

The Original Sin of Dualism

What if Epistemology and Ontology are the Same Thing? What if Models are Reality Organizing Reality?

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ABSTRACT: What if epistemology and ontology are not two different things? What if models are reality organizing reality? Philosophy repeatedly draws the same basic line: mind/body, mind/nature, model/reality, epistemology/ontology. These distinctions are useful for talking, but they become misleading when treated as evidence that reality is divided into fundamentally different kinds. O-Theory starts from a simpler claim: thinking is the organization of information into meaning or mental models, $M = I \cdot O$, where the organizational operator is $O = \text{DSRP-484}$. If the same organizational primitives also characterize reality, then $R = I \cdot O$. The critical point is that the O on both sides is the same. Mind is therefore not a special substance standing outside reality and attempting to represent it. Mind is one organized part of reality interacting with and modeling other organized parts of reality. More strongly, if reality is recursively composed of information-organizing systems, $R = \{M_1, M_2, \dots, M_n\}$, with each $M_i = I_i \cdot O$, then what we call “mind” is one local manifestation of a process occurring throughout reality. In that sense, $M = R$ modeling R . This reframes the classical mind/body, mind/nature, model/reality, and epistemology/ontology problems as variations of the same mistaken dualism: a useful distinction within one reality mistaken for a division between different kinds of reality. O-Theory therefore does not propose a bridge between mind and world. It proposes that the apparent divide is explanatory, while the deeper unity lies in the shared organizational structure.

KEYWORDS: O-Theory | Dualism | Mind–Body Problem | Epistemology | Ontology | DSRP-484 | Mental Models | Information Organization | Love Reality Loop

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1.0 The Original Sin

A large portion of philosophy begins with a distinction. Mind here. World there. Subject here. Object there. Knower here. Known there. And then, having divided one reality into two supposedly fundamental

kinds, we spend centuries trying to explain how they reconnect. And Science cashes in on the original sin of philosophy in a remarkable feat of collective confirmation bias.

The mind–body problem is one version. The older and deeper formulation is mind–matter: the assumption that mind belongs to one category of existence and matter to another. Mind/body, mind/nature, model/reality, and epistemology/ontology are all variations of this same original split.

These may not be different problems. They may be the same problem wearing different clothes. At its most consequential, this is the mind–matter distinction: treating the activity we call mind as fundamentally different in kind from the material reality in which it occurs. Once that distinction is granted, the knower/known and epistemology/ontology divisions follow almost automatically. Many have warned of the dangers of mind/body dualism and argued convincingly against it. Yet few offer an empirical rationale that actually dissolves the distinction rather than merely criticizing it. In DSRP terms, the problem is a distinction whose boundary has been given too much ontological weight. The dividing line between epistemology and ontology—once assumed *a priori*—may not be a boundary at all.

2.0 To Dissolve the Dualism, Start With Thinking

It may sound absurd, but to dissolve the dualism of ontology and epistemology we must start with something that—on its face—appears entirely epistemological. But is it? Much hinges on what we mean by *thinking*. In particular it hinges on how *biased* we humans are when we define it. If thinking is defined by what human thought feels like from inside a human skull, then the concept becomes anthropocentric almost immediately.

Animals become marginal. Plants become absurd. Atoms and galaxies become impossible.

But that may confuse a particular manifestation of thinking with its underlying structure. Even the word *mind* carries less ontological baggage than its later philosophical use suggests. English *mind* derives from Old English *gemynd*—memory, remembrance, thought, purpose, intention—and ultimately from the Indo-European root *men-*, “to think.” Its linguistic roots point more naturally toward an activity or capacity than toward a separate immaterial substance. The strong opposition of “mind” to “matter” is therefore not built into the word itself; it is a later conceptual loading.

A more fundamental definition is:

$$T \equiv \text{organizing information}$$

Here, T is a technical construct, not a synonym for conscious thought, deliberation, or subjective experience. Under this minimal definition, systems that ordinary language would not describe as “thinking” may nevertheless instantiate T if they organize information. That consequence is intentional. The purpose of the definition is to identify the underlying operation rather than to reserve the term for one highly elaborated human manifestation of it.

O-Theory makes this definition more precise by distinguishing the *process* of thinking from its *product*. Thinking is a process that operates on information through an organizational structure:

$$T(I; O) \rightarrow \mathbb{M}$$

where I is information, O is the organizational operator, and $\mathbb{M}$ is the resulting mental model. Thus T is process-oriented—a verb—while $\mathbb{M}$ is the resulting organized state—a noun.

This distinction matters because:

$$\mathbb{M} \neq I$$

A model is not information alone. It is organized information:

$$\mathbb{M} = I \cdot O$$

The comparatively well-established construct is I . The theoretically decisive term is O : the structure through which information becomes organized into a model. O-Theory therefore places its explanatory burden on the organizational operator:

$$O = DSRP-484$$

The crux is O .

DSRP-484 proposes four organizing patterns—Distinctions, Systems, Relationships, and Perspectives—composed of eight elements and four dynamics.

The claim is empirical, not merely philosophical. Across multiple experimental and cross-disciplinary studies, DSRP-484 has been tested as a candidate set of necessary and sufficient primitives for the organization of information in thinking. Importantly, the ontological claim developed below does not follow simply from the fact that human cognition appears to organize information through DSRP-484. That would risk anthropomorphic projection. The stronger claim rests on independent convergence: studies of physical, biological, mathematical, computational, and social systems—many conducted without knowledge of DSRP—repeatedly recover the same underlying organizational structures [1]. The argument is therefore not that reality must resemble cognition because cognition is DSRP-484, but that cognition and reality appear independently to converge on the same organizational primitives.

The important question then becomes: *Is this organization peculiar to human minds?* There is growing reason to think it is not.

3.0 Reality Is Organizing Information Too

At biological scales, organisms discriminate among conditions, organize parts into wholes, respond relationally to surroundings, and behave differently as context changes.

Plants do this.
Animals do this.
Cells do this.

And the same general principle extends much farther down.

At the quantum scale, a qubit interacting with its environment changes state in ways that encode information about that environment. Zwick, Álvarez, and Kurizki show that a dynamically controlled qubit can be used to extract and maximize information about unknown environmental parameters.

The qubit is not a little person. It does not need a human-like inner life. It participates in an information-organizing relationship. The evidentiary distinction is important. Zwick et al. [2] were not testing O-Theory or DSRP-484, and their findings are not offered as a direct test of either. Their relevance is independent: they demonstrate that a non-cognitive physical system can differentially encode information about environmental conditions such that properties of that environment can be inferred from the state of the system. Direct tests of DSRP-484 [3–12] and independent findings that converge on its predicted organizational structures are therefore different classes of evidence. The ontological argument depends on convergence across both, not on treating either as sufficient alone.

That matters. Because once information organization is no longer confined to human minds, the old boundary between “mind” and “world” begins to look less fundamental. If reality itself manifests the same organizational structure, then we can write:

$$\mathbb{R} = I \cdot O$$

And if:

$$\mathbb{M} = I \cdot O$$

with:

$$O_{\mathbb{M}} = O_{\mathbb{R}} = DSRP-484$$

then the problem changes completely.

4.0 Reality Is Made of Modelers

The stronger claim is not merely that mind is contained within reality:

$$\mathbb{M} \subset \mathbb{R}$$

That is true, but incomplete. If thinking is the organization of information,

$$\mathbb{M} = I \cdot O$$

and if the same organizational process is operating at every scale of reality, then reality is not composed of one kind of thing called “matter” with occasional special things called “minds” appearing inside it.

Reality is recursively composed of information-organizing systems. This is the critical shift. Reality is not merely a container that happens to contain some modelers. Reality is constituted by modelers at every scale.

Atoms interact with local environments.
Molecules interact with local environments.
Cells interact with local environments.
Organisms interact with local environments.
Humans interact with local environments.
Collectives interact with local environments.

At each scale, a system receives information, organizes it, and changes state or behavior as a consequence. Each local system can therefore be represented as:

$$\mathbb{M}_i = I_i \cdot O$$

where:

$$O = DSRP-484$$

and reality can be understood structurally as nested and interacting instances of this same process:

$$\mathbb{R} = \{\mathbb{M}_1, \mathbb{M}_2, \dots, \mathbb{M}_n\}$$

The environment of any particular $\mathbb{M}_i$ is itself composed of other $\mathbb{M}$'s.

So reality is not something fundamentally different from the modeler. *Reality is made entirely of modelers*. Here, “modeler” does not imply consciousness, subjective experience, intention, or human-like representation. Nor does every physical state transition qualify as modeling. Minimally, a modeler must differentially register information about its environment, embody those differences in its own state, and have those state differences constrain its subsequent interaction with that environment. Mere physical change is therefore insufficient. Modeling requires that differences in the environment become organized differences in the system that subsequently matter to what the system does. Panpsychism does not follow from this claim. Consciousness may be a property of some highly elaborated modelers, but it is not required by the definition.

On this account, there is no point at which nonmental matter suddenly crosses a metaphysical boundary and becomes mind. There are differences of scale, complexity, recursion, memory, and capacity, but not necessarily a change in the underlying organizational kind.

At every scale, little organized systems are interacting with, differentiating, relating to, and responding to environments made of other organized systems. That means the knower/known distinction is not a distinction between two different kinds of reality. It is a perspectival distinction within one recursively organized reality.

The consequence is:

$$\boxed{\mathbb{M} = \mathbb{R} \text{ modeling } \mathbb{R}}$$

Not because a human mind somehow represents the whole universe, but because every act of modeling is one part of reality organizing information about another part of reality. The universe is not divided into model and modeled. It is modelers within modelers, interacting through the same organizational grammar.

Reality is modelers all the way down—and all the way up.

5.0 O-Theory Appears Dualist—But Is Not

At first glance, O-Theory appears to repeat the very dualism being criticized.

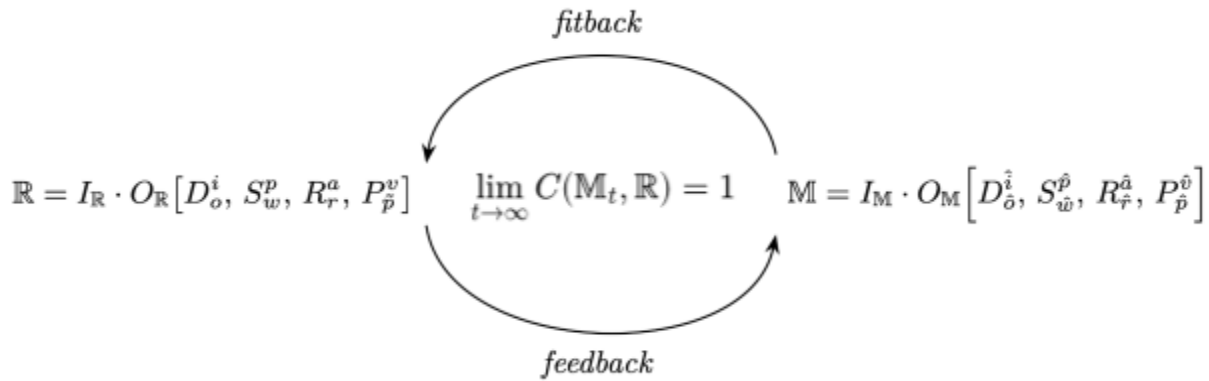


Figure 1. The Love–Reality Loop (LRL). The LRL integrates the Law of Structural Cognition, $\mathbb{M} = I \cdot O$ the Law of Structural Reality, $\mathbb{R} = I \cdot O$ and the Law of Oneness, $\lim_{t \rightarrow \infty} C(\mathbb{M}_t, \mathbb{R}) = 1$ [13–17], where $C(\mathbb{M}_t, \mathbb{R})$ denotes normalized correspondence between the $I \cdot O$ structure of the mental model at time t and the $I \cdot O$ structure of reality. The limit expresses increasing structural alignment between model and reality over time. Both mind $\mathbb{M}$ and reality $\mathbb{R}$ organize information through the same structural code, $I \cdot O_{\text{DSRP}}$. The loop evolves through continuous **feedback**—reality informing and updating mental models, $\mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{M}$ —and **fitback**—mental models being projected, tested, and fitted against reality, $\mathbb{M} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$. Together, these reciprocal processes describe a dynamic mechanism for learning, adaptation, and increasing structural correspondence between mind and reality [12,18].

Formally, $C(\mathbb{M}_t, \mathbb{R}) \in [0, 1]$ is a normalized correspondence function comparing the relevant information I and organizational structure O represented in $\mathbb{M}_t$ with those in $\mathbb{R}$. A value approaching 1 represents increasing correspondence between their $I \cdot O$ structures. The specific empirical operationalization of C may vary with the domain and measurement problem; the Law of Oneness specifies the direction of fit rather than requiring that every domain use the same correspondence metric.

The Love–Reality Loop places mind on one side:

$$\mathbb{M} = I_{\mathbb{M}} \cdot O_{\mathbb{M}}$$

and reality on the other:

$$\mathbb{R} = I_{\mathbb{R}} \cdot O_{\mathbb{R}}$$

with feedback and fitback operating between them.

That representation is intentional. O-Theory must explain itself in a world whose language, philosophy, and science already distinguish mind from reality, epistemology from ontology, and knower from known.

But the apparent dualism is explanatory scaffolding.

The actual crux of O-Theory is not $\mathbb{M}$ on one side and $\mathbb{R}$ on the other. This is also where the apparent mind–matter dualism dissolves. If the same O organizes what we call mind and what we call material reality, then their apparent difference is not a difference in the fundamental grammar of organization. It is all O —all the way down and all the way up.

Because:

$$O_{\mathbb{M}} = O_{\mathbb{R}} = O_{\text{DSRP-484}}$$

The same organizational primitives operate on both sides of the apparent divide. This is not a semantic equivalence produced by defining both domains broadly enough to make them match. The claim is falsifiable. If some form of organization in cognition or reality requires structural primitives outside DSRP-484, or if DSRP-484 fails to account for an observed organizational structure, then the universality claim fails. The force of the claim therefore depends on empirical sufficiency across independent domains, not on definitional convenience [19].

The claim can therefore be tested against established organizational formalisms rather than only against phenomena described in O-Theory's own vocabulary. For example, network theory distinguishes nodes, organizes nodes into graphs and subgraphs, specifies relationships as edges, and generates descriptions whose meaning depends upon the node, scale, boundary, or reference frame from which the network is analyzed [20]. Comparable mappings have been tested across other independently developed representational systems [21,22]. The empirical question is not whether these systems can be redescribed using DSRP-484 after the fact, but whether any necessary organizational operation remains that cannot be generated by it [23].

And the deeper implication is more important still. Reality is not an undifferentiated thing called $\mathbb{R}$ sitting opposite special entities called minds. Reality is recursively composed of information-organizing systems:

$$\mathbb{R} = \{\mathbb{M}_1, \mathbb{M}_2, \dots, \mathbb{M}_n\}$$

where each:

$$\mathbb{M}_i = I_i \cdot O$$

Atoms, molecules, cells, organisms, people, collectives, and larger systems are nested organizations interacting with environments themselves composed of other organized systems.

Each little $\mathbb{M}$ organizes information about an environment made of other $\mathbb{M}$ s.

All use the same O . Thus reality is not one thing being modeled by something fundamentally different from it. Reality is made of organizing systems modeling, affecting, and responding to other organizing systems.

The Love–Reality Loop therefore does not ultimately describe a bridge between two worlds. It describes the recursive dynamics of one world:

$$\boxed{\mathbb{M} = \mathbb{R} \text{ modeling } \mathbb{R}}$$

The apparent duality is in the picture. The unity is in the O .

6.0 Epistemology Is Ontology Doing Something

Epistemology is ontology doing something. Mind is matter organized in a particular way doing something. Mind is nature modeling nature. The epistemology/ontology split is therefore downstream of the older mind–matter split. Once mind is placed in a category separate from matter, knowing is easily placed in a category separate from being. Remove the first division and the second becomes much harder to sustain.

The epistemology/ontology distinction is perhaps the clearest example. Ontology asks what reality is. Epistemology asks how reality is known. But knowing is itself something that happens in reality.

A knower is an organized part of reality. The information available to the knower is part of reality. The process by which that information is organized is part of reality. The resulting model is part of reality.

So epistemology is not a separate domain standing across from ontology. It is an ontological process. This position is related to, but distinct from, panpsychism, neutral monism, and process philosophy. O-Theory does not require that all matter possess consciousness or experience, nor does it posit a third substance underlying mind and matter. Its narrower claim is organizational: what we call mind and what we call reality instantiate the same generative organizational code. This is therefore not merely a philosophical claim. It is a materialist scientific claim grounded in converging empirical evidence.

Formally:

$$E \subset \mathbb{R}$$

But the stronger claim follows from the structure of reality itself.

If:

$$\mathbb{R} = \{\mathbb{M}_1, \mathbb{M}_2, \dots, \mathbb{M}_n\}$$

and:

$$\mathbb{M}_i = I_i \cdot O$$

then knowing occurs whenever one organized part of reality organizes information about another part of reality.

Therefore:

$$E = \mathbb{R} \text{ organizing information about } \mathbb{R}$$

The same is true of mind. Mind is not something that must be reconciled with nature. Mind is nature doing something. Specifically:

$$\mathbb{M} = \mathbb{R} \text{ modeling } \mathbb{R}$$

This is why the epistemology/ontology distinction ultimately breaks down. Not because the two sides become similar. Not because one gradually approaches the other. But because they were never two fundamentally different kinds in the first place. Epistemology is what ontology looks like when one part of reality is organizing information about another part.

Mind is what reality looks like when one part of it is modeling another. The distinction remains useful locally. The dualism does not.

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