoring Sanity and Remembering Spirit in Psychology: Reclaiming Our Pre-Colonial Worldview. *Rev. Gen. Psychol.* **2024**, *28*, 106–122. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.