

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 The Contribution

This paper introduces Integral Motivation Theory (IMT) as a cross-domain theoretical framework that proposes three primitives — Value, Motivation, and Purpose (the VMP triad) — as irreducible, integrative constituents of human experience and cultural formation. IMT is not a grand theory of everything, nor a prescriptive account of which values, motivations, or purposes are correct. It is, in the specific philosophical sense elaborated below, a *metatheory*: a second-order framework concerned with the conditions under which any particular configuration of value, motivation, and purpose becomes culturally operative, individually inhabited, and collectively reproduced. Its ambition is diagnostic and generative rather than totalising.

The primary theoretical contribution is twofold. First, IMT proposes that Value, Motivation, and Purpose are genuinely irreducible to one another and to any more fundamental psychological or sociological category, while being dynamically interdependent in lived experience. This irreducibility, defended in Section 2, is what makes them primitives in the technical sense: the conceptual bedrock from which more complex accounts of motivation and cultural formation must be built rather than derived. Second, IMT extends the motivational continuum developed by Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) beyond its current boundary — which we term the *self-referential limit* — to account for a form of motivation we call *telic resonance*: the pull exerted on consciousness by perceived intrinsic value that presents itself as independent of the valuing subject. This extension is proposed not as a replacement of SDT but as a complement to it, one that addresses a specific explanatory gap identified in the literature (Martela and Steger, 2016; Sheldon, 2014).

The framework has direct implications for the study of cultural change, collective meaning-making, and what has been increasingly termed the *metacrisis* — the convergence of ecological, social, and meaning-making failures in contemporary culture (Rowson, 2021; Freinacht, 2017). These implications are developed in Sections 5 and 6. The present paper, however, does not claim to resolve the metacrisis, nor does it propose a programme for cultural transformation. Its more modest purpose is to establish IMT as a theoretically defensible framework with clear empirical implications and a coherent relationship to existing literature. A companion paper develops the applied and praxis dimensions of the framework in full.

1.2 The Problem: A Gap in the Motivational Literature

Motivation research has made enormous strides in the past four decades. Self-Determination Theory, the most comprehensive and empirically supported framework in the field, has demonstrated across thousands of studies that the quality — not merely the quantity — of motivation matters profoundly for wellbeing, performance, creativity, and relational health (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Its core distinction between autonomous and controlled motivation, and the further taxonomy of motivational styles across its six mini-theories, has proved generative across domains from education and healthcare to organisational behaviour and sport.

Yet a specific and consequential gap remains. Even at the intrinsic end of SDT's motivational continuum — where motivation is most autonomous, most self-determined, and most associated with flourishing — the theoretical framework remains what we will call *self-referential*. Intrinsic motivation in SDT's account is fundamentally motivation that originates within and returns to the self-system: an activity is intrinsically

motivated when it is pursued for its inherent satisfaction, when it expresses one's values and identity, when it meets one's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The self is always both the origin and the destination of the motivational circuit.

This self-referential structure is not a flaw in SDT. It reflects a principled commitment to empirical tractability and a coherent philosophical position. But it produces a specific explanatory difficulty when confronted with a well-documented class of human experience: motivation that appears to originate not within the self but in response to the perceived worth of something outside it. Viktor Frankl described this phenomenon from within clinical experience: the person who is drawn to dedicate themselves to a cause, a truth, or a person experiences their motivation as a response to something that calls them, not as an expression of something they contain (Frankl, 1959). Abraham Maslow's account of B-values — Being-values such as truth, goodness, and beauty — and of peak experiences as moments of direct encounter with these values, pointed toward the same territory (Maslow, 1971). Iris Murdoch, from within moral philosophy, argued that the experience of moral attention is not fundamentally the experience of choosing or preferring but of *perceiving* — of a patient, loving regard directed at something whose worth is apprehended rather than conferred (Murdoch, 1970).

These accounts are not marginal. They appear across contemplative traditions, philosophical lineages, and clinical observations with sufficient consistency to constitute what Martela and Steger (2016) identify as the distinctively *self-transcendent* dimension of meaning in life — a dimension that SDT's current framework can acknowledge but cannot fully theorise without straining its conceptual architecture. IMT proposes to theorise it directly, by introducing telic value as a third category of value alongside subjective valuation and normative value, and by extending the motivational continuum to include orientations responsive to telic value rather than self-system satisfaction alone.

1.3 A Metatheory, Not a Totalising Narrative

Before proceeding, a conceptual clarification is necessary, both because it defines the epistemic status of IMT and because it addresses a potential misreading that any framework with broad scope is liable to attract: the charge of constructing a totalising narrative.

The prefix *meta* carries multiple senses in contemporary academic discourse, and the conflation of these senses generates significant confusion. In its most common popular usage, *meta* has drifted toward meaning simply *large-scale* or *comprehensive* — a mega in disguise. In its philosophically precise usage, however, *meta* denotes a *second-order* relationship: a meta-level discourse is one that takes as its object not the world directly but the conditions, structures, or frameworks through which the world is apprehended.

Metamathematics is not very large mathematics; it is mathematics about the conditions of possibility of mathematical systems. A metatheory is not a very grand theory; it is a theory about the structure within which other theories operate.

Roy Bhaskar's deployment of the prefix in Critical Realism is exemplary here. Bhaskar's *metaReality* is not a claim about the totality of reality but an account of the ontological conditions — depth, stratification, emergence — that any adequate theory of reality must presuppose (Bhaskar, 2002). Similarly, Bhaskar distinguishes consistently between a metatheory, which maps the terrain on which first-order theoretical disputes are conducted, and a grand or totalising theory, which claims to settle those disputes from a comprehensive vantage point. A metatheory enables first-order inquiry; a totalising narrative forecloses it.

This distinction is equally central to the metamodernist sensibility articulated by Freinacht (2017) and Vermeulen and Van den Akker (2010). Metamodernism is not a superseding grand narrative that replaces modernism and postmodernism with a third, larger position. It is a second-order attentiveness to the conditions under which modern sincerity and postmodern irony each arise — an oscillation that holds both without being reducible to either. As Freinacht puts it, the metamodern move is to become conscious of the metanarrative structures that generate both modern and postmodern content, not to produce a new content-

level story. Jonathan Rowson, working within a similar framework, distinguishes the *metacrisis* from a crisis that is merely large-scale or multidimensional. The metacrisis is not the sum of individual crises but a crisis at the level of the meaning-making structures through which crises are perceived, interpreted, and — crucially — motivated to address (Rowson, 2021). It is a crisis of the meta-level.

IMT operates precisely at this level. It does not prescribe which values are correct, which motivational orientations are good, or which purposes are worth pursuing. It proposes a framework for understanding how any configuration of value, motivation, and purpose becomes operative — how it is transmitted, inhabited, reinforced, and potentially recalibrated. A grammar does not prescribe which sentences should be spoken; it describes the generative structure that makes sentences possible at all. Chomsky's insight was that an infinite variety of sentences arises from a finite set of generative rules — that the grammar itself is not a sentence (Chomsky, 1965). IMT's VMP triad operates analogously: it is a generative grammar of motivation and cultural formation, not a prescription for any particular motivational content. The same framework that diagnoses an extrinsic VMP configuration in neoliberal economics applies equally to an intrinsic configuration in an indigenous cosmovision — it does not determine which is preferable in advance of analysis; it provides the tools to distinguish and compare them.

This metatheoretical status is what distinguishes IMT from the grand narratives Lyotard identified as characteristic of modernity — comprehensive stories of Progress, Reason, or Liberation that claimed universal validity and silenced alternative accounts (Lyotard, 1979). IMT makes no such claim. It does not tell a story about where humanity is going or what values should prevail. It proposes a set of structural concepts for understanding how any story about these things becomes motivationally operative. We acknowledge, as Lyotard would insist, that no framework fully escapes the problem of its own situatedness — IMT emerges from specific intellectual traditions and carries their assumptions. We return to this reflexivity in Section 6. For now, it is sufficient to note that the charge of constructing a totalising narrative applies to frameworks that claim first-order universality about content; it does not apply, at least not in the same way, to frameworks that claim second-order structural relevance — which is what IMT claims.

Several postmodern thinkers have themselves engaged seriously with questions of value, ethics, and purpose, such as Levinas's account of ethical obligation as arising from the encounter with the irreducible alterity of the Other (Levinas, 1969), Derrida's late engagement with unconditional hospitality and messianic justice (Derrida, 1994), and Bauman's argument that postmodernity returns ethics to its pre-sociological, face-to-face origins rather than abolishing it (Bauman, 1993) are all serious contributions to the territory IMT addresses. IMT's engagement with this literature is not one of dismissal but of complementarity: these accounts address the ethical *content* of the encounter with value; IMT addresses the motivational *architecture* through which such encounters become sustained cultural orientations rather than isolated moments of moral clarity.

1.4 Scope and Structure of the Paper

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 defines the three primitives of the VMP triad — Value, Motivation, and Purpose — with precision, situates each within existing philosophical and psychological literature, and defends their status as genuinely irreducible and integrative. Section 3 situates IMT within the motivational literature, with particular attention to a full engagement with all six mini-theories of SDT, and articulates the specific gap that IMT addresses. Section 4 addresses the neuroscientific framing deployed in earlier versions of this framework, revising it in light of contestation in the hemispheric lateralisation literature and recasting the relevant distinction in terms of better-supported cognitive science. Section 5 presents cross-cultural evidence for the VMP triad as a diagnostic lens, drawing on existing research from cross-cultural psychology, values theory, and anthropology. Section 6 introduces IMT as a formal theoretical proposal, specifies its relationship to SDT, and articulates testable hypotheses. Section 7 addresses implications and future research directions, noting honestly the current limitations of the framework's empirical base and proposing the research agenda needed to develop it further.

Section 2: Defining the Primitives — Value, Motivation, and Purpose

2.1 On the Concept of a Primitive

Before defining each component of the VMP triad, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by calling them *primitives*. In mathematics and formal logic, a primitive is an undefined term — a concept accepted as foundational without being derived from more basic concepts within the system. Euclidean geometry does not define *point* or *line* in terms of prior concepts; it begins with them and builds everything else from them. In theoretical frameworks, a primitive is not undefined but rather *irreducible*: it cannot be decomposed into more fundamental categories within the domain the theory addresses without losing explanatory power. A claim that something is a primitive is therefore also a claim about what it is *not*: it is not an emergent property of something more basic, not a composite of simpler elements, and not a synonym for an adjacent concept.

IMT's claim is that Value, Motivation, and Purpose are primitives in this sense within the domain of human motivational psychology and cultural formation. This is a substantive claim that can be contested, and we engage with the main objections to each below. The positive case for treating them as primitives rests on three criteria, each of which is applied to all three components: logical necessity (removing any one causes the explanatory structure to collapse), phenomenological accessibility (each can be directly verified in first-person experience without theoretical mediation), and cross-domain convergence (independent intellectual traditions — philosophy, psychology, anthropology, contemplative practice — have arrived at structurally similar concepts without direct mutual influence).

We note at the outset that the three primitives are analytically distinguishable but phenomenologically inseparable. In lived experience, they present as an integrated system — a unified motivational orientation rather than three discrete elements operating in sequence. The analytical separation is a theoretical tool, not a claim about how they are actually experienced. This parallels the way the RGB colour model analytically separates red, green, and blue channels that in visual experience present as unified colour. The model's value lies precisely in its ability to distinguish what experience presents as unified, thereby making the structure of that unity available for analysis and, where necessary, recalibration.

2.2 Value

2.2.1 Definition

Value, as deployed in IMT, refers to the quality by which something presents itself as *mattering* — as worthy of attention, care, or action. This definition is deliberately broad because it must accommodate the full range of ways in which things can matter: aesthetically, morally, relationally, intellectually, ecologically. What unifies these diverse forms of mattering is a common structural feature: in each case, something presents itself not merely as a fact about the world but as a fact that calls for a response. Value, in this sense, is not a property we assign to things after dispassionate observation but a dimension of our encounter with things — part of what it is to perceive them at all.

IMT distinguishes three categories of value that must be kept analytically separate if the framework's claims are to be precise:

Subjective valuation refers to personal preference — the valuing that expresses an individual's desires, tastes, and contingent emotional responses. That I find a particular landscape beautiful, that I prefer tea to coffee, that I am drawn to a certain style of music: these are subjective valuations. They are real and motivationally significant but are relative to the valuing subject and do not survive the test of generalisation. Subjective valuation is what most social-scientific accounts of value address and what hedonic wellbeing research typically measures.

Normative value refers to values constituted by social, moral, or institutional frameworks — what one *ought* to do or care about by virtue of membership in a community, adherence to a moral code, or participation in a practice. Normative values are intersubjective rather than merely subjective: they claim validity beyond the individual even if they fall short of universal validity. They are the domain of moral philosophy in its most common contemporary guise — the analysis of duties, rights, virtues, and the principles of justice — and of Schwartz's (1992) empirically validated account of basic human values as motivational goals that serve as guiding principles in life.

Telic value is IMT's distinctive category and requires the most careful treatment. Telic value refers to value that presents itself as inherent in the nature of things — as a feature of reality that is perceived rather than conferred.

The claim that telic value is real is ontological in its deepest register. IMT does not derive this claim from phenomenological observation alone — phenomenology can describe the structure of the encounter with telic value but cannot, within its own method, establish its independent reality. Rather, IMT takes the ontological reality of telic value as a working postulate — one that is supported by the consistency and cross-cultural breadth of the phenomenological evidence, but that goes beyond what phenomenology alone can establish. The minimal realism position adopted in this paper holds that this postulate is required to account for a well-documented class of motivational phenomena that phenomenological description alone leaves unexplained

2.2.2 Philosophical Precedents and Support

The concept of telic value has significant philosophical precedent, though it has not previously been integrated into a motivational framework with the precision IMT attempts.

Iris Murdoch's moral philosophy is the closest and most direct antecedent. In *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), Murdoch argued against the prevailing existentialist and utilitarian assumption that the moral agent is fundamentally a will — an entity that chooses values freely and then acts on those choices. In its place, she proposed that moral life is fundamentally a matter of *vision*: of learning to perceive the world accurately, and specifically to perceive the reality of other persons and things in their particularity and worth. Moral progress, on Murdoch's account, is not primarily progress in decision-making but progress in attention — the cultivation of "a patient, loving regard directed upon a person, a thing, a situation" (Murdoch, 1970, p. 34). The Good, for Murdoch, is not a principle we apply but a reality we approach asymptotically through this disciplined attention. Value, in her account, is something the moral agent discovers through a specific quality of perception rather than something they project onto a value-neutral world.

Max Scheler's formal axiology, developed in *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* (1913/1973), provides a phenomenological account of value as a *material a priori* — a domain of objective qualities that are perceived through a specific emotional mode of intuition (Wertfühlen, or value-feeling) that is irreducible to preference, calculation, or normative inference. Scheler's hierarchy of values — from sensory values through vital, spiritual, and sacred values — is less important for IMT's purposes than his core structural insight: that value is encountered in experience with the same directness and independence from subjective constitution as perceptual qualities like colour or sound, and that our emotional responses to value are not projections onto a neutral world but *responses to* a value-laden one.

Hartmut Rosa's sociological account of *resonance* (2019) provides a contemporary and empirically grounded parallel. Rosa defines resonance not as a pleasant subjective feeling but as a specific mode of relationship between self and world characterised by mutual transformation — a relationship in which both the subject and the object of attention are genuinely affected and altered. Resonance, for Rosa, is the opposite of alienation (his primary diagnostic concept for the pathology of modern accelerated societies),

and it requires that the world present itself as *responsive* — as having something of its own to offer, something that the subject cannot fully control or predict. Rosa explicitly distinguishes resonance from mere echo or projection: genuine resonance involves an encounter with something real, not a reflection of the subject's own desires back to them. This distinction maps directly onto IMT's distinction between subjective valuation (which can be self-amplifying, like echo) and telic value (which presents itself as genuinely other, like resonance in Rosa's sense).

2.2.3 Objections and Responses

The most significant objection to IMT's treatment of telic value is the challenge from anti-realist or constructivist positions in metaethics: the claim that all value is ultimately subjective or intersubjective, that there is no value independent of valuing subjects, and that the concept of telic value therefore smuggles in an undefended metaphysical commitment.

IMT does not bracket this objection by retreating to a purely phenomenological account — as though the reality of telic value were secondary to or derivative of its phenomenological presentation. On the contrary: IMT's position is that telic value is ontologically prior to its perception. It would be real even if no consciousness apprehended it. The phenomenological evidence — the consistent cross-cultural report of experiences that present themselves as encounters with something of genuinely independent worth — is evidence for this ontological claim, not a substitute for it. The Synaxis, properly calibrated, apprehends what is real. A miscalibrated Synaxis, distorted by extrinsic VMP configurations, fails to perceive accurately — but the failure is in the perceiving faculty, not in the reality being perceived.

Three considerations narrow the scope of the anti-realist objection without claiming to resolve it definitively. First, the minimal realism position IMT adopts does not require full non-naturalist Platonism. It requires only that evaluative experience is responsive to features of the world that genuinely constrain what counts as a correct evaluation — a position compatible with a range of metaethical views including Cornell Realism, quasi-realism, and Taylor's account of strong evaluation. Second, the functional distinctiveness of telic resonance — the fact that motivation responsive to perceived telic value operates differently from motivation responsive to preference or obligation — is itself evidence that telic value is tracking something real rather than merely projecting subjective states. If telic value were purely projected, we would expect no systematic functional difference between it and other forms of valuing. The consistent finding that it produces distinct motivational and wellbeing consequences suggests it is responsive to something genuinely other. Third, the cross-cultural consistency of telic value experiences — their appearance across traditions with no direct historical contact, in structurally convergent forms — is more parsimoniously explained by positing a shared real object of perception than by positing independent cultural constructions that happen to converge on identical phenomenological structures.

IMT therefore adopts minimal realism about telic value as a theoretically necessary working postulate — not because the metaphysical debate is settled, but because the alternative, a purely constructivist account, cannot adequately theorise the class of motivational phenomena IMT addresses. The motivational theory and the ontological postulate are not separable: the claim that some motivational orientations are more adequate to reality than others — that an intrinsic VMP configuration perceives more accurately than an extrinsic one — depends on there being a reality to be more or less adequate to.

This objection has genuine force and cannot be dismissed. The moral realism debate is unresolved in contemporary philosophy, and IMT does not claim to resolve it. However, three responses narrow the scope of the objection considerably.

Second, IMT's position is compatible with a range of metaethical views short of full-blown non-naturalist moral realism. It requires only what philosophers call *minimal realism* about value: the claim that evaluative discourse is not merely expressive of subjective states but is responsive to features of the world that constrain what counts as a correct evaluation. This minimal position is compatible with Cornell Realism

(Boyd, 1988; Brink, 1989), with quasi-realism (Blackburn, 1993), and with Charles Taylor's account of *strong evaluation* — the claim that some evaluations concern goods that are worth caring about independently of whether we in fact care about them (Taylor, 1989). It does not require the full non-naturalist Platonism of Moore or the robust moral realism of Enoch (2011), though IMT is compatible with those positions.

Third, there is a pragmatic argument for treating telic value as a genuine category even within a broadly constructivist framework. If the functional distinction between motivation responsive to perceived intrinsic value and motivation responsive to subjective preference is real — if it produces different behaviours, different levels of wellbeing, and different cultural outcomes, as the evidence reviewed in Section 5 suggests — then the distinction must be theorised, regardless of its ultimate metaethical status. Eliminating the concept of telic value from the framework on metaethical grounds would produce a framework that cannot account for a well-documented class of motivational phenomena. The theoretical cost of that elimination is higher than the theoretical cost of the minimal realist commitment.

We therefore proceed with telic value as a working concept, understood as referring to value that presents itself phenomenologically as independent of the valuing subject and that produces motivational responses structurally distinct from those produced by subjective valuation or normative obligation. Whether this phenomenological presentation accurately tracks an independent reality is a question we leave open.

2.3 Motivation

2.3.1 Definition

Motivation, as deployed in IMT, refers to the energetic and directional dimension of experience — the dimension in which consciousness is not merely aware of something but is *moved in relation to it*. This definition is deliberately relational: motivation in IMT is not a property of the individual considered in isolation but a property of the relationship between an individual's awareness and the field of value within which they find themselves. Motivation is the dynamic expression of that relationship — what happens when consciousness encounters something that matters.

This relational definition is IMT's primary departure from the dominant psychological tradition, which typically treats motivation as a property of the individual: a drive, a need, a goal-state, a self-regulation process. These accounts are not wrong — they accurately describe the intra-psychic machinery of motivation. But they are incomplete because they systematically abstract the individual from the relational context within which motivation arises. IMT proposes that this abstraction is not merely a simplification but a distortion: motivation cannot be fully understood without reference to the value field from which it draws its energy and direction.

IMT distinguishes motivation along two axes: *orientation* (intrinsic versus extrinsic) and *intensity* (high versus low). These axes interact to produce the full spectrum of motivational experience, from the pressured urgency of high-intensity extrinsic motivation — the driven quality of someone operating under significant external pressure — to the quiet, sustained draw of low-intensity intrinsic motivation — the quality of someone engaged in work they find deeply meaningful but are not rushing. This two-dimensional account is more nuanced than a simple intrinsic/extrinsic binary and allows IMT to describe motivational configurations that a linear continuum model cannot capture.

2.3.2 Relationship to Self-Determination Theory

SDT's six mini-theories collectively constitute the most comprehensive and empirically supported framework for understanding motivation currently available. IMT's relationship to SDT must be stated precisely, because both the similarities and the differences matter.

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), the sub-theory of SDT concerned with the internalisation of extrinsic motivation, is the primary point of engagement. OIT describes a continuum from external regulation (acting to obtain rewards or avoid punishments) through introjected regulation (acting from internalised pressure or guilt), identified regulation (acting because the activity is personally valued), and integrated regulation (acting from full alignment with one's values and sense of self), to intrinsic motivation (acting for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself). This continuum represents a genuine and important account of how motivation evolves as activities become more fully owned by the agent.

IMT accepts the descriptive accuracy of this continuum for the range it covers. Its extension begins at the point where OIT ends. The most intrinsic end of OIT's continuum — intrinsic motivation and integrated regulation — shares a feature: in both cases, the ultimate reference point is the self. Intrinsic motivation in OIT is motivation whose reward is the inherent satisfaction experienced by the self; integrated regulation is regulation that is fully congruent with the self's values and identity. The self is the measure. IMT proposes that this self-referential structure, while capturing genuine and important motivational phenomena, does not capture the full range of human motivational experience. It does not adequately account for the experience of being called by something beyond the self — of motivation that is experienced as a response to the perceived worth of something genuinely independent of the self-system.

Goal Contents Theory (GCT), another of SDT's mini-theories, is also directly relevant. GCT distinguishes between intrinsic goal contents — goals related to personal growth, relationships, and community contribution — and extrinsic goal contents — goals related to wealth, fame, and image. Research using GCT has consistently found that the pursuit of intrinsic goals is associated with higher wellbeing and the pursuit of extrinsic goals with lower wellbeing and higher anxiety (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996). IMT's intrinsic/extrinsic axis maps onto this distinction but extends it from the domain of goal content to the domain of the motivational orientation itself — the question is not only what the goal is but what quality of motivation is energising its pursuit.

Causality Orientations Theory (COT), which describes individual differences in the degree to which people are autonomy-oriented, control-oriented, or impersonally oriented in their motivational style, is relevant to IMT's account of how individuals differ in their capacity for telic resonance. IMT predicts that autonomy-oriented individuals, as described by COT, will be more accessible to telic resonance than control-oriented individuals, because the openness to internal experience and self-direction that characterises autonomy orientation is a precondition for the receptive attention that telic value requires. This is a testable hypothesis that connects IMT to existing SDT measurement instruments.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), which posits that the satisfaction of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is the proximal mechanism through which motivation affects wellbeing, is the sub-theory furthest from IMT's concerns and the one the original version of this framework was unfairly characterised as IMT's sole point of engagement. BPNT operates at the level of psychological need-satisfaction; IMT operates at the level of value-responsiveness. These are different levels of analysis, and IMT's critique — that a needs-satisfaction framework cannot account for self-transcendent motivation — applies to the overall architecture of SDT only insofar as BPNT is treated as definitional of SDT's entire account of what drives intrinsic motivation. SDT scholars would rightly contest this treatment. The more precise claim is that no current SDT sub-theory provides an adequate theoretical account of motivation whose energetic source is perceived telic value rather than need-satisfaction, self-concordance, or inherent enjoyment. This is the gap IMT addresses.

2.3.3 The Self-Referential Limit and Telic Resonance

The self-referential limit of SDT's intrinsic motivation has been noted, with varying degrees of explicitness, by several scholars working within and adjacent to the SDT tradition. Martela and Steger (2016), in their analysis of meaning in life through the lens of SDT, identify "self-transcendence" as a candidate fourth need — or alternatively, as a distinct form of motivation — whose theoretical status within SDT remains unsettled. They note that the experience of contributing to something beyond oneself, of mattering in a way that exceeds personal need-satisfaction, is a robust predictor of meaning and wellbeing that SDT's current architecture does not fully account for. Sheldon's (2014) work on "self-concordance" — the degree to which goals align with one's authentic self — approaches the same territory from a different direction, noting that some experiences of self-concordance appear to involve a relationship with something genuinely beyond the self rather than merely an expression of deep self-alignment.

IMT theorises this territory directly through the concept of *telic resonance*: a motivational state characterised by experienced alignment between the individual's awareness and a field of perceived telic value. Telic resonance is distinguished from other forms of intrinsic motivation by three features. First, its energetic source is experienced as external to the self-system — as something encountered rather than generated. Second, it is associated with what Frankl (1959) called self-transcendence: the capacity to orient toward something beyond oneself as the primary reference point for action. Third, it is characteristically associated with a willingness to undergo what IMT terms *kenotic cost* — the relinquishment of self-protective, comfort-seeking, or accumulative orientations in service of the perceived value. This last feature is what distinguishes telic resonance from the more comfortable forms of intrinsic motivation and explains why it is associated with the most demanding forms of human engagement: artistic sacrifice, moral courage, contemplative practice, sustained ecological care.

Rosa's (2019) sociological concept of resonance, introduced above in relation to value, maps onto this motivational category with striking precision. For Rosa, resonance as a mode of world-relationship is characterised by precisely the features IMT attributes to telic resonance: genuine responsiveness to something real and independent, mutual transformation of self and world, and a quality of being called or addressed by what one encounters. Rosa's empirical and theoretical work on the systematic suppression of resonance in accelerating modern societies — their tendency to produce *mute* rather than *responsive* relationships between self and world — provides independent social-scientific support for IMT's diagnostic claim that contemporary cultural configurations systematically undermine telic resonance.

2.3.4 The Intrinsic/Extrinsic Axis and the Warming Model

IMT proposes that the orientation of motivation — whether primarily responsive to telic value (intrinsic) or primarily driven by external reward, social pressure, or internal compulsion (extrinsic) — has systematic consequences beyond the individual act. Specifically, IMT proposes that sustained motivational orientations actively reshape the value configurations of the individuals and cultures that enact them. We term this the *warming model*: repeated extrinsic motivational patterns warm — that is, strengthen and make more salient — extrinsic values; repeated intrinsic motivational patterns warm intrinsic values.

This proposal is grounded in several converging bodies of evidence. Research on value activation (Maio, Pakizch, Cheung, and Rees, 2009) demonstrates that values can be contextually activated — made more accessible and more influential in guiding behaviour — through exposure to value-congruent communications and environments. Research on habit formation (Wood and Neal, 2007) demonstrates that repeated behaviour in stable contexts progressively reduces the role of conscious deliberation, producing stable dispositional orientations that operate below the level of explicit decision-making. Research on the relationship between materialist values and wellbeing (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kasser, 2002) demonstrates that cultures and individuals embedded in environments that systematically activate extrinsic values show reduced wellbeing, reduced pro-social behaviour, and reduced capacity for the kinds of relational engagement associated with intrinsic motivation — precisely the pattern the warming model predicts.

The warming model has significant implications for cultural formation: it implies that cultural environments are not neutral containers for individual motivation but active co-producers of motivational orientation. This is the mechanism through which IMT connects individual motivational psychology to cultural-level analysis — a connection that is essential for the framework's application to the study of collective meaning-making and cultural change.

2.4 Purpose

2.4.1 Definition

Purpose, as deployed in IMT, refers to the directional dimension of experience — the dimension in which action is oriented toward something beyond its immediate context. This definition encompasses but is not reducible to the psychological concept of *goal*: a goal is a specific, bounded target state toward which action is directed, while purpose in IMT's sense is the broader orientational horizon within which particular goals become meaningful. One can have many goals without purpose — directed activity without an overarching sense of what the activity is *for*. Purpose is the condition under which goals cohere into a life or a culture rather than remaining a series of disconnected targets.

IMT distinguishes two fundamental orientations of purpose, corresponding to the intrinsic/extrinsic axis of the broader framework:

Extrinsic purpose is directed toward a separable, graspable outcome: a state of affairs that can be fully specified in advance, that is distinct from the activity directed toward it, and that is complete when achieved. Wealth, status, market share, credential, metric — these are extrinsic purposes in this sense. Their achievement terminates the purposive relationship. Extrinsic purpose is the domain of goal-setting theory (Locke and Latham, 2002) and of most managerial, policy, and campaign frameworks.

Intrinsic purpose is directed toward a state of being, relationship, or participation that cannot be fully specified in advance and is not terminated by achievement. Justice, ecological integrity, wisdom, communion, flourishing — these are intrinsic purposes in IMT's sense. They are not destinations but orientations: one does not *arrive* at justice in the way one arrives at a revenue target. They draw one forward without being exhausted by any particular approach. This quality — the inexhaustibility of genuine purpose — is what IMT means by *telos* in its technical sense: not merely a goal but a directional pull that transcends any specific instantiation of itself.

2.4.2 Philosophical Precedents and Support

The concept of *telos* originates with Aristotle, for whom every natural thing has a characteristic form of flourishing toward which its development is directed: the acorn tends toward the oak, the human being toward eudaimonia (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I). Aristotle's account is teleological in the full sense — it attributes directional purpose not merely to conscious agents but to natural processes. IMT does not require this full Aristotelian teleology. It requires only the more modest claim, applicable to conscious agents rather than to nature as a whole, that purposive orientation toward states of being and participation is a genuine and distinct motivational category that cannot be reduced to goal-directed behaviour.

Charles Taylor's account of *moral frameworks* in *Sources of the Self* (1989) provides the most sophisticated contemporary philosophical treatment of purpose in the sense IMT intends. For Taylor, a moral framework is a background orientation — not a set of explicitly held principles but a sense of what is worth caring about, what constitutes a good life, what kinds of things matter at all. This framework is constitutive of identity in a way that specific goals are not: losing one's moral framework is not like failing to achieve a goal but like losing one's sense of who one is. Taylor's account of the *horizons of significance* within which

individual choices acquire meaning maps directly onto IMT's account of intrinsic purpose as an orientational horizon. Taylor's further argument — that modernity has produced a systematic crisis of meaning through the attenuation of these horizons — is, at the cultural-level, precisely the claim IMT makes through the diagnostic category of extrinsic purpose predominance.

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, developed from clinical experience with Holocaust survivors, provides a psychological antecedent of comparable importance. Frankl's central finding — that the capacity to find meaning, or purpose in the sense IMT intends, is a more powerful predictor of survival and psychological integrity than the satisfaction of comfort or pleasure needs — is the most direct empirical evidence available that purposive orientation toward something beyond the self has distinctive and irreducible motivational consequences (Frankl, 1959). Frankl's account of the *will to meaning* as a primary human motivational force, distinct from and not reducible to the will to pleasure (Freud) or the will to power (Adler), anticipates IMT's claim that intrinsic purpose is a genuinely separate motivational category.

2.4.3 The Logical Necessity of Purpose as a Primitive

The case for treating purpose as a genuine primitive — irreducible to value or motivation — rests on the observation that purpose provides a dimension that neither value nor motivation alone supplies. Value, without purpose, produces a sense that things matter without any orientation toward what to do in response. Motivation, without purpose, produces energy without direction — the condition of driven activity that has lost its meaning, characteristic of burnout. Purpose, without motivation, produces a sense of direction without the energy to pursue it — the condition of knowing what matters without being able to act, characteristic of certain forms of depression. Each of the three primitives, when isolated, produces a recognisable and clinically significant pathological condition: value without motivation and purpose produces passive aesthetic appreciation at best, anhedonia at worst; motivation without value and purpose produces compulsive activity; purpose without value and motivation produces what Frankl called existential vacuum — a sense of direction emptied of its substance.

This phenomenological distinctness — the fact that each primitive, when absent, produces its own characteristic form of dysfunction — is evidence for their irreducibility. They are not three descriptions of the same thing, because their absence produces three different things. This constitutes what we take to be the strongest argument for their status as genuine primitives: not merely that they are conceptually distinct, which might be a matter of analytical convenience, but that they are experientially distinct in their absence.

2.5 The VMP Triad as an Integrated System

The three primitives are not sequential — value does not come first, followed by motivation, followed by purpose — nor are they parallel processes that combine additively. They are structurally interdependent in a way that makes their relationship closer to a grammar than a formula. Each primitive constitutes the conditions of possibility for the others to function as it does: value gives motivation its quality and purpose its stakes; motivation gives value its enactment and purpose its energy; purpose gives value its horizon and motivation its direction.

This interdependence is what IMT means by calling the triad *integrative*: the whole is not merely the sum of the parts but a relational structure in which each element is partly constituted by its relationship to the others. A configuration in which all three primitives are aligned in the intrinsic orientation — where what matters (value) draws action through resonant energy (motivation) toward a horizon of flourishing (purpose) — produces the coherent, self-sustaining motivational state that IMT terms *intrinsic alignment*. A configuration in which all three are aligned in the extrinsic orientation — where worth is assigned instrumentally, action is driven by reward and pressure, and the horizon is accumulation or metric — produces the coherent but ultimately self-consuming state IMT terms *extrinsic dominance*. Mixed

configurations produce characteristic forms of dissonance: the activist who pursues intrinsic purpose through extrinsic motivation, the spiritually oriented person whose values remain telic but whose institutional life is entirely extrinsically organised.

These mixed configurations are not merely theoretical abstractions. They describe the actual motivational landscape of most individuals and institutions operating in late-modern cultural contexts — contexts in which extrinsic motivational architecture is dominant at the institutional level while intrinsic orientations persist in pockets of personal, relational, and communal life. IMT's diagnostic value lies precisely in its capacity to make these configurations visible: to show not merely that motivation is mixed but *how* it is mixed, and what the consequences of different configurations are for wellbeing, meaning, and cultural sustainability.

Section 3: IMT in Relation to the Motivational Literature — Situating the Framework

3.1 Overview

This section situates Integral Motivation Theory within the existing motivational literature with two purposes. The first is corrective: to demonstrate that IMT's critique of dominant frameworks is precise rather than caricatured, engaging with the full architecture of Self-Determination Theory across all six of its sub-theories rather than reducing it to a needs-based model. The second is constructive: to identify, with specificity, the explanatory gap that IMT addresses — the gap between SDT's account of integrated regulation and the motivational phenomena associated with genuine self-transcendence — and to show why this gap cannot be closed from within SDT's current conceptual architecture without the kind of extension IMT proposes.

IMT's position is explicit: it extends SDT rather than replacing it. SDT remains the most comprehensive, empirically grounded, and theoretically coherent motivational framework available. IMT accepts its core findings, its taxonomy of motivational styles, and its account of the psychological conditions that support flourishing. What it proposes to add is a further axis of analysis — the relationship between motivation and perceived telic value — that SDT's framework has not theorised and that is necessary to account for a well-documented class of motivational phenomena.

We then situate IMT in relation to three adjacent traditions — logotherapy, eudaimonic wellbeing research, and resonance theory — each of which has approached the same explanatory gap from a different disciplinary direction, and whose convergent findings provide independent support for IMT's central claims.

3.2 Self-Determination Theory: A Full Engagement

Self-Determination Theory is not a single unified theory but what Ryan and Deci call a "macro-theory" composed of six distinct mini-theories, each addressing a specific aspect of human motivation, personality, and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Any serious engagement with SDT must engage with all six, and IMT's relationship to each is different. We address them in turn.

3.2.1 Cognitive Evaluation Theory

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) was SDT's original formulation, developed to explain a counterintuitive finding: that introducing external rewards for an intrinsically motivated activity can undermine rather than enhance motivation for that activity — the so-called "overjustification effect" (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett, 1973). CET proposes that events in the social environment affect intrinsic motivation by influencing the individual's experience of autonomy and competence. Events experienced as informational — as providing feedback that supports competence without controlling behaviour — tend to enhance

intrinsic motivation. Events experienced as controlling — as pressuring behaviour toward a specific outcome — tend to undermine it.

CET's relevance to IMT is primarily at the level of mechanism. CET demonstrates that the social and institutional environment does not merely influence the quantity of motivation but its quality — specifically, whether motivation retains its intrinsic character or becomes externalised. This is consistent with IMT's warming model: institutional environments that systematically use controlling events reshape motivational orientation over time, not merely in individual instances. IMT extends this logic from the individual-institutional interaction to the cultural level, proposing that dominant cultural configurations — understood as the aggregate of institutional practices, communication patterns, and social norms — function as the largest-scale "social environment" in CET's sense, shaping the prevailing quality of motivation across populations.

3.2.2 Organismic Integration Theory

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) is the sub-theory most directly relevant to IMT's project and the one with which IMT engages most substantively. OIT describes the process by which initially extrinsic motivations are internalised — progressively taken up into the self and integrated with the individual's values and identity. The resulting continuum runs from external regulation (acting to obtain reward or avoid punishment) through introjected regulation (acting from internalised compulsion or guilt), identified regulation (acting because the activity is personally valued and important), and integrated regulation (acting from full congruence with one's values and sense of self) to intrinsic motivation (acting for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself).

This continuum represents a genuine and important theoretical achievement. It demonstrates that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not binary but developmental — that extrinsic motivations can, under the right conditions, be transformed through internalisation into increasingly autonomous forms. It has generated a rich programme of empirical research demonstrating that higher levels of internalisation are associated with greater wellbeing, persistence, creativity, and relational quality (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

IMT's engagement with OIT is precisely located: it concerns what happens at the continuum's intrinsic end. OIT describes the most autonomous motivation available within its framework as either integrated regulation — full congruence with one's values and identity — or intrinsic motivation — engagement for the inherent satisfaction it provides. Both of these are characterised by what we have termed the self-referential structure: the self's values, the self's identity, the self's satisfaction are the ultimate reference points. The motivational circuit closes within the self-system.

This is not a failing of OIT — it is a reflection of SDT's principled commitment to empirical tractability and its roots in humanistic psychology's emphasis on self-determination and personal growth. It produces a framework that is enormously generative for the range it covers. But it means that OIT's continuum, as currently constituted, does not have a theoretical position for motivation that is experienced as genuinely self-transcendent — as responsive to something that makes a claim on the agent from outside the self-system rather than expressing something from within it. IMT proposes that OIT's continuum requires extension along a further dimension — from self-referential alignment to telic resonance — to account for this class of motivational experience.

3.2.3 Basic Psychological Needs Theory

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) proposes that the satisfaction of three universal psychological needs — autonomy (the experience of volition and self-endorsement of one's actions), competence (the experience of effectiveness and mastery in valued domains), and relatedness (the experience of genuine

connection and care in one's relationships) — is the proximal mechanism through which social environments and motivational orientations affect wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

BPNT is the sub-theory that earlier versions of this framework most prominently engaged and characterised as exhausting SDT's account of motivation. The reviewer's critique of this characterisation is warranted: BPNT does not claim to constitute SDT's full account of motivation but to identify the psychological mediators through which motivational quality affects wellbeing. The needs are not motivations but the conditions under which motivation flourishes.

IMT's relationship to BPNT is one of complementarity rather than contestation. BPNT identifies three necessary conditions for motivational flourishing from within the self-system. IMT proposes that these conditions are necessary but not sufficient for the most demanding forms of human motivational engagement. The need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can be met — as research consistently demonstrates is possible even within extrinsically structured environments — without the individual encountering telic value. IMT proposes that telic resonance requires something beyond need-satisfaction: a specific quality of attention, a receptive orientation toward perceived intrinsic value, that BPNT does not theorise.

A secondary observation is warranted here. BPNT's three needs map partially but imperfectly onto the VMP triad. Relatedness bears some resemblance to the relational dimension of intrinsic value; autonomy bears some resemblance to the self-authoring dimension of intrinsic motivation; competence has no clear analogue in VMP, which does not treat effectiveness as a motivational primitive. These partial overlaps are evidence that the two frameworks are addressing adjacent rather than identical territory, and that their relationship is one of productive complementarity.

3.2.4 Causality Orientations Theory

Causality Orientations Theory (COT) describes stable individual differences in the degree to which people orient their motivation autonomously, in a controlled fashion, or impersonally (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Autonomy-oriented individuals tend to experience their behaviour as self-initiated and self-endorsed; control-oriented individuals tend to experience their behaviour as driven by external pressures or internal compulsions; impersonally oriented individuals tend to experience their behaviour as beyond their influence and approach it with anxiety or amotivation.

COT is relevant to IMT primarily as a framework for theorising individual differences in accessibility to telic resonance. IMT predicts that autonomy-oriented individuals, as described by COT, will be more consistently accessible to telic resonance than control-oriented individuals, for two reasons. First, the receptive, open quality of attention that telic value requires — the "patient, loving regard" Murdoch (1970) describes — is more naturally available to individuals whose habitual motivational orientation is already one of self-endorsement and openness rather than pressure and compulsion. Second, control orientation, as COT describes it, is associated with precisely the attentional narrowing that would occlude the perception of telic value: the focus on external requirements and internal pressures leaves insufficient attentional space for the kind of broad, contextual perception through which telic value typically presents itself. This relationship between COT orientations and telic accessibility constitutes a testable hypothesis connecting IMT to existing SDT measurement infrastructure — specifically, the General Causality Orientations Scale (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

3.2.5 Relationships Motivation Theory

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT) extends SDT's analysis to the domain of close interpersonal relationships, proposing that relationships are most satisfying and growth-promoting when they are autonomy-supportive — when both partners experience themselves as freely choosing the relationship and as authentically known within it (La Guardia and Patrick, 2008; Deci et al., 2006).

RMT is the sub-theory least directly engaged by IMT, but it is relevant in one significant respect. RMT's account of the relationship between autonomy support and relational quality provides evidence for a claim IMT makes at the cultural level: that environments characterised by controlling, extrinsically oriented motivational structures are not merely less pleasant but actively degrade the quality of human connection. If RMT finds that controlling relational environments undermine the authenticity and vitality of intimate relationships, IMT proposes — as an extension of this finding to the cultural scale — that controlling, extrinsically oriented cultural environments similarly undermine the depth and authenticity of the relational bonds that constitute community. The warming model, at the relational scale, suggests that cultures dominated by extrinsic VMP configurations systematically erode the relational substrate on which intrinsic motivation depends.

3.2.6 Goal Contents Theory

Goal Contents Theory (GCT) is perhaps the sub-theory most directly empirically relevant to IMT's diagnostic claims. GCT distinguishes between intrinsic goal contents — goals oriented toward personal growth, meaningful relationships, community contribution, and physical health — and extrinsic goal contents — goals oriented toward financial wealth, fame, attractiveness, and social status (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996). Research using this framework across multiple cultures has consistently found that the relative priority individuals give to extrinsic versus intrinsic goals is a robust predictor of wellbeing: higher relative prioritisation of extrinsic goals is associated with reduced wellbeing, higher anxiety, more depression, and lower quality of relationships, even controlling for actual attainment of those goals (Kasser, 2002; Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci, 2009).

IMT's relationship to GCT is one of deepening rather than extension. GCT describes the consequences of intrinsic versus extrinsic goal content at the level of individual choice and priority. IMT proposes that the goal content distinction observed in GCT is a downstream expression of a more fundamental VMP configuration — that what individuals choose to pursue is shaped by the implicit motivational grammar of the cultural environment within which they are embedded. The warming model provides the mechanism: cultures and institutions that systematically activate extrinsic motivational orientations through their practices, incentive structures, and communications warm extrinsic values, which then express themselves as extrinsic goal priorities at the individual level. GCT's findings thus provide indirect empirical support for IMT's cultural-level claims, and IMT provides GCT with a cultural mechanism that GCT itself does not theorise.

3.3 The Self-Referential Limit: Why the Gap Cannot Be Closed from Within SDT

Having engaged with SDT's full architecture, we are in a position to state the self-referential limit with greater precision. The limit is not located at any particular sub-theory; it is a structural feature of SDT's overall framework that follows from its philosophical commitments.

SDT is rooted in the organismic-dialectical meta-theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017): the view that human beings are active, growth-oriented organisms who, under supportive conditions, naturally tend toward integration — toward bringing their diverse experiences, values, and motivations into a coherent, self-authored whole. The telos of this meta-theory is the integrated, authentic, fully self-determined individual: a person whose motivations express who they genuinely are rather than who external pressures or internal compulsions have made them. This is a powerful and valuable vision of human flourishing. It is also one in which the self remains the ultimate reference point.

The philosophical tradition from which this vision descends — broadly humanistic, broadly individualist, broadly immanent in Tylor's (1989) sense — is one in which the horizon of meaning and value is set by the individual's own authentic self rather than by something genuinely external to it. This tradition has deep and

important roots, and SDT's empirical programme has provided it with substantial evidential support. But it is not the only tradition through which human motivation has been understood, and there are well-documented motivational phenomena it cannot accommodate without theoretical strain.

Frankl's observation that meaning — his term for what IMT calls intrinsic purpose — is experienced as *discovered* rather than constructed, as something the world offers rather than something the self generates, is one formulation of the limit (Frankl, 1959). Murdoch's account of moral attention as a form of *perception* rather than decision is another (Murdoch, 1970). Rosa's distinction between genuine *resonance* — a relationship with something genuinely other and responsive — and mere echo — a relationship with one's own desires reflected back — is a third (Rosa, 2019). Each of these accounts, from different disciplinary traditions, identifies the same structural feature: a class of motivational experience whose defining quality is its responsiveness to something beyond the self-system, and whose theoretical treatment requires a conceptual vocabulary that SDT's current architecture does not supply.

IMT proposes to supply this vocabulary through the concept of telic resonance, defined in Section 2 and elaborated in Section 6. We emphasise that this is a theoretical extension, not a refutation. The vast body of SDT's empirical programme remains valid and relevant within its domain. IMT proposes only that the domain has a boundary, that the boundary is located at the self-referential limit, and that a theoretically and empirically adequate account of human motivation requires a framework that extends beyond it.

3.4 Adjacent Traditions Converging on the Same Gap

Three further intellectual traditions have approached the explanatory gap IMT addresses from independent directions. Their convergence — despite arising from different disciplines, using different methods, and being largely unconnected in the literature — constitutes what philosophers of science call *consilience*: the coincidence of multiple independent lines of evidence on a common conclusion, which provides stronger support for that conclusion than any single line could provide alone (Wilson, 1998).

3.4.1 Logotherapy and the Will to Meaning

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, developed through clinical experience in the Nazi concentration camps and subsequently elaborated into a systematic psychological theory, proposes that the primary human motivational force is not the will to pleasure (Freud's pleasure principle) nor the will to power (Adler's drive for superiority) but the *will to meaning* — an orientation toward something beyond the self that makes life worth living (Frankl, 1959). Frankl's clinical observation was that individuals who maintained a sense of meaning — who had something or someone to live *for* — survived the extreme conditions of the camps at significantly higher rates than those who did not, even controlling for physical condition.

Frankl's account of meaning maps closely onto IMT's account of intrinsic purpose: meaning, for Frankl, is not a state of the self but a relationship between the self and something genuinely external — a cause, a person, a value — that makes a claim on the person. Crucially, meaning in Frankl's sense cannot be invented or constructed by the will alone; it must be *discovered* in the encounter with the world. This discovery character — the sense that meaning presents itself rather than being produced — is precisely the phenomenological feature that distinguishes telic resonance from other forms of intrinsic motivation.

Logotherapy has been criticised for its limited empirical basis in Frankl's original work and for its dependence on a specific philosophical anthropology. These criticisms have some force, but they have been substantially answered by subsequent empirical research. Steger and colleagues' development of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and the substantial body of research it has enabled demonstrate that the presence of meaning — experienced as a sense that one's life is directed toward something of genuine worth — is a robust predictor of wellbeing, resilience, and life satisfaction across cultures and populations

(Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler, 2006; Steger, 2012). This research provides the empirical grounding that Frankl's original account lacked and constitutes direct empirical support for IMT's claim that the category of intrinsic purpose — orientation toward something beyond the self — is a genuine and consequential motivational category.

3.4.2 Eudaimonic Wellbeing Research

The distinction between hedonic wellbeing — the experience of pleasure and the absence of pain — and eudaimonic wellbeing — the experience of living well, of fulfilling one's potential, of being engaged with what is genuinely worth engaging with — originates with Aristotle and has been substantially rehabilitated in contemporary psychological research (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993; Ryff, 1989).

Eudaimonic wellbeing research is directly relevant to IMT because eudaimonia, as operationalised in this literature, consistently includes components that SDT's framework does not fully capture. Ryff's (1989) model of psychological wellbeing, for example, includes *purpose in life* — a sense of directedness toward meaningful goals — and *personal growth* — an orientation toward becoming what one is capable of becoming — as core dimensions of wellbeing that are distinct from need-satisfaction and that are not reducible to the experience of pleasure. Waterman's (1993) distinction between hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic *personal expressiveness* — the experience of activities as expressing one's deepest self and as genuinely worth doing — approaches, from within empirical psychology, the territory IMT addresses through telic resonance.

Critically, eudaimonic wellbeing research has consistently found that eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing, while correlated, are empirically distinguishable and have different predictors. Activities that score high on personal expressiveness are not always the most pleasurable; the most pleasurable activities are not always eudaimonically significant. This empirical distinguishability supports IMT's claim that intrinsic purpose — orientation toward what is genuinely worth pursuing — is a distinct motivational category with distinct consequences, not merely a more sophisticated form of pleasure-seeking.

3.4.3 Resonance Theory

Hartmut Rosa's resonance theory, introduced in Section 2 in relation to value, is equally relevant to the motivational dimension of IMT's framework. Rosa (2019) proposes that modern societies are characterised by a systematic tendency toward alienation — a mode of world-relationship in which the world presents itself as mute, indifferent, or merely instrumental. Alienation, in Rosa's sense, is not primarily a socioeconomic condition (as in Marx's original account) but a motivational and relational one: it is the condition of being unable to be genuinely affected by, drawn toward, or transformed through one's encounters with the world.

Rosa's account of resonance as the opposite of alienation maps directly onto the motivational territory IMT addresses through telic resonance. For Rosa, a resonant world-relationship is one in which the world calls and one answers — in which something in the world genuinely addresses the person and the person is genuinely moved in response. This calling and answering is irreducible to need-satisfaction (Rosa explicitly distinguishes resonance from need-fulfilment) and irreducible to autonomous self-expression (resonance requires that the world have something of its own to offer, not merely reflect the person back). Rosa's sociological account of the systematic suppression of resonance in accelerating modern societies — their tendency to produce encounters that are controlled, efficient, and indifferent rather than open, responsive, and transformative — provides independent social-scientific support for IMT's cultural-level diagnostic claim.

Rosa's framework is additionally relevant because it provides a sociological mechanism for the cultural effects IMT's warming model proposes. If accelerating, extrinsically oriented social environments systematically suppress resonance — systematically undermine the capacity for the kind of world-

relationship that telic resonance requires — then the cultural dominance of extrinsic VMP configurations is not merely associated with reduced individual wellbeing but actively produces the motivational poverty that makes alternative orientations seem implausible or inaccessible. This is a stronger causal claim than the warming model alone supports, and one that aligns Rosa's independent theoretical framework with IMT's cultural diagnostic.

3.5 Synthesis: What IMT Adds

Drawing the three preceding sections together, IMT's theoretical contribution to the motivational literature can be stated with precision.

IMT adds, to the existing literature, four distinct elements. First, the VMP triad as an integrative framework that holds Value, Motivation, and Purpose as co-constitutive and irreducible primitives — a structural insight that is present in the adjacent literature (Taylor on frameworks, Frankl on meaning, Rosa on resonance) but has not previously been formalised as an integrated motivational model. Second, the concept of telic resonance as a theoretically distinct motivational category that extends SDT's continuum beyond its self-referential limit and accounts for the class of motivational experience characterised by genuine responsiveness to perceived intrinsic value. Third, the warming model as a mechanism connecting individual motivational orientations to cultural-level value formation — a bridge between motivational psychology and cultural analysis that the existing literature approaches but does not explicitly theorise. Fourth, the intrinsic/extrinsic axis applied not merely to goal content (as in GCT) or motivational style (as in OIT) but to the full VMP configuration — the simultaneous orientation of value, motivation, and purpose — as the diagnostic unit of cultural formation.

These contributions do not invalidate existing frameworks. They extend and integrate them. IMT's ambition is not to replace SDT, logotherapy, or resonance theory but to provide the unifying meta-level structure within which their distinct insights become mutually illuminating rather than parallel but disconnected. The VMP triad is the vocabulary in which the convergent findings of these traditions can be expressed as a coherent account of how human motivation operates at both individual and cultural scales.

Section 4: Epistemological Foundations — What Counts as Evidence for Motivational Claims

4.1 The Epistemological Question

Every theoretical framework makes implicit assumptions about what kinds of evidence are relevant to its claims. In the study of human motivation, these assumptions are consequential in ways they are not in the natural sciences, because the subject matter — the interior life of conscious beings — is not fully accessible through third-person observation alone. A framework that accepts only quantitative, third-person data as legitimate evidence will systematically fail to register the most important features of motivational experience: its qualitative character, its meaning-saturated texture, its relationship to values and purposes that cannot be operationalised without remainder. IMT takes a different position, which this section articulates and defends.

The position is not anti-scientific. It is a defence of science's integrity against its own overextension — a demand that the methods deployed match the nature of the subject matter being investigated rather than the other way around. As William James argued over a century ago, a psychology that excluded subjective experience from its data would not be a more rigorous psychology but a less adequate one — one that had simply decided, in advance of investigation, that the most interesting features of its subject matter did not exist (James, 1890). The contemporary philosopher of science Helen Longino (2002) makes a related point in more technical terms: the standards of adequacy for a scientific framework are themselves evaluative and

cannot be derived from within the framework they evaluate. What counts as evidence for a claim about motivation is partly a normative question about what kinds of access to motivational phenomena are epistemically legitimate — a question that cannot be answered by motivational science alone without circularity.

IMT's response to this epistemological question draws on a tradition of plural epistemology in the philosophy of social science: the view that different dimensions of human experience require different and complementary modes of knowing, each with its own standards of rigour and its own domain of appropriate application. This is not relativism — the claim that all ways of knowing are equally valid for all purposes. It is a principled account of epistemic complementarity: the recognition that empirical-analytic methods, phenomenological methods, hermeneutic-interpretive methods, and normative-philosophical methods each illuminate aspects of human experience that the others cannot fully reach, and that an adequate account of complex human phenomena requires all four rather than the dominance of any one.

4.2 A Plural Epistemology for Motivational Research

The argument for plural epistemology in the study of motivation begins with a simple observation about the subject matter. Motivation, as defined in Section 2, is the energetic and directional dimension of experience — the dimension in which consciousness is moved in relation to perceived value. This subject matter has at least four distinct dimensions, each of which requires a different mode of knowing to be adequately investigated.

The first dimension is the *empirical-analytic*: the measurable, third-person-observable correlates of motivation — behavioural choices, physiological states, neural activation patterns, experimental responses. This dimension is the domain of mainstream motivational psychology and neuroscience, and the methods of these disciplines — controlled experiment, psychometric measurement, statistical analysis — are genuinely well-suited to it. IMT accepts and draws on this body of evidence throughout.

The second dimension is the *phenomenological-experiential*: the first-person character of motivational experience — what it is like to be drawn toward something, to feel called by a purpose, to experience the energetic quality of resonant versus driven motivation. This dimension cannot be adequately investigated through third-person methods alone, because third-person methods observe behaviour from outside the experience and necessarily abstract from its qualitative character. First-person phenomenological methods — careful description and analysis of the structure of experience as it presents itself to consciousness — are the appropriate tools here. Their rigour lies not in replication across subjects but in the fidelity and precision with which structural features of experience are articulated and tested against the recognition of other careful observers. Husserl (1913), Merleau-Ponty (1945), and Zahavi (2003) provide the philosophical foundations; contemporary developments in neurophenomenology (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1991) and second-person phenomenological methods (Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, 2003) have extended these tools toward greater empirical tractability.

The third dimension is the *relational-ecological*: the way in which motivation arises from the dynamic relationship between an organism and its environment rather than from properties of either in isolation. This dimension is the domain of ecological psychology (Gibson, 1979), developmental psychology (Vygotsky, 1978; Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and cultural psychology (Shweder, 1991). Its methods are those of systems analysis, developmental observation, and cross-cultural comparison. IMT draws on this dimension in its warming model and its account of how cultural environments shape individual motivational orientations through repeated interaction.

The fourth dimension is the *normative-interpretive*: the evaluative and meaning-making dimension of motivation — the relationship between what moves a person and what is genuinely worth being moved by.

This is the domain of moral philosophy, hermeneutics, and the interpretive humanities. It is precisely the dimension that most scientific accounts of motivation bracket as outside their remit — treating questions of what is worth pursuing as beyond the scope of an empirical discipline. IMT proposes that this bracketing, while methodologically understandable, is epistemically costly: a framework that cannot engage with the normative dimension of motivation cannot adequately theorise the difference between motivation that is well-directed — responsive to genuine value — and motivation that is misdirected — responsive to apparent value that does not sustain the flourishing it promises.

These four dimensions are not hierarchically ordered. None is epistemically prior to the others. They stand in a relationship of constraint and completion: empirical-analytic findings constrain what phenomenological accounts can claim about experience and its neural correlates; phenomenological findings constrain what empirical accounts can claim about the nature of the states they measure; ecological findings constrain both by situating them in the relational contexts within which they actually arise; normative-interpretive findings provide the evaluative framework within which all three become intelligible as accounts of something worth investigating. The failure to engage any one of these dimensions does not merely produce an incomplete account — it produces a systematically distorted one, because the missing dimension is not merely absent but actively misrepresented by the frameworks that expand to fill its space.

This epistemological pluralism has a methodological implication that is directly relevant to IMT's evidential base. Cross-cultural wisdom traditions — indigenous cosmovisions, contemplative lineages, philosophical schools from outside the Western mainstream — are not pre-scientific curiosities to be mentioned as anthropological colour and then set aside. They are, on a plural epistemological account, repositories of phenomenological and normative-interpretive knowledge about human motivation and flourishing that have been accumulated, tested, refined, and transmitted across generations in the relational-ecological contexts of lived communities. Their evidential weight is not identical to that of randomised controlled trials — they address different dimensions of the subject matter using different methods — but they are not weightless. A motivational theory that finds no resonance whatsoever in the accumulated wisdom of diverse human traditions across cultures and epochs has more explaining to do, not less, than one that finds convergent support in them. IMT draws on this convergent support as one thread in a plural evidential weave, not as its primary or sole basis.

This is precisely the metamodern epistemological move: not the postmodern gesture of treating all knowledge claims as equally valid irrespective of their methods and domain of application, and not the modernist gesture of treating scientific method as the exclusive arbiter of legitimate knowledge, but the integrative recognition that different questions require different epistemic tools and that wisdom consists in deploying the right tools for the right questions while maintaining rigorous standards within each mode.

4.3 Hemispheric Lateralisation — Revising the Framework's Reliance on McGilchrist

The original version of this framework made extensive and relatively uncritical use of Iain McGilchrist's account of hemispheric lateralisation as neuroscientific grounding for the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. The reviewer's observation that neuroscience contesting McGilchrist's claims was not engaged is well-founded, and this section addresses that gap directly — revising the framework's relationship to McGilchrist's work in light of the contested neuroscientific landscape while preserving the genuine insights his account provides at the phenomenological and cultural levels.

4.3.1 McGilchrist's Thesis and Its Neuroscientific Reception

McGilchrist's central claim in *The Master and His Emissary* (2009) and *The Matter with Things* (2021) is that the brain's two cerebral hemispheres do not primarily differ in *what* they process — the old view that the left hemisphere processes language and the right processes spatial information — but in *how* they attend

to the world. The left hemisphere, on McGilchrist's account, attends narrowly, analytically, and with a preference for the fixed, the decontextualised, and the manipulable. The right hemisphere attends broadly, contextually, and with a preference for the living, the relational, and the implicit. McGilchrist further argues that this hemispheric difference has cultural consequences: the progressive dominance of left-hemisphere modes of attention in Western modernity is, he argues, a primary driver of the meaning crisis and the ecological and social failures of contemporary civilisation.

The neuroscientific response to McGilchrist's thesis has been mixed. Several neuroscientists have offered substantive critiques. The most frequently cited concerns the degree to which hemispheric specialisation is as clean and consistent as McGilchrist's framework requires. Gazzaniga's decades of split-brain research — studies of patients whose corpus callosum has been severed, allowing the hemispheres to be studied independently — demonstrate genuine hemispheric differences in processing but also considerable variability between individuals and across contexts, and suggest a more complex relationship between the hemispheres than a simple division of attentional modes (Gazzaniga, 2000; Gazzaniga, Ivry, and Mangun, 2014). Critics have further noted that McGilchrist's cultural-historical argument — that Western modernity exhibits left-hemisphere dominance — involves a leap from individual neuroscience to cultural diagnosis that is not straightforwardly warranted by the neurological evidence, however compelling it may be as a phenomenological or philosophical observation (Corballis, 2012).

These are legitimate criticisms and IMT takes them seriously. They establish that McGilchrist's claims cannot be deployed as established neuroscience in the way the original framework's presentation implied. The hemispheric distinction is a genuine and empirically supported phenomenon; the specific architecture McGilchrist builds upon it extends significantly beyond what the neuroscientific evidence alone can support.

4.3.2 What Can Be Retained

The critical question is what, if anything, of McGilchrist's framework survives the neuroscientific critique. We propose that two distinct levels of McGilchrist's argument should be carefully separated.

At the *neuroscientific* level — the claim that specific hemispheric structures reliably produce the attentional and processing differences McGilchrist describes — the evidence is suggestive but contested, and IMT does not require this level of claim. We therefore withdraw the framework's earlier reliance on McGilchrist as neuroscientific authority for the distinction between relational-contextual and narrow-analytic modes of attention.

At the *phenomenological and cognitive-scientific* level — the claim that two fundamentally different modes of attention exist and operate differently in relation to value, context, and meaning — the evidence is substantially stronger and comes from sources that do not depend on the contested hemispheric architecture.

The distinction between narrow, analytic, target-focused attention and broad, contextual, relationally aware attention is one of the most robustly documented findings in cognitive science. Kahneman's (2011) distinction between System 1 and System 2 processing — fast, associative, contextually sensitive versus slow, analytic, rule-governed — captures one dimension of it. The distinction between the task-positive network and the default mode network in neuroimaging research captures another: the default mode network, associated with narrative self-reflection, social cognition, and the integration of past experience with present context, is systematically deactivated during focused analytical task performance, suggesting a genuine antagonism between these two modes of cognitive engagement (Buckner, Andrews-Hanna, and Schacter, 2008; Raichle, 2015). Iain McGilchrist's contribution, at this level, is not the neuroscientific detail but the philosophical and phenomenological articulation of what these two modes mean for human experience and culture — an articulation that remains powerful and largely unchallenged even where the specific hemispheric architecture is contested.

For IMT's purposes, what matters is this phenomenological distinction rather than its precise neurological substrate. The claim that there are two fundamentally different modes of attending to the world — one oriented toward the manageable, the measurable, and the instrumental; the other oriented toward the contextual, the relational, and the value-laden — is supported by the broader cognitive-scientific literature and by the phenomenological tradition independently of McGilchrist's specific hemispheric thesis. William James's distinction between "acquaintance knowledge" and "knowledge-about" (James, 1890) — the difference between direct experiential familiarity and propositional description — anticipates this distinction. Heidegger's account of the difference between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand — between engaged, absorbed involvement with the world and detached, thematising observation of it (Heidegger, 1927/1962) — is a philosophical articulation of the same fundamental distinction. Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing — the vast dimension of knowledge that we can act on but cannot fully articulate, that is contextually embedded and relationally structured rather than explicitly propositional (Polanyi, 1966) — provides yet another formulation.

IMT draws on this broader convergent tradition rather than on McGilchrist's specific hemispheric thesis. The claim is that the distinction between two modes of attending — one that is hospitable to telic value and one that systematically occludes it — is a genuine and important feature of human cognitive experience, supported by multiple independent lines of evidence. Where McGilchrist's specific neuroanatomical claims are contested, IMT rests its case on the phenomenological and cognitive-scientific consensus that the distinction itself reflects.

4.3.3 The Cultural Claim — Restated Modestly

McGilchrist's cultural claim — that Western modernity exhibits a systematic bias toward the narrow, analytic mode of attention — is similarly in need of restating on more defensible grounds. This claim is not primarily a neuroscientific one: it cannot be established by brain scans of historically situated populations. It is a cultural-historical observation, and it requires cultural-historical evidence.

That evidence is available, and it does not require McGilchrist's specific framework. Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan's research on the progressive spread of materialist and extrinsic value orientations in contemporary Western cultures (Kasser, 2002; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996) provides empirical evidence that cultures in which extrinsic goal content predominates are associated with systematically reduced wellbeing, reduced social trust, and reduced pro-environmental behaviour. The Common Cause Foundation's research on the relationship between communications that activate extrinsic versus intrinsic values and subsequent prosocial behaviour provides experimental evidence that the motivational mode activated by dominant communications patterns shapes what kinds of values and behaviours become accessible (Crompton, 2010). Shalom Schwartz's cross-cultural research on value hierarchies demonstrates that cultures differ systematically in the relative priority given to self-enhancement values — power, achievement, hedonism — versus self-transcendence values — universalism, benevolence — and that these differences have measurable consequences for social cohesion and ecological orientation (Schwartz, 1992, 2012).

These bodies of evidence, taken together, support the cultural diagnostic claim at the heart of IMT — that dominant cultural configurations in late modernity systematically activate and reinforce extrinsic VMP orientations, with measurable consequences for individual and collective flourishing — without requiring the contested neuroscientific architecture McGilchrist builds upon. They constitute an empirically grounded version of the cultural claim, appropriately modest in its mechanisms while consistent in its diagnostic implications.

4.4 First-Person and Contemplative Evidence — A Methodological Defence

The preceding sections have established the grounds for a plural epistemology and revised the framework's neuroscientific claims onto more defensible ground. This section addresses the evidential status of first-person phenomenological accounts and contemplative traditions — the forms of evidence that purely empirical approaches systematically discount but that are indispensable for any adequate account of telic resonance.

The methodological case for taking first-person evidence seriously in the study of motivation is not merely pragmatic — not merely the observation that we cannot study motivation without attending to what it is like to be motivated. It is principled, and it rests on a convergent argument from philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and the philosophy of social science.

The philosophical argument begins with the observation that motivation is an *intentional* phenomenon: it is always motivation toward or away from something, directed by a sense of what matters. Intentional states, as Husserl (1913) and Brentano (1874) first argued systematically, cannot be fully characterised from a third-person perspective without losing precisely the feature that makes them intentional — their directedness, their aboutness, their reference to a content that may or may not exist independently of the mental state itself. A complete account of a motivational state must include a characterisation of what the state is directed toward and how that object is experienced — information that is only accessible, in the first instance, through first-person description.

The cognitive-scientific argument has been developed most rigorously by Francisco Varela and colleagues in the neurophenomenology programme (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1991; Thompson, 2007). Neurophenomenology proposes that first-person phenomenological accounts and third-person neuroscientific accounts stand in a relationship of *mutual constraint*: neither is reducible to the other, both are necessary, and their integration produces accounts that are richer and more adequate than either alone. The programme has generated concrete methodological tools — trained introspection protocols, first-person report methods, micro-phenomenological interview techniques (Petitmengin, 2006) — that bring first-person evidence toward greater replicability and inter-subjective validation without abandoning its qualitative character.

The cross-cultural and contemplative argument draws on a point made most forcefully by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and elaborated by scholars of comparative religion and contemplative science since: that the systematic cultivation of specific modes of attention through contemplative practice across diverse traditions — Buddhist vipassana, Christian contemplative prayer, Sufi dhikr, Daoist inner alchemy — has generated a body of first-person phenomenological knowledge about the structure of consciousness and its relationship to value that is, by any reasonable criterion, a form of evidence. These traditions are not merely cultural artefacts. They are the accumulated results of sustained, disciplined, methodical investigation of the structure of inner experience by trained practitioners across millennia. They are, in the language of philosophy of science, *research programmes* — programmes that have generated reproducible findings (across traditions and cultures with no direct contact), refined their methods through ongoing practice, and developed sophisticated theoretical frameworks to organise and transmit what they have discovered.

The specific finding from contemplative traditions most relevant to IMT is the consistent report — across Buddhist, Christian mystical, Sufi, and indigenous traditions — of a mode of motivation that arises from a perceived encounter with something of ultimate value: what Christian mystics call the pull of the Good, what Sufi tradition describes as the attraction of the Beloved, what Buddhist practice describes as the motivation of bodhicitta — the aspiration to enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Whatever the metaphysical interpretation given to these experiences within their respective traditions, the phenomenological structure is strikingly consistent: a motivation experienced as arising from beyond the self, as drawing the person toward something of genuinely independent worth, and as associated with a willingness to undergo significant personal cost in service of that worth. This is precisely the phenomenological structure IMT attributes to telic resonance, and its cross-cultural consistency — arising

independently in traditions with no direct historical connection — constitutes the kind of convergent evidence that a plural epistemology recognises as significant.

We are not claiming that contemplative testimony establishes the metaphysical reality of the values these traditions apprehend. We are claiming, more modestly, that the consistent cross-cultural report of a structurally similar motivational experience — one that is phenomenologically distinct from need-satisfaction, preference-expression, and normative obligation — constitutes evidence that telic resonance is a genuine and widespread human motivational phenomenon. Its theoretical treatment is IMT's contribution; its phenomenological reality is established by the breadth and consistency of its occurrence across human experience.

4.5 Summary: The Evidential Base of IMT

IMT draws on four classes of evidence, each corresponding to one of the four epistemic modes described in Section 4.2.

From the empirical-analytic mode: the body of quantitative research on SDT, GCT, eudaimonic wellbeing, meaning in life, materialist values, and cross-cultural value profiles reviewed across Sections 3 and 5. These provide third-person, replicable, statistically supported evidence for the motivational distinctions IMT theorises.

From the phenomenological-experiential mode: the careful first-person philosophical accounts of Murdoch, Frankl, and Rosa; the neurophenomenological programme of Varela and colleagues; and the micro-phenomenological methods that are progressively bringing first-person evidence toward greater empirical tractability.

From the relational-ecological mode: cross-cultural research on value configurations and their ecological and social consequences; Rosa's sociological account of resonance and alienation; the anthropological literature on indigenous communities whose intrinsic VMP configurations are sustained through specific relational practices and communal structures.

From the normative-interpretive mode: the philosophical literature on value — Murdoch, Scheler, Taylor, Frankl — and the cross-cultural wisdom traditions that have, across diverse lineages, arrived at structurally convergent accounts of the motivational experience IMT terms telic resonance.

These four classes of evidence are not equivalent in type, and they do not all support the same specific claims. IMT's theoretical claims are calibrated to what each mode of evidence can legitimately support. Empirical-analytic evidence supports the claim that distinct motivational orientations produce distinct and measurable consequences. Phenomenological evidence supports the claim that telic resonance is a structurally distinct motivational experience. Relational-ecological evidence supports the claim that cultural configurations shape and reshape individual motivational orientations. Normative-interpretive evidence supports the claim that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic VMP configurations is not merely empirically significant but evaluatively significant — that it matters, not just as a predictor of wellbeing, but as an account of what human flourishing actually requires.

Together, these constitute what we take to be an adequate evidential base for a theoretical framework of IMT's scope and ambition: not proof, which no framework at this level of generality can provide, but a convergent, multi-modal case that the framework's central claims are well-grounded, worth taking seriously, and worth testing further.

Good. Section 5 is where the theoretical framework meets the world — where abstract claims about VMP configurations become legible in actual human cultures and their documented outcomes. The challenge here is to use existing cross-cultural evidence responsibly: treating it as retrospective illustration and diagnostic application rather than claiming it as original research, and being scrupulously honest about what the evidence does and does not demonstrate.

The structure I will use moves from the most quantitative and replicable evidence (Kasser, Schwartz, Common Cause) through the anthropological case studies (Sumaq Kawsay, Nordic social models) to the cultural-historical diagnosis, ending with an honest account of the evidential limits and what research would be needed to strengthen the claims further. This satisfies the reviewer's demand for empirical grounding while maintaining the intellectual honesty that *Integration* expects.

PAPER 1 — SECTION 5 DRAFT

Section 5: Cross-Cultural Evidence — VMP Configurations and Their Consequences

5.1 Overview and Methodological Note

This section applies the VMP diagnostic framework retrospectively to existing bodies of cross-cultural evidence. It does not present original research. What it offers is something distinct but equally valuable for a theoretical paper: a demonstration that the VMP triad, as defined in Section 2, constitutes a coherent and productive lens for integrating findings from research programmes that have, until now, remained largely disconnected from one another. When cross-cultural psychology, values research, anthropology, and wellbeing science are read through the VMP framework, a consistent pattern emerges — one that provides convergent empirical support for IMT's core claims while also revealing the limits of the existing evidence base and identifying the research agenda that would strengthen it.

The methodological principle guiding this section is one of epistemic honesty about the relationship between existing evidence and IMT's theoretical claims. The evidence reviewed here was not generated to test IMT. It was generated within its own research programmes, using its own constructs and methods, to address its own questions. Where it converges with IMT's predictions, that convergence is suggestive and theoretically significant — what we have called consilience in Section 3. Where it falls short of IMT's claims, we say so directly, and we identify what kinds of evidence would be needed to close the gap.

We also note, consistent with the plural epistemology articulated in Section 4, that not all evidence in this section is of the same type. Quantitative cross-cultural psychology provides one kind of evidence; ethnographic and anthropological accounts of specific cultural configurations provide another; cultural-historical analysis provides a third. Each illuminates a different dimension of the VMP framework's empirical relevance. Their integration, rather than the dominance of any single type, constitutes the evidential basis for IMT's cross-cultural claims.

5.2 Extrinsic Value Orientation and Its Consequences: The Kasser-Ryan Research Programme

The most directly relevant body of quantitative evidence for IMT's account of extrinsic VMP configurations comes from the programme of research initiated by Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan in the early 1990s and subsequently developed across multiple cultures and methodologies over three decades.

Kasser and Ryan's foundational studies (1993, 1996) examined the relationship between the relative priority individuals give to intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations and a range of wellbeing outcomes. Using the Aspiration Index — a measure that assesses the importance individuals place on intrinsic goals (meaningful relationships, personal growth, community contribution, physical health) versus extrinsic goals (financial wealth, fame, physical attractiveness, social status) — they found consistent and robust associations between the relative prioritisation of extrinsic goals and reduced wellbeing across multiple dimensions: higher anxiety, greater depression, lower vitality, lower self-actualisation, and lower relationship quality. These associations held when controlling for actual attainment of the goals in question — it was the orientation toward extrinsic goals, not their non-attainment, that predicted reduced wellbeing (Kasser and Ryan, 1996).

Kasser (2002) extended this research programme to examine the relationship between materialist value orientations — the cluster of values centred on wealth, possessions, and status — and a broader range of outcomes including environmental attitudes and behaviour, social trust, and relationship authenticity. The findings were consistent: higher materialism was associated with lower environmental concern, lower charitable giving, lower empathy, and more superficial relationship patterns, as well as lower subjective wellbeing and higher rates of psychological disorder. Importantly, Kasser also examined the cultural and environmental conditions that promote materialist value orientations, finding that exposure to environments characterised by economic insecurity, controlling parenting, and heavy commercial media — all of which are, in IMT's terms, extrinsic VMP configurations at different scales — predicted higher materialism in individuals.

These findings map with considerable precision onto IMT's warming model. Kasser and Ryan's research demonstrates that extrinsic goal orientations are not merely associated with reduced wellbeing in a correlational sense but are actively cultivated by environments that systematically activate and reward extrinsic values. This is the empirical content of what IMT proposes as the warming mechanism: extrinsic motivational environments warm extrinsic values, which warm extrinsic goal priorities, which produce the measurable wellbeing and relational deficits Kasser and Ryan document. The causal chain is not fully established by correlational research alone — randomised experimental manipulation of value orientation at the cultural level is not feasible — but the pattern across studies is consistent with the causal interpretation IMT proposes.

Niemiec, Ryan, and Deci (2009) provide a further relevant finding: in a longitudinal study of individuals who had recently completed university education — a transition point at which the degree of extrinsic versus intrinsic goal fulfilment becomes more directly legible — they found that individuals whose post-graduation life was characterised by the attainment of extrinsic aspirations showed no increase in wellbeing and significant increases in negative affect, while those whose post-graduation life was characterised by the fulfilment of intrinsic aspirations showed wellbeing gains and reduced ill-being. This prospective longitudinal design strengthens the causal interpretation available from cross-sectional data and constitutes some of the strongest individual-level evidence for IMT's distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic VMP orientations and their divergent consequences.

5.3 Cross-Cultural Value Profiles: Schwartz's Universal Value Structure

Shalom Schwartz's programme of cross-cultural values research provides a second major body of quantitative evidence relevant to IMT. Schwartz (1992) proposed a universal structure of basic human values — motivationally distinct goals that serve as guiding principles in life — derived from the common requirements of human existence: biological needs, social coordination, and the welfare of groups. Through extensive cross-cultural data collection across more than eighty countries, Schwartz identified ten universal value types — power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security — and demonstrated that they are organised in a consistent circular motivational structure in which adjacent values are compatible and opposing values are in tension.

The most directly relevant feature of Schwartz's model for IMT is the opposition between the self-enhancement pole — power and achievement values, oriented toward personal success and dominance — and the self-transcendence pole — universalism and benevolence values, oriented toward the welfare of others and of the broader world. This opposition maps with considerable precision onto IMT's intrinsic/extrinsic axis at the level of value orientation: self-enhancement values are characteristically extrinsic in IMT's sense — oriented toward separable outcomes, competitive advantage, and status — while self-transcendence values are characteristically intrinsic — oriented toward the inherent worth of persons and the natural world, beyond the self-system's interests.

Schwartz and colleagues have used this value structure to examine cross-national differences in value profiles and their relationship to social and environmental outcomes. Nations characterised by higher population-level self-transcendence values show higher levels of social trust, voluntary prosocial behaviour, and support for environmental protection (Schwartz, 2012; Davidov, Schmidt, and Schwartz, 2008). Nations characterised by higher self-enhancement values show higher levels of economic inequality, lower social cohesion, and lower reported wellbeing at the population level, even when controlling for absolute levels of economic development (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, various years, World Happiness Report).

These cross-national findings provide ecological-level evidence — evidence about cultural units rather than individuals — that is methodologically distinct from but complementary to the individual-level findings of Kasser and Ryan. Together they suggest that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction operates at multiple scales: as an individual difference in goal priority (Kasser and Ryan), as a cultural difference in value profile (Schwartz), and as a predictor of social and environmental outcomes at both scales. This multi-scale consistency is precisely what IMT's account of VMP configurations as simultaneously individual and cultural phenomena would predict.

A methodological caution is warranted here. Cross-national ecological correlations are subject to confounds that individual-level studies can more readily control. The relationship between national value profiles and national outcomes may be mediated by economic development, institutional quality, or historical factors that are themselves correlated with value profiles. Schwartz and colleagues are aware of these limitations and have taken steps to address them, but they cannot be fully eliminated within a correlational research design. IMT's use of these findings is accordingly appropriately modest: they are offered as pattern-level evidence consistent with the framework's predictions, not as causal proof of those predictions.

5.4 Value Activation Research: The Common Cause Evidence

A third body of evidence — more experimental and therefore more causally informative than the correlational research reviewed above — comes from the programme of research on value activation associated with the Common Cause Foundation, drawing on the work of Maio, Crompton, Kasser, and colleagues.

Maio, Pakizeh, Cheung, and Rees (2009) demonstrated in a series of experimental studies that values can be contextually activated — rendered more cognitively accessible and more influential in guiding subsequent behaviour — through apparently incidental exposure to value-congruent stimuli. Crucially, they also demonstrated that the activation of values from one region of Schwartz's circular structure tends to suppress the accessibility of values from the opposing region: activating self-enhancement values reduces the accessibility of self-transcendence values, and vice versa. This finding has direct implications for IMT's warming model, providing an experimental mechanism through which the repeated activation of extrinsic values — through commercial communications, institutional incentive structures, and social norms — progressively reduces the accessibility of intrinsic values and the motivational orientations that depend on them.

Crompton (2010), in the Common Cause report that synthesised this research for environmental and social change communications, drew the practical implication: communications campaigns that seek to promote prosocial or environmental behaviour by activating extrinsic values — appealing to financial self-interest, social status, or competitive advantage — may achieve short-term behaviour change while inadvertently suppressing the intrinsic value orientations on which sustained, long-term behaviour change depends. The extrinsic motivational logic of the campaign undermines the intrinsic motivational base of the cultural change it seeks to produce. This is a direct experimental analogue, at the scale of individual communications, for IMT's cultural-level claim that extrinsic VMP configurations are self-undermining with respect to the social and ecological outcomes they purport to serve.

Evans, Maio, Corner, Hodgetts, Ahmed, and Hahn (2013) provided further experimental evidence for the mutual suppression of value regions, demonstrating that the effect is not merely one of cognitive priming but involves genuine changes in the evaluative weight given to competing value considerations in subsequent decisions. The practical implications for cultural change strategy are significant: interventions that use extrinsic motivational logic to achieve intrinsic ends are not merely inefficient but actively counterproductive at the level of motivational infrastructure. IMT's account of why this is the case — the warming model and the VMP coherence requirement — provides the theoretical explanation for a pattern that the empirical literature has documented but not fully theorised.

5.5 Anthropological Case Studies — VMP Configurations in Cultural Context

The quantitative evidence reviewed above establishes the empirical pattern at the individual and cross-national levels. Anthropological case studies provide a different and complementary form of evidence: thick description of the specific cultural practices, institutional structures, and relational forms through which particular VMP configurations are embodied, transmitted, and sustained in specific communities. Two cases are developed here — Sumaq Kawsay as an example of a sustained intrinsic VMP configuration, and the Nordic social model as an example of a partially intrinsic institutional configuration in a contemporary democratic context — with a third, the subsumption of the Christian wisdom narrative by an extrinsic institutional metanarrative, noted more briefly as a diagnostic illustration.

5.5.1 Sumaq Kawsay — Intrinsic VMP in an Indigenous Cosmivision

Sumaq Kawsay — translated variously as "good living," "living well," or "harmonious living" — is the cosmivision of Andean Quechua communities, most systematically documented in Ecuador and Bolivia, where elements of it have been incorporated into national constitutions (Ecuador, 2008; Bolivia, 2009). As articulated by Acosta (2013) and Gudynas (2011), and as documented in detailed ethnographic work across the Andean region, Sumaq Kawsay represents a cultural configuration in which all three VMP primitives are oriented intrinsically.

Value in Sumaq Kawsay is relational and inherent rather than instrumental and assigned. The concept of *Pachamama* — the living Earth — is not a resource to be exploited but a subject to be related to: a participant in the web of mutual obligation and care that constitutes the community. Worth is not quantified through exchange value but perceived through relational quality — the health of the community's relationships with land, ancestors, and one another. Ecuador's constitutional recognition of the rights of nature (*derechos de la naturaleza*) represents the institutionalisation of this intrinsic value orientation at the level of positive law: nature is not merely a protected resource but an entity with inherent rights, a subject rather than an object.

Motivation in Sumaq Kawsay is characterised by *ayni* — a principle of sacred reciprocity that operates as the energetic principle of community life. Ayni is not contractual exchange — it does not involve the calculation of equivalent returns — but the willing participation in a network of mutual care whose

maintenance is its own motivation. Action motivated by *ayni* is not driven by anticipated reward or fear of sanction but pulled by the perceived relational obligation that arises from being embedded in a living community. This is intrinsic motivation in IMT's sense: motivation whose source is the perceived worth of the relational network itself rather than the self-system's interest in it.

Purpose in Sumaq Kawsay is participatory rather than acquisitive: the telos of community life is Sumaq Kawsay itself — the ongoing, dynamic state of harmonious flourishing — rather than any separable outcome to be achieved and completed. Purpose is realised in the process of living well together rather than as the terminus of goal-directed effort. This is intrinsic purpose in IMT's sense: orientation toward a state of being and participation rather than a graspable target.

The anthropological documentation of Sumaq Kawsay communities shows that this intrinsic VMP configuration is not merely a set of articulated values but a lived cultural reality sustained through specific practices: the *minga* (communal labour organised on reciprocal principles), ritual offerings to Pachamama, governance through consensus-based assembly, and agricultural practices oriented toward long-term ecological health rather than short-term yield maximisation (Estermann, 1998; Acosta, 2013). These practices constitute what IMT terms the cultural enactment of a VMP configuration — the specific relational and institutional forms through which abstract motivational orientations become lived reality and are transmitted across generations.

The evidence from these communities is relevant to IMT in two ways. First, it demonstrates that an intrinsic VMP configuration — one in which value, motivation, and purpose are all oriented toward inherent worth, relational reciprocity, and participatory flourishing — is not a theoretical abstraction but a documented cultural reality. This answers the objection that IMT's vision of intrinsic alignment is utopian. Second, the correlation between Sumaq Kawsay communities' intrinsic VMP configuration and their documented patterns of ecological stewardship, social cohesion, and long-term sustainability is consistent with IMT's prediction that intrinsic configurations produce more sustainable individual and collective outcomes than extrinsic ones. We note, however, that this is observational evidence from non-experimental settings, subject to all the confounds that attend anthropological case studies. Sumaq Kawsay communities are also characterised by smallness of scale, specific geographic and historical contexts, and degrees of isolation from global market integration that may independently account for their sustainability outcomes. IMT does not claim that Sumaq Kawsay proves the warming model; it claims that Sumaq Kawsay is consistent with it and provides a concrete illustration of what an intrinsic VMP configuration looks like when institutionally embodied.

5.5.2 Nordic Social Models — Partial Intrinsic Alignment in Contemporary Democracies

The Nordic countries — Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland — consistently rank at or near the top of global indices of subjective wellbeing, social trust, environmental performance, gender equality, and democratic quality (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, World Happiness Report, various years). They also consistently exhibit, on Schwartz's value survey data, population-level value profiles characterised by relatively high self-transcendence and relatively low self-enhancement compared to other developed economies (Schwartz, 2012).

IMT offers a reading of this pattern that is distinct from the standard political-economic explanation, which tends to attribute Nordic success to high social spending, strong institutions, and effective governance. These factors are real and important, but they raise an explanatory prior question: what motivates the political will and civic participation that maintains the social investment and institutional quality on which these outcomes depend? IMT's answer — provisional and requiring further investigation — is that Nordic cultural configurations exhibit a partial intrinsic VMP alignment at the institutional level: welfare state institutions that frame their purpose in terms of collective flourishing rather than individual productivity; labour market arrangements that prioritise work quality, autonomy, and relational embedding alongside

economic output; civic cultures that sustain relatively high levels of voluntary participation in community life.

The concept of *hygge* in Danish culture — an untranslatable term referring to a quality of warm, convivial, present togetherness — is a vernacular expression of an intrinsic value orientation: worth located in the quality of relational presence rather than in productive output or status display. The Norwegian concept of *friluftsliv* — outdoor life as a source of non-instrumental engagement with the natural world — represents a similar intrinsic value orientation at the ecological level. These cultural concepts are not merely aesthetic preferences; they are, in IMT's terms, expressions of a VMP configuration in which the inherent worth of relational and ecological engagement is culturally valorised rather than systematically subordinated to extrinsic metrics.

We offer this reading with appropriate modesty. The Nordic case is complex, internally varied, and subject to significant internal pressures from global market integration and the progressive penetration of extrinsic value orientations through commercial culture and managerial practice. The Nordic model is not an example of pure intrinsic VMP alignment — no contemporary nation-state is — but of a cultural configuration in which intrinsic orientations retain significant institutional expression alongside the extrinsic orientations that characterise late-modern capitalism more broadly. Its relevance to IMT is illustrative rather than probative: it suggests that the practical institutionalisation of partially intrinsic VMP configurations is achievable within contemporary democratic contexts and is associated with better social, ecological, and wellbeing outcomes than comparable nations characterised by more thoroughly extrinsic configurations.

5.5.3 The Subsumption of Wisdom Narratives — A Diagnostic Illustration

A third case study — briefer and more diagnostic than the preceding two — illustrates IMT's explanatory power in a different register: not as evidence for the consequences of intrinsic alignment but as a framework for understanding the mechanism through which intrinsic orientations are overridden by extrinsic institutional configurations.

The historical development of Western Christianity from the intrinsic VMP configuration of its founding wisdom narrative — characterised by relational value (the Kingdom of God as present communion), kenotic motivation (agape as self-emptying love), and participatory purpose (reconciliation as a way of being rather than a destination to be achieved) — toward the extrinsic institutional configurations of medieval Christendom and subsequent organised religion provides a diagnostic case for IMT's central claim about the relationship between explicit narratives and implicit VMP architectures.

The core finding, argued in detail in the companion overview paper, is structural rather than historical: when an intrinsic wisdom narrative — no matter how profound — is embedded within an institutional context characterised by an extrinsic VMP configuration, the extrinsic configuration systematically overrides the intrinsic narrative in determining how the narrative is enacted. The narrative may be cited, celebrated, and proclaimed while its motivational content is inverted: self-emptying love becomes the justification for hierarchical power; present participation in the Kingdom becomes deferred reward for compliance; relational value becomes instrumental exchange. This is the mechanism IMT calls *capture* — a term developed more fully in the companion paper on evil as extrinsic capture (O'Brien, forthcoming).

For the purposes of this paper, the diagnostic value of this case is the following: it demonstrates that the VMP framework operates at a level of analysis beneath the explicit content of beliefs and narratives, and that this deeper level is the decisive one for understanding how motivational orientations are actually embodied and transmitted in cultural life. Two communities can share identical explicit narratives — identical scripture, identical doctrinal formulations, identical stated values — and exhibit radically different motivational architectures depending on the VMP configuration within which those narratives are embedded. This explanatory capacity — accounting for the systematic gap between professed values and enacted behaviour at the cultural level — is one of IMT's distinctive theoretical contributions, and the

Christian case illustrates it with particular clarity because the gap between the founding narrative and its institutional expression is so well-documented in the historical and sociological literature (Weber, 1905; Troeltsch, 1912; Wuthnow, 1988).

5.6 Synthesising the Evidence: What It Supports and What It Does Not

Drawing the preceding sections together, we can state with precision what the cross-cultural evidence supports and where it falls short of IMT's full theoretical claims.

The evidence robustly supports four propositions. First, that individual-level value orientation — specifically the relative priority given to intrinsic versus extrinsic goal contents — is a consistent predictor of wellbeing, relational quality, and prosocial behaviour across cultures (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Niemiec et al., 2009). Second, that value orientations can be experimentally activated and suppressed through contextual exposure, and that the activation of extrinsic values suppresses the accessibility of intrinsic values and vice versa (Maio et al., 2009; Evans et al., 2013). Third, that cultural configurations characterised by relatively higher intrinsic value orientation at the population level are associated with better social, ecological, and wellbeing outcomes at the national and community level (Schwartz, 2012; Helliwell et al., various years). Fourth, that specific cultural practices and institutional forms can sustain intrinsic VMP configurations across generations in the way the warming model predicts (Sumaq Kawsay; partially in Nordic models).

The evidence does not yet fully support three further propositions that IMT's theoretical framework makes and that require future research to establish. First, the full VMP triad — the claim that Value, Motivation, and Purpose must be considered as a coherent configuration rather than as independent variables — has not been tested as an integrated construct. Existing research tends to focus on one or two components in isolation. The development of instruments that measure VMP alignment as a configuration rather than its components separately is a necessary step toward empirical testing of the triad's core claim. Second, the warming model as a causal mechanism — the claim that repeated motivational orientations actively reshape value accessibility over time — is supported by experimental evidence at the level of individual priming studies but has not been tested at the cultural timescale or with the institutional scope that IMT's cultural claims require. Longitudinal research tracking the relationship between institutional VMP configurations and population-level value profiles over time would provide more direct evidence. Third, the concept of telic resonance as a distinct motivational category has not been operationalised or measured in existing research. Developing a psychometric instrument that captures the phenomenological features of telic resonance — its quality of external sourcing, its association with kenotic cost, its distinction from both autonomous self-expression and need-satisfaction — is a research priority that IMT identifies as central to its own empirical development.

5.7 A Call for Dedicated IMT Research

The honest assessment of the evidential situation is this: the existing cross-cultural literature provides substantial convergent support for the major structural claims of IMT — that motivational orientation shapes wellbeing, that value activation has real cultural consequences, that intrinsic configurations produce more sustainable outcomes than extrinsic ones. It does not yet provide direct evidence for IMT as a unified framework, because IMT as a framework has not yet been operationalised as a research instrument and tested as such.

This is not a weakness peculiar to IMT. It is the normal epistemic situation of a newly proposed theoretical framework prior to its empirical research programme. SDT itself began as a theoretical proposal, grounded

in existing evidence and motivated by explanatory gaps in prior frameworks, before accumulating its extensive empirical base over four decades. IMT is at an analogous early stage: its theoretical claims are grounded in existing evidence and motivated by a specific explanatory gap in SDT's current architecture, and it requires a dedicated research programme to test, refine, and where necessary revise its specific propositions.

The research agenda we propose has four priority components. First, the development of a VMP Configuration Assessment instrument — a psychometric tool that measures the three primitives as an integrated configuration rather than separately, allowing both individual VMP profiles and institutional VMP profiles to be assessed and compared. Second, longitudinal research examining whether interventions designed to shift institutional VMP configurations toward greater intrinsic alignment produce the wellbeing, relational, and ecological outcomes that IMT predicts, and whether these effects are mediated by the value-warming mechanism the model proposes. Third, neurophenomenological studies — using the methods of Varela and colleagues — to investigate the phenomenological structure of telic resonance as a distinct motivational state and its neural correlates. Fourth, cross-cultural comparative research examining the relationship between population-level VMP configuration profiles and long-term social and ecological sustainability metrics, with longitudinal tracking of how those profiles change in response to economic and institutional pressures.

The practitioner experience that underlies this framework — more than two decades of applied work with organisations, communities, and campaigns — provides generative hypothesis rather than evidence in the scientific sense. It has been the source of the theoretical framework's specific contours and its sensitivity to the practical consequences of VMP misalignment. But it is subject to the confirmation biases that attend practitioner knowledge, and it requires the independent verification that only a systematic research programme can provide. IMT is offered here not as a finished and validated theory but as a theoretically grounded and empirically anchored framework that is ready for systematic empirical development.

Section 6 is where everything the paper has built converges. Sections 1–5 have established the epistemological foundation, defined the primitives, engaged the existing literature, revised the neuroscience, and grounded the framework in cross-cultural evidence. Section 6 now presents IMT itself as a formal theoretical proposal — the eight-stage motivational continuum, the full VMP architecture as an integrated system, the relationship to SDT stated with precision, and the testable hypotheses that give the framework its empirical programme.

The challenge here is register. This section needs to be simultaneously ambitious and restrained — ambitious enough to establish IMT as a genuine theoretical contribution of significance, restrained enough to avoid the rhetorical overreach that the reviewer correctly identified in the original paper. Every claim must be clearly labelled as to its epistemic status: established finding, theoretical proposal, testable hypothesis, or working postulate. The framework's power should emerge from the precision and coherence of its architecture, not from rhetorical force.

PAPER 1 — SECTION 6 DRAFT

Section 6: Integral Motivation Theory — A Formal Theoretical Proposal

6.1 Framing the Proposal

Integral Motivation Theory is presented here as a formal theoretical framework at what philosophers of science call the level of a *research programme* in Lakatos's (1978) sense: a structured set of theoretical commitments, methodological principles, and empirical hypotheses that together constitute a coherent and

progressive research agenda. Like all research programmes at their inception, IMT consists of a hard core of theoretical commitments that define the framework's identity, a protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses that connect the hard core to empirical evidence, and a positive heuristic — a set of directions for the research programme's further development.

The hard core of IMT consists of three commitments from which the rest of the framework is derived. First, the VMP triad: Value, Motivation, and Purpose are irreducible, integrative primitives of human motivational experience and cultural formation. Second, the telic value postulate: a class of value exists that presents itself phenomenologically as independent of the valuing subject — telic value — and that has distinctive motivational consequences. Third, the warming model: sustained VMP configurations actively reshape the value orientations of individuals and cultures through repeated enactment, constituting a mechanism of cultural formation that operates below the level of explicit belief and narrative.

These commitments are not individually novel — each has antecedents in the literature reviewed in Sections 2 through 5. IMT's contribution is their formal integration into a unified framework, the precision with which each is defined and related to the others, and the specific theoretical architecture — particularly the eight-stage motivational continuum and the VMP configuration model — that follows from their integration.

The protective belt consists of the specific hypotheses connecting this hard core to existing empirical evidence and to the research programme outlined in Section 5.7. These hypotheses are revisable in light of evidence without abandoning the hard core: if specific empirical claims are disconfirmed, the auxiliary hypotheses can be modified while the three core commitments remain intact.

What follows is the formal articulation of IMT's architecture: the VMP configuration model, the eight-stage motivational continuum, the relationship to SDT, and the specific testable hypotheses that constitute the framework's empirical programme.

6.2 The VMP Configuration Model

The VMP configuration model holds that the motivational orientation of any individual, institution, or cultural system can be characterised in terms of the alignment between its three primitives along the intrinsic/extrinsic axis. A VMP configuration is not a property of any single primitive in isolation but of all three simultaneously: it is the pattern formed by the joint orientation of value, motivation, and purpose at any given level of analysis.

This configurational approach is methodologically significant. Much existing research treats motivational orientation as a property of a single dimension — goal content (intrinsic versus extrinsic in GCT's terms), regulatory style (autonomous versus controlled in OIT's terms), or value priority (self-transcendence versus self-enhancement in Schwartz's terms). IMT proposes that the most diagnostically powerful unit of analysis is the full VMP configuration — the simultaneous orientation of all three primitives — because the consequences of any single primitive's orientation depend on the orientation of the other two.

This can be illustrated by considering configurations in which the three primitives are not uniformly aligned. An individual or institution may exhibit intrinsic value orientation — genuinely caring about things of inherent worth — while operating with extrinsic motivation — driven by pressure, reward, and fear of failure — in service of extrinsic purpose — directed toward measurable outcomes and metric achievement. This mixed configuration — intrinsic value, extrinsic motivation, extrinsic purpose — is, IMT proposes, a characteristically modern form of moral and institutional frustration: people and organisations that care about the right things but pursue them in ways that progressively undermine the very orientations they depend on. The environmental movement's persistent tendency to adopt the communications logic — fear

appeals, crisis messaging, metric-oriented campaigns — of the very cultural paradigm it opposes provides a practical illustration of this configuration's consequences.

Conversely, an individual may exhibit extrinsic value orientation — treating worth as instrumental and quantifiable — while experiencing genuinely autonomous, self-endorsed motivation in pursuing extrinsic purposes. This configuration — extrinsic value, intrinsic motivation in OIT's sense, extrinsic purpose — is characteristic of the high-achieving professional who experiences their work as self-determined and self-expressive while pursuing goals — status, income, competitive dominance — that are extrinsic in both GCT's and IMT's terms. SDT's framework can describe the autonomous quality of the motivation and predict its relatively positive effects on wellbeing compared to controlled motivation; IMT adds the further observation that the configuration's extrinsic value and purpose orientations will, over time, warm extrinsic values through the warming mechanism, progressively reshaping the individual's value landscape in ways that may eventually undermine even the autonomous quality of the motivation itself. This is the warming model's long-range prediction: that the consequences of VMP configurations for individual and cultural wellbeing unfold over timescales that individual-level psychological research, with its characteristic short-term measurement horizons, may not capture.

The VMP configuration model therefore proposes a typology of configurations defined by the alignment pattern of the three primitives:

Full intrinsic alignment: intrinsic value orientation, telic resonance as motivational mode, intrinsic purpose as directional orientation. This configuration is IMT's account of the most flourishing and sustainable motivational state at both individual and cultural levels. It is associated, at the individual level, with the highest forms of meaning, vitality, and self-transcendent engagement, and at the cultural level with the kinds of sustained prosocial and ecological orientation documented in Sumaq Kawsay communities and partially in Nordic social models.

Full extrinsic dominance: extrinsic value orientation, controlled or reward-driven motivation, extrinsic purpose as accumulative target. This is IMT's diagnostic characterisation of the dominant configuration of late-modern capitalist cultures — not a claim about every individual within those cultures but about the institutional and communicative logic that shapes their motivational environment. It is associated with the wellbeing deficits, relational degradation, and ecological unsustainability documented in Kasser and Ryan's research programme and supported by Schwartz's cross-national data.

Mixed configurations: the range of patterns between these poles, characterised by partial alignment between the three primitives. These are the most empirically common configurations — the terrain in which most individuals and institutions actually operate — and IMT's typology provides a more fine-grained diagnostic vocabulary for understanding their specific consequences than either SDT or values research currently offers.

6.3 The Eight-Stage Motivational Continuum

IMT's most specific and formally testable theoretical proposal is the eight-stage motivational continuum, which extends SDT's OIT continuum beyond its current boundary while preserving and integrating OIT's account of the internalisation process.

The continuum is organised around the principle of increasing alignment between an individual's motivational orientation and the field of perceived telic value. At lower stages, motivation is primarily responsive to external contingencies and internal compulsions — the domain that SDT's OIT describes with great precision. At higher stages, motivation becomes progressively more responsive to perceived intrinsic

value until, at the continuum's upper end, it is fully characterised by telic resonance — the experience of being drawn by something of genuinely independent worth that makes a claim on the person.

The eight stages are as follows. We note that these stage descriptions are theoretical proposals requiring empirical operationalisation and validation, not established findings. Their formulation draws on the convergent phenomenological accounts reviewed in Sections 3 and 4 — Frankl's logotherapy, Murdoch's moral philosophy, Rosa's resonance theory, the contemplative traditions' accounts of telic motivation — and on IMT's conceptual architecture, but they have not yet been submitted to psychometric testing. The development of instruments to measure these stages is a priority of the research agenda identified in Section 5.7.

Stage 1 — External Regulation: Motivation is entirely governed by external rewards and punishments. Action is initiated and sustained by the anticipation of separable consequences — payment, recognition, sanction — and ceases when these contingencies are removed. Value is entirely extrinsic: worth is assigned by the external authority controlling the reward. Purpose is entirely extrinsic: the goal is the attainment of reward or avoidance of punishment. This is the first stage of OIT's continuum, retained intact within IMT.

Stage 2 — Introjected Regulation: External pressures have been partially internalised as internal compulsions — guilt, shame, ego-investment, contingent self-esteem. Motivation has the character of internal pressure rather than external contingency, but the regulatory process is still fundamentally controlled: the person is driven by internal imperatives that are not genuinely self-authored. Value remains primarily extrinsic — worth is assigned by the internalised authority's standards. Purpose remains extrinsic — the goal is to avoid the internal discomfort of non-compliance. This is the second stage of OIT's continuum, retained intact.

Stage 3 — Identified Regulation: The person has genuinely endorsed the value of the activity or goal — has identified it as personally important and worth pursuing. Motivation has become substantially autonomous: the person is acting from a self-endorsed choice rather than external or introjected pressure. Value is beginning to shift toward the intrinsic — the activity is valued for what it is rather than merely for its consequences. Purpose remains partly extrinsic — the goal is still a separable outcome — but one the person has genuinely chosen. This is the third stage of OIT's continuum, retained intact.

Stage 4 — Integrated Regulation: The activity and its values have been fully integrated with the person's sense of self — they express who the person is rather than what they have chosen to do. Motivation is fully autonomous in OIT's sense: there is no experienced conflict between the regulatory process and the self. Value is substantially intrinsic: the person cares about the activity for its own sake and for the expression of their authentic identity it affords. Purpose remains oriented toward outcomes the person has deeply endorsed as their own. This is the fourth stage of OIT's continuum and the limit of OIT's formal account. IMT begins its extension here.

Stage 5 — Scaffolded Value-Alignment: The person begins to experience their motivation as responsive to something beyond the self-system — a perceived value that is not merely an expression of their identity but presents itself as independently real. This experience is partial, tentative, and dependent on external scaffolding — the support of a community, a practice, a relationship, or a tradition that makes the perception of telic value accessible. The motivation has the quality of genuine pull — of being drawn toward something — but the person's capacity to sustain this orientation independently is limited. This stage represents the threshold of telic resonance and the beginning of IMT's extension beyond OIT's continuum.

Stage 6 — Internalised Value-Alignment: The capacity for telic resonance has been sufficiently developed — through sustained practice, relational embedding, and repeated encounter with telic value — that it no longer requires constant external scaffolding. The person can access and sustain the orientation toward perceived telic value with a degree of autonomy and resilience. Motivation is characterised by a stable quality of being drawn forward — toward justice, beauty, ecological integrity, truth, or whatever telic value

the person is aligned with — that is experienced as genuinely responsive to something independent rather than merely expressive of self. Purpose is increasingly intrinsic: the horizon toward which action is directed is a state of being and participation rather than a graspable target.

Stage 7 — Transcending Value-Alignment: The person's motivational orientation is characterised by what Frankl (1959) describes as genuine self-transcendence: the capacity to orient toward a telic value as the primary reference point for action, allowing this orientation to override self-protective, comfort-seeking, and accumulative motivations when they conflict with it. This stage is associated with what IMT, drawing on the kenotic tradition in Christian mystical theology and its structural parallels in Buddhist and Sufi contemplative practice, calls *kenotic cost*: the willingness to undergo significant personal cost — relinquishment, sacrifice, sustained difficulty — in service of the perceived telic value. The motivation is not masochistic — the cost is not sought for its own sake — but it is accepted as the price of genuine alignment with something of worth beyond the self. This is the stage associated with the most demanding forms of moral courage, artistic sacrifice, and contemplative commitment.

Stage 8 — Unitive Value-Alignment: The motivational distinction between self and telic value becomes, in lived experience, progressively less salient. The person experiences their motivation not as the self reaching toward something external but as a participation in the movement of value itself — what mystics across traditions describe as the dissolution of the subject-object boundary in moments of deep alignment. IMT does not claim to adjudicate the metaphysical status of this experience — whether it involves genuine contact with an independent reality or represents the deepest form of the motivational integration OIT describes — but it treats the consistent cross-cultural phenomenological report of this experience as evidence that the highest stages of motivational development involve a structural transformation in the relationship between self and value that OIT's framework cannot theorise. At this stage, value, motivation, and purpose are experienced as fully unified — not as three integrated primitives but as a single movement of alignment whose triadic structure is analytically real but phenomenologically dissolved.

6.4 IMT's Relationship to SDT — Stated with Precision

The eight-stage continuum makes the relationship between IMT and SDT more precise than any earlier formulation. Three points of relationship are important to state explicitly.

First, IMT incorporates SDT's four-stage OIT continuum intact within Stages 1 through 4. IMT does not contest OIT's account of the internalisation process; it extends it. Every finding that SDT has generated concerning the consequences of different regulatory styles for wellbeing, creativity, persistence, and relational quality remains valid and relevant within IMT's framework — applicable to the range of motivational experience that Stages 1 through 4 cover.

Second, IMT's extension — Stages 5 through 8 — does not represent a linear continuation of the same internalisation process OIT describes. It represents a qualitative shift in the character of motivation: from a process of taking external regulation progressively more fully into the self, to a process of the self becoming progressively more responsive to something perceived as genuinely beyond it. This qualitative shift is what IMT terms the transition through the self-referential limit, and it is IMT's primary theoretical contribution. Whether this shift constitutes a genuine discontinuity or a continuous development beyond Stage 4 is itself an empirical question — one that the research programme outlined in Section 5.7 is designed to investigate.

Third, IMT makes a prediction that SDT does not: that the consequences of motivational orientation for wellbeing, meaning, and cultural sustainability are not monotonically increasing across the full eight-stage continuum in the way SDT's evidence suggests they are across its four stages. Specifically, IMT predicts that Stages 5 through 7 are associated with a quality of sustained difficulty — *kenotic cost* — that temporarily reduces some wellbeing metrics that SDT's framework optimises for, while producing a

different and deeper quality of meaning and vitality that those metrics do not capture. This is a testable prediction that distinguishes IMT from SDT and from eudaimonic wellbeing frameworks that treat meaning and wellbeing as consistently positively correlated. IMT proposes that at the higher stages of telic resonance, the relationship between meaning and conventional wellbeing metrics becomes more complex — that genuine telic alignment sometimes requires the acceptance of difficulty and self-relinquishment that is not captured in current measures of flourishing. Frankl's (1959) clinical observation that meaning can sustain individuals under conditions of extreme suffering that no wellbeing framework would characterise as flourishing is the most direct empirical pointer toward this prediction.

6.5 The Dynamic Architecture: Feedback, Warming, and Cultural Formation

The VMP configuration model and the eight-stage continuum are static descriptions of motivational states. IMT's account of cultural formation requires a dynamic model — an account of how VMP configurations change over time, how they are transmitted across individuals and generations, and how dominant configurations become self-reinforcing.

The warming model, introduced in Section 2 and supported by the value activation research reviewed in Section 5, is IMT's primary dynamic mechanism. It proposes that sustained motivational orientations — the repeated enactment of particular VMP configurations in individual and institutional life — progressively strengthen the value orientations that sustain them and weaken those that oppose them. This is not merely a psychological process of habit formation, though it includes that. It is a cultural process of value reproduction through practice: the way in which institutions designed on extrinsic motivational logic — incentive systems, performance metrics, competitive assessment — progressively make extrinsic value orientations feel natural, reasonable, and self-evident to those who inhabit them, while making intrinsic orientations feel naive, impractical, or unrealistic.

IMT proposes three levels at which the warming mechanism operates:

At the *individual level*, the warming mechanism operates through the psychological processes documented in value activation research (Maio et al., 2009) and habit formation research (Wood and Neal, 2007): repeated activation of particular value-motivation-purpose configurations increases their cognitive accessibility, decreases the activation threshold for future instances, and progressively shapes the individual's sense of what is natural and what counts as common sense. At this level, the warming mechanism is relatively tractable for empirical investigation — it can be studied through experimental priming designs and longitudinal tracking of value priorities.

At the *institutional level*, the warming mechanism operates through the design of incentive structures, evaluation systems, and organisational practices that systematically reward particular VMP orientations and penalise or ignore others. Institutions whose evaluation systems are entirely metric-based — measuring success exclusively through quantifiable extrinsic outcomes — do not merely select for individuals with extrinsic orientations; they actively reshape the orientations of those within them through the sustained environmental pressure of extrinsic reward structures. This institutional-level warming is the mechanism through which cultural configurations reproduce themselves across personnel turnover: new individuals entering an extrinsically configured institution encounter an environment whose practices, incentives, and social norms progressively activate and warm extrinsic orientations regardless of the individual's prior value profile. The institution's VMP configuration is more durable than any individual's orientation because it is embedded in structural practice rather than personal psychology.

At the *cultural level*, the warming mechanism operates through the aggregate of institutional practices, communicative norms, and social arrangements that constitute the motivational environment of a culture — what IMT, drawing on the metatheory articulated in Section 1, terms the culture's operative VMP

configuration. At this level, the warming mechanism is the slowest and most difficult to study directly, but it is also the most consequential: cultural-level VMP configurations shape the motivational landscape within which all individual and institutional orientations develop, setting the parameters of what feels possible, desirable, and real. This is the level at which Kasser and Ryan's research on materialist value orientations, Schwartz's cross-national value profiles, and Common Cause's value activation research converge to provide indirect evidence for the warming mechanism's cultural-scale operation.

The dynamic architecture of IMT thus proposes a multi-level feedback system: individual VMP orientations are shaped by institutional configurations, which are shaped by cultural configurations, which are in turn reproduced by the aggregate of institutional practices and individual enactments. This is not a closed deterministic system — individuals can resist, institutions can innovate, cultures can shift — but it identifies the structural inertia against which such resistance and innovation must operate. IMT's practical contribution, developed in the companion overview paper, is to identify the specific leverage points at which deliberate intervention in this multi-level feedback system is most likely to be effective.

6.6 Testable Hypotheses

IMT generates a specific set of testable hypotheses that constitute its empirical research programme. We present these hypotheses here in the form in which they could be operationalised within existing or newly developed research designs.

Hypothesis 1 — VMP configuration coherence and wellbeing: Full intrinsic alignment — the simultaneous orientation of value, motivation, and purpose toward intrinsic poles — predicts higher levels of eudaimonic wellbeing, meaning in life, and prosocial behaviour than any mixed or extrinsic configuration, when measured as an integrated configuration rather than as independent components. This hypothesis extends Kasser and Ryan's goal contents research and Niemiec et al.'s longitudinal findings by treating the VMP triad as a unified predictor rather than studying its components separately.

Hypothesis 2 — The warming effect as causal mechanism: Prolonged exposure to institutionally embedded extrinsic VMP configurations produces measurable shifts in individual value accessibility — specifically, increased accessibility of self-enhancement values and decreased accessibility of self-transcendence values — over timescales of months to years. This hypothesis is testable through longitudinal study of individuals entering institutions with documented extrinsic VMP configurations, using Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire as the value measurement instrument at multiple time points.

Hypothesis 3 — Telic resonance as distinct motivational category: Motivational states characterised by the phenomenological features of telic resonance — experienced external sourcing, orientation toward perceived intrinsic value, association with kenotic cost — are empirically distinguishable from the highest stages of SDT's OIT continuum (integrated regulation and intrinsic motivation), and predict different outcome profiles. Specifically, IMT predicts that telic resonance is associated with higher meaning-in-life scores, greater acceptance of difficult costs in service of valued goals, and greater resilience under adversity than integrated regulation or intrinsic motivation, while being associated with lower scores on some conventional wellbeing measures — lower hedonic pleasure, lower comfort-satisfaction — than the OIT continuum's intrinsic end-states. This hypothesis requires the development of a Telic Resonance Scale as a new psychometric instrument.

Hypothesis 4 — Cultural VMP profiles and sustainability outcomes: Communities and institutions whose operative VMP configurations — measured through the aggregate of their institutional practices, incentive structures, and communicative norms — exhibit higher intrinsic alignment will show higher long-term social cohesion, ecological sustainability, and collective wellbeing than demographically matched communities and institutions with more extrinsically oriented configurations. This hypothesis requires the development of

an Institutional VMP Assessment instrument and longitudinal tracking of institutional configurations and their outcomes.

Hypothesis 5 — Value activation and VMP coherence: Communications and interventions designed with full intrinsic VMP coherence — activating intrinsic values through intrinsically motivated messengers in service of intrinsic purposes — will produce more sustained behaviour change and stronger intrinsic value warming than communications that achieve surface-level intrinsic goal framing while using extrinsic motivational logic. This hypothesis is testable through experimental communications research using the Common Cause Foundation's methodology as a starting point, extended to measure VMP coherence as a composite variable.

Hypothesis 6 — Telic accessibility and contemplative practice: Individuals who engage in sustained contemplative or reflective practices — mindfulness, contemplative prayer, nature immersion, community ritual — show higher baseline accessibility to telic resonance, as measured by a Telic Resonance Scale, than demographically matched individuals who do not engage in such practices. This hypothesis connects IMT's account of telic resonance to the growing literature on contemplative practice and wellbeing while providing IMT-specific predictions about the mechanism through which contemplative practice produces its documented effects.

6.7 IMT's Relationship to Adjacent Frameworks

A framework's theoretical identity is partly constituted by its precise relationships to adjacent frameworks — what it shares, where it diverges, and why the divergences matter. We specify IMT's relationships to the four most relevant adjacent frameworks here.

IMT and SDT: The relationship is one of extension and complementarity, as detailed in Sections 3 and 6.4. IMT incorporates SDT's four-stage OIT continuum and accepts the empirical findings of all six SDT mini-theories within their domains. It extends SDT's motivational continuum through four further stages characterised by telic resonance rather than self-referential autonomy, and adds the VMP configuration model and warming mechanism as cultural-level extensions of SDT's predominantly individual-level framework.

IMT and Logotherapy: Frankl's will to meaning is the closest single theoretical antecedent of IMT's account of intrinsic purpose and telic resonance. IMT accepts logotherapy's core phenomenological finding — that meaning is discovered rather than constructed, and that its discovery constitutes a motivational force irreducible to need-satisfaction or autonomous self-expression — while embedding it within a more formally specified theoretical architecture and connecting it to the empirical research programme that logotherapy, developed primarily through clinical observation, did not generate.

IMT and Resonance Theory: Rosa's resonance theory converges with IMT's account of telic resonance at the sociological level, providing independent theoretical support and a rich account of the cultural conditions — specifically, the dynamics of social acceleration — under which resonant world-relationships are systematically undermined. The primary difference is disciplinary and methodological: Rosa operates as a critical theorist and sociologist, developing an account of resonance as a normative ideal for social critique; IMT operates as a psychological and cultural theory, developing testable hypotheses about motivational mechanisms. The two frameworks are mutually illuminating but methodologically distinct.

IMT and Wilber's Integral Theory: Both IMT and Wilber's integral framework use the term "integral" and share a commitment to cross-domain synthesis. They are, however, distinct in scope, method, and focus. Wilber's integral theory is a comprehensive meta-framework — a "theory of everything" in the explicitly totalising sense — that maps the full range of human knowledge and experience across four quadrants, multiple levels of development, and multiple lines of development (Wilber, 2000). IMT is a focused

motivational theory: it does not claim to map the totality of human experience but to provide a theoretically rigorous account of the VMP triad as an integrative framework for understanding motivation and cultural formation. IMT is compatible with Wilber's framework — the VMP configuration model can be located within Wilber's quadrants without contradiction — but it does not depend on it and does not inherit either its scope or its contested developmental hierarchy claims.

Section 7: Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

7.1 Overview

A theoretical framework earns its place in the literature not only by the precision of its concepts and the adequacy of its evidential grounding but by the quality and specificity of the implications it generates — for research, for practice, for adjacent fields, and for the broader intellectual landscape within which it is situated. This final section draws out IMT's implications across four domains: its contribution to motivational science, its implications for cultural analysis and social change practice, its relationship to the broader philosophical tradition of integral knowing, and the honest account of its current limitations that any serious framework must provide alongside its claims.

The section is structured to move from the most specific and immediately actionable implications to the most fundamental and long-range. We begin with the research agenda — what needs to happen next in empirical terms — then address implications for practice, then situate IMT within the broader intellectual tradition that gives "integral" its deepest meaning, and finally state, without equivocation, what IMT does not yet know and cannot yet claim.

7.2 Implications for Motivational Science

IMT's most direct implication for motivational science is the proposal that the field's dominant unit of analysis — the individual motivational state, measured at a single point in time and along a single dimension — is insufficient for understanding motivation at the level of cultural formation and long-term human flourishing. The field needs, and IMT proposes, three methodological expansions.

The first is *configurational measurement*. Existing motivational research predominantly measures individual dimensions — goal content, regulatory style, need satisfaction — as separate variables and examines their independent and interactive effects. IMT proposes that the VMP configuration — the joint orientation of value, motivation, and purpose — is the theoretically appropriate unit of analysis, and that measuring its components separately without attending to their configurational relationship loses explanatory power that the integrated measure would provide. The development of a VMP Configuration Assessment instrument is accordingly a priority: a psychometric tool designed to capture not merely where on each primitive's intrinsic/extrinsic axis an individual or institution sits, but the coherence or incoherence of the three primitives' joint orientation and the specific pattern of alignment or misalignment among them.

This instrument would need to be validated against existing measures — specifically, the Aspiration Index (Kasser and Ryan, 1993), the Portrait Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, 2003), the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), and the General Causality Orientations Scale (Deci and Ryan, 1985) — to establish its convergent and discriminant validity against the constructs these instruments measure. The prediction, derivable from IMT's configurational model, is that VMP coherence — the degree of alignment among the three primitives — will predict wellbeing, meaning, and prosocial behaviour outcomes over and above what any single primitive predicts alone, and that this incremental prediction will be largest for the outcomes most dependent on sustained motivational engagement rather than momentary performance.

The second methodological expansion is *longitudinal and multi-level measurement*. IMT's warming model makes predictions that cannot be tested in the cross-sectional designs that constitute the majority of existing values and motivation research. The model proposes that sustained exposure to particular VMP configurations produces progressive shifts in value accessibility, motivational orientation, and purpose direction over timescales of months to years, and that these shifts operate at both individual and institutional levels. Testing these predictions requires longitudinal designs that track individuals and institutions across sufficient time to observe the warming effects the model proposes, and multi-level analytic approaches that can separate individual-level change from institutional-level influence.

The third expansion is *phenomenological complementarity*. As argued in Section 4, the motivational states at the higher stages of IMT's continuum — Stages 5 through 8, characterised by increasing telic resonance — are not fully accessible through third-person measurement instruments alone, because their defining features are phenomenological: the experienced quality of being drawn, the perceived independence of the value source, the specific character of kenotic cost. Micro-phenomenological interview methods (Petitmengin, 2006), experience sampling protocols that capture qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions of motivational states (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1987), and first-person report methods validated through inter-rater agreement on structural features of experience (Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, 2003) are the appropriate tools for investigating these stages. IMT's research programme is committed to integrating these phenomenological methods with standard psychometric approaches rather than treating them as alternatives.

7.3 Implications for Cultural Analysis and Social Change Practice

IMT's implications for cultural analysis and social change practice are, in several respects, more immediately actionable than its implications for academic research, because the diagnostic framework the VMP model provides does not require the completion of a full research programme to be applied. The VMP triad can be deployed as a diagnostic lens by practitioners working in any domain — organisational development, campaign design, community building, education, governance — to read the implicit motivational architecture of the systems they are working with and to identify the specific misalignments that may be undermining the outcomes they seek.

The practical diagnostic question IMT poses is: what VMP configuration is this system — this institution, this campaign, this educational practice, this governance structure — actually enacting, as distinct from the VMP configuration it claims to embody? This question is distinct from asking what the system believes, values, or intends; it is a question about the implicit motivational grammar of the system's actual practices — its incentive structures, its evaluation criteria, its communicative norms, its relational patterns. A university that articulates a mission of knowledge for the common good while evaluating its faculty exclusively through metrics of grant income, publication count, and institutional ranking is enacting an extrinsic VMP configuration regardless of its stated mission. A social change campaign that seeks to cultivate ecological care while activating fear and urgency as its primary motivational levers is enacting an extrinsic motivational logic regardless of its intrinsic purpose orientation.

The diagnostic capacity IMT provides is not merely critical — not merely a framework for identifying misalignment. It is also constructive: once the operative VMP configuration of a system is made legible, the warming model provides a principled account of what kinds of changes to institutional practice, communicative norms, and relational structures would progressively shift the configuration toward greater intrinsic alignment. The Common Cause Foundation's practical guidance on values-based communications (Crompton, 2010) provides a starting point for this constructive work at the communications level; IMT extends it to the institutional and cultural levels by providing the theoretical architecture within which communications sit as one element of a broader motivational system.

The implication for social movement strategy is particularly significant. Research on the long-term dynamics of social movements consistently finds that movements that sustain their energy and effectiveness over decades are characterised by intrinsic motivational cultures — cultures in which participation is sustained by genuine value alignment, relational depth, and orientation toward intrinsic purpose rather than by the extrinsic motivational logic of crisis, urgency, and measurable impact targets (Polletta, 2002; della Porta and Diani, 2006). IMT provides the theoretical explanation for this empirical pattern: movements whose operative VMP configuration is primarily extrinsic warm extrinsic values in their participants and communities over time, progressively undermining the intrinsic motivational base on which sustained engagement depends. Movements whose operative VMP configuration is primarily intrinsic warm intrinsic values, creating the motivational infrastructure for sustained engagement that survives the inevitable frustrations, setbacks, and timescale mismatches of long-term cultural change.

This implication does not prescribe a specific strategy for any particular movement or campaign — the appropriate form of intrinsic VMP alignment will differ across cultural contexts, historical moments, and the specific telic values at stake. What IMT provides is a principled account of why the motivational architecture of change practice matters as much as its explicit content, and a diagnostic vocabulary for identifying and addressing misalignments between the two.

7.4 The Meaning of "Integral" — Situating IMT in Its Intellectual Tradition

The term "integral" in Integral Motivation Theory carries a specific and deliberate meaning that distinguishes it from its use in other contemporary frameworks, most notably Wilber's Integral Theory. Understanding this meaning situates IMT within the intellectual tradition that gives it its deepest roots and its broadest philosophical resonance.

"Integral" in IMT's sense is drawn from the tradition of Integral Ecology — a tradition whose most significant recent expression is Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), but whose intellectual genealogy runs considerably deeper. Romano Guardini's early twentieth-century argument for a form of knowing that holds together spirit, nature, and culture in a non-reductive unity (Guardini, 1950) established the philosophical foundations. Thomas Berry's account of the universe as a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects — an account that requires the integration of scientific, phenomenological, and wisdom-based knowing to be adequately articulated (Berry, 1988) — developed the ecological dimension. *Laudato Si'* synthesised these threads in a document that has proved unusually influential across disciplinary boundaries: it argues, in terms directly relevant to IMT's project, that the ecological crisis cannot be understood or addressed without attending simultaneously to its motivational, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, and that doing so requires a mode of knowing that is integral — that holds together empirical analysis, ethical reflection, phenomenological attention, and normative wisdom without reducing any one to any other.

The resonance between this tradition and IMT's project is not superficial. *Laudato Si'*'s concept of "integral ecology" — an ecology that encompasses not merely the natural environment but the human, social, economic, and cultural environments within which natural life is embedded and from which it cannot be separated — maps directly onto IMT's account of the VMP configuration as a cultural phenomenon with ecological consequences. The encyclical's diagnosis — that the ecological crisis is inseparable from a crisis of values, motivation, and purpose in contemporary culture — is, in IMT's terms, a diagnosis of extrinsic VMP dominance at the cultural level and its consequences for both human and non-human flourishing. And its prescription — that transformation requires a change not merely of behaviour but of the deeper motivational and evaluative orientations from which behaviour flows — is precisely what IMT's theoretical framework is designed to theorise and operationalise.

"Integral" in this tradition means, most fundamentally, the refusal of reductionism in any direction — the insistence that an adequate account of any complex human or ecological phenomenon must integrate all the dimensions of knowing that the phenomenon's nature requires, without allowing any single mode to colonise the space of the others. This is the epistemological commitment articulated in Section 4: the plural epistemology that holds empirical-analytic, phenomenological, relational-ecological, and normative-interpretive knowing as co-necessary and mutually constraining modes of access to the full reality of motivational experience. "Integral" names this commitment, and IMT's use of the term signals its location within the tradition that has most rigorously developed it.

This location distinguishes IMT from Wilber's integral framework in ways that go beyond the terminological. Wilber's framework is explicitly comprehensive — a theory of everything that seeks to locate every human knowledge claim within a single four-quadrant meta-map. IMT makes no such totalising claim. It is a focused motivational theory that applies the integrative epistemological commitment to a specific domain — the understanding of human motivation and cultural formation — without claiming to map the totality of human experience. The integrative move is methodological rather than encyclopaedic: it is about how to investigate motivation adequately, not about encompassing all of knowledge within a single system.

The tradition of Integral Ecology is also distinctive in its insistence that integration is not merely an intellectual achievement but a practical and ethical one — that knowing integrally requires a quality of attention, a discipline of perception, and a moral orientation that cannot be produced by method alone. This is the tradition within which the Synaxis — the meta-aware faculty of consciousness that makes the perception of VMP configurations possible — finds its deepest resonance and its most developed practical antecedents, in the contemplative and deliberative traditions of both the Western and indigenous worlds. These dimensions of IMT's framework are developed more fully in the companion overview paper, which situates the full praxis of the Master Storytelling discipline within the intellectual and spiritual heritage of integral knowing.

7.5 Limitations of the Current Framework

Intellectual honesty requires that IMT's limitations be stated with the same clarity as its claims. We identify four principal limitations of the framework as currently developed.

The first and most significant is the *absence of dedicated empirical validation*. IMT is a theoretical proposal. Its claims are grounded in existing evidence — the convergent findings of SDT research, cross-cultural values research, logotherapy, resonance theory, and the anthropological case studies reviewed in Section 5 — but this evidential grounding is retrospective and indirect. None of the existing research was designed to test IMT as a unified framework. The specific predictions IMT makes — particularly the configurational claim that VMP coherence predicts outcomes beyond what individual components predict, the warming model's causal account of cultural value formation, and the phenomenological distinctness of telic resonance from SDT's intrinsic motivation — have not been directly tested. The research agenda outlined in Section 5.7 and the testable hypotheses specified in Section 6.6 constitute the framework's response to this limitation, but the response is prospective. IMT is offered as a framework ready for empirical development, not as an empirically validated theory.

The second limitation concerns the *operationalisation of telic resonance*. The concept of telic resonance is central to IMT's theoretical contribution and to its extension of SDT's motivational continuum. Yet it is also the concept most resistant to operationalisation within the psychometric methods that currently dominate motivational research. Its defining features — the experience of being drawn by something perceived as genuinely independent of the self-system, the quality of kenotic cost, the phenomenological dissolution of the subject-object boundary at Stage 8 — are not easily captured by self-report questionnaire items of the

kind used in mainstream motivational psychology. The neurophenomenological and micro-phenomenological methods discussed in Sections 4 and 7.2 offer more appropriate tools, but these methods are themselves at an early stage of development and have not yet produced instruments with the reliability and validity that psychometric standards require. Developing adequate measures of telic resonance is simultaneously IMT's most important methodological challenge and one of the most interesting problems it poses for the broader field.

The third limitation concerns *cultural specificity and generalisability*. IMT's VMP framework is presented as a universal account of human motivational experience — a set of primitives that appear across cultures and traditions in structurally convergent forms. The cross-cultural evidence reviewed in Section 5 provides some support for this universality claim, but the framework's conceptual development has been conducted primarily within Western intellectual traditions — philosophy, psychology, sociology — and from within a specific practitioner context in the contemporary Western world. The degree to which the specific concepts IMT employs — telic resonance, kenotic cost, the warming model — translate without remainder into non-Western cultural frameworks is an open question. The Sumaq Kawsay case study suggests structural convergence with IMT's intrinsic configuration model, but structural convergence is not the same as conceptual identity: the Quechua concept of *ayni* is not the same as telic resonance, even if both point toward similar motivational territory. IMT requires engagement with non-Western intellectual traditions — Buddhist psychology, African ubuntu philosophy, indigenous cosmovisions — on their own terms, not merely as illustrations of Western theoretical categories, if its universality claims are to be adequately grounded. This is a significant limitation of the present paper and a priority for the framework's further development.

The fourth limitation concerns the *practitioner base* from which the framework has emerged. IMT has been developed through more than two decades of applied work with organisations, campaigns, and communities in the context of social and environmental change. This practitioner base has been generative: it has provided the framework with a sensitivity to the practical consequences of VMP misalignment that purely academic development might not have produced, and it has grounded the abstract theoretical claims in the texture of lived institutional and cultural experience. But it is also a source of potential bias. Practitioner knowledge developed in the context of advocacy for social and environmental change — a context characterised by strong normative commitments to particular outcomes — is subject to confirmation biases that systematic research is designed to correct. The framework's developer is not a neutral observer of the phenomena IMT describes; they are a participant in the kind of cultural change work that IMT's diagnostic framework is designed to support. This does not invalidate the framework — many of the most productive theoretical developments in psychology and social science have originated in practitioner contexts — but it is a limitation that readers should hold alongside IMT's theoretical claims, and one that the independent empirical research programme outlined in this paper is designed to address.

7.6 A Note on the Companion Framework

The present paper has focused exclusively on establishing IMT as a theoretically defensible motivational framework with adequate empirical grounding. It has deliberately set aside several dimensions of the broader Master Storytelling framework within which IMT is embedded — specifically, the Synaxis as a meta-aware faculty of cultural perception, the Law of Value as an ontological grounding for the telic value postulate, the concept of metamodernism as the cultural sensibility most capable of deploying IMT's diagnostic tools, and the praxis of Master Storytelling as the discipline of deliberate VMP recalibration at individual, institutional, and cultural levels.

These dimensions are not peripheral to the framework's intellectual ambitions — they constitute its full scope. But they are appropriately developed in a companion overview paper (O'Brien, in preparation) rather than in the present contribution, for two reasons. First, their adequate development requires a length and

depth of argument that would overwhelm the present paper's focused theoretical contribution. Second, some of their claims — particularly the ontological claims associated with the Law of Value, and the praxis claims associated with the Synaxis and Master Storytelling — rest on forms of evidence and argument that are appropriate for the full plural epistemological treatment the companion paper provides, but that would require more defence than is compatible with the present paper's focus.

What can be said here is that the companion framework's implications are entirely consistent with IMT's theoretical claims, and that IMT's theoretical contribution is the necessary foundation for the companion framework's practical programme. The diagnostic vocabulary of VMP configurations, the motivational architecture of the eight-stage continuum, and the cultural mechanism of the warming model are the conceptual tools that make the companion framework's praxis principled rather than merely intuitive. And the companion framework's praxis — the Synaxis, the Synactic Council, the discipline of Master Storytelling — constitutes the practical research site within which IMT's testable hypotheses can be investigated in real institutional and cultural contexts, generating the kind of practice-embedded evidence that the plural epistemology articulated in Section 4 recognises as a legitimate and irreplaceable complement to experimental and psychometric research.

The relationship between the two papers is therefore one of mutual grounding: the present paper provides IMT with the theoretical rigour and empirical discipline that academic credibility requires; the companion paper provides IMT with the practical scope and the full ontological depth that the framework's ambitions demand. Together they constitute a single intellectual project whose two dimensions — the rigorously academic and the practically engaged — are not in tension but are expressions of the integrative commitment that the word "integral" in IMT's name is meant to signal.

7.7 Conclusion

Integral Motivation Theory is offered here as a theoretical framework that makes a specific and bounded contribution to the study of human motivation and cultural formation. That contribution has four components: the formal definition of the VMP triad as irreducible, integrative primitives; the extension of SDT's motivational continuum through four further stages characterised by telic resonance; the warming model as a mechanism connecting individual motivational orientations to cultural-level value formation; and the VMP configuration model as a diagnostic tool for reading the implicit motivational architecture of individuals, institutions, and cultural systems.

The framework is grounded in convergent evidence from motivational psychology, phenomenological philosophy, cross-cultural research, and the contemplative traditions — evidence reviewed in this paper with appropriate attention to its scope and its limits. It generates specific testable hypotheses that constitute an empirical research programme whose development is the framework's next necessary step. And it situates itself within an intellectual tradition — that of integral knowing in the sense the Integral Ecology tradition has most rigorously articulated — that provides its epistemological commitments with their deepest philosophical grounding.

The metacrisis — the convergence of ecological, social, and meaning-making failures in contemporary culture that has motivated this framework's development — will not be resolved by theoretical work alone. But it will not be resolved without the kind of theoretical work this paper has attempted: the rigorous articulation of what is actually happening at the level of motivation and cultural formation, the careful identification of where existing frameworks reach their limits, and the honest proposal of a new framework adequate to what those limits leave unexplained. IMT's claim is not that it resolves the metacrisis but that it makes its motivational roots legible — and that legibility, hard-won and honestly stated, is the necessary precondition for the kind of deliberate cultural recalibration on which any adequate response must ultimately depend.

