

A Unification Theory: Universal, Natural Rights

written by Jackson Pemberton | February 14, 2026

The quest for unification began sometime in ancient philosophical discussions. By our standards, they were crude: pre-Socratic thinkers like Thales (ca. 600 BCE) proposed water as the fundamental substance, while Anaximander reached for a total comprehension of all things with his indefinite “apeiron”: something eternal, qualitatively indeterminate, and extending through all space. Why we even seek for a unification theory is interesting enough. We seem to think there is always a deeper reality, and that may very well be: we may never reach an ultimate level. That is an unanswerable question. Nevertheless, Temporal Rights performs unusually well as a unifying perspective on reality by dramatically dissolving many traditional dichotomies.

This researcher was looking for a deeper source for natural rights, one that clearly connected nature and those rights. The realization that a beaver was exercising agency, permission, dominion, and authority over the tree it was felling gave birth to the Temporal Rights paradigm. Now, years later, another discovery lends its weight to the accuracy of that view. Temporal Rights dissolve many long-held dichotomies; dichotomies that are embedded in our vocabulary and, worse, in the structures of our thinking, guiding perception into the pigeon holes that have become native to us. False dichotomies are split categories whose boundaries were created due to a lack of comprehension of the underlying reality. Temporal Rights shows these are not two separate categories but two points on a common scale that appears at the existence level.

The Epistemology of Temporal Rights

First, some definitions: “temporal” is to be understood as primarily meaning secular rather than time-based. I use “operator” as a universal term for agents, “operations” as the exercise of their capabilities, and “rights” as the label for the intrinsic authority existentially demonstrated by operators through their operations

(like the beaver).

Thus, the terse definitions of a Temporal Right are:

- the existential authority of an operator to operate, or,
- the agency of an agent.

The Temporal Rights theory of natural rights is profoundly foundational, based on objectively observable phenomena in the universe. Nothing needs to be inferred, implied, or assigned; only recognized for what it is and what it represents. The epistemology is a universal, existential recognition of reality.

The Ontology of Temporal Rights

Author's Note: "TR" means "Temporal Rights" throughout the remainder of this paper.¹

Preamble: We do not experience reality directly, even though it seems so. We actually live in our perception universe, which is a limited version of reality. It's what leaks through our senses to our attention. The eye leaks only a minuscule part of a spectrum of electromagnetic energy to our comprehension. The other senses, including intuition and spiritual perception, probably exhibit the same limitations. Adding the limitations of words as vehicles of understanding further constrains our eventual comprehension.

It is easier to see the TR truth when you stop thinking and focus on watching the beaver cut down the tree. We talk about objective observation, but that is technically impossible for us humans. As soon as data from the energy and substance around us passes through our senses, reality becomes inherently subjective. This makes perception subject to prior experience and our interpretations of it. This impedes our ability to comprehend paradigm shifts, and the TR view of natural rights requires paradigm shifts. Artificial intelligence bots have the same problem: when first confronted with TR, two of them made incoherent observations and then began to hallucinate, but when they were made to realize it was an

unprecedented paradigm, they began to praise TR's contributions to understanding the universe.

I point out these things because the TR point of view can seem like an artificial or contrived view, where rights, existential authority, and intrinsic power to effect change all seem to dance around a core reality. But more importantly we have a tendency to see things as opposites, which casts them as contending forces. This is similar to AI's flawed view.

There is a better way to view life, and I hope that the following discussion will reveal this. The simple truth is that we can paradigmatically change our minds to view the inevitable conflicts positively. Instead of agonizing each "problem" up close—fixating on apparent dysfunctions—we can adopt the longer view that TR reveals.

Consider the opposing flows of nutrients and waste products across a cell membrane: at the microscopic level, this domain is awash in opposing, conflicting capabilities of the various operators at the membrane. But the result is the essence of life, of a beautiful symbiosis produced precisely from that conflict. A courtroom can look like hardcore conflict, and rightly so, but the longer view reveals a methodology of resolution leading to harmony and freedom to grow. All this requires is a change of paradigm, a shift in perspective, a change of mind.

My goal for Temporal Rights is a happier world based on patience and humility, waiting for the inevitable resolution that time and nature are forced to deliver. Not just waiting, of course, but always moving forward wherever opportunity affords.



Ontology: The ontology of TR is elegantly simple: it shows that rights are not arbitrarily attached or inferred, but demonstrated intrinsic, existential authority. It recognizes that every entity in the universe has natural rights to exercise its capabilities. For example, when you watch a beaver cutting down a tree, you see that it *possesses* and *exercises* dominion, agency, prerogative, privilege, authority, power, license, permission, and consent. There is no better label for this existential display of agency and authority than “natural rights”. Every operator in the universe with the capability to effect change (or prevent it) is inherently authorized to exercise that capability. This is an unprecedented paradigm shift from traditional natural rights theories, which inferred and attributed them.

That the beaver is destroying the tree makes its operation also a *moral* event. The fact that capabilities demonstrate rights is the structural link grounding physics and morality as a single structure seen from two different semantic contexts. This is also a profound ethics paradigm shift.

[John Locke and Thomas Hobbes](#) came remarkably close to this insight. Had they extended their analysis beyond human rights to all entities with capabilities, they surely would have discovered TR. These natural rights, founded on naked reality, are ubiquitous, appearing everywhere we can find an agent of change, or one that slows or prevents change. Just as a fish doesn't realize it is wet, Locke and

Hobbes did not recognize what was everywhere they looked.

It is also worth noting that TR rights are inherent and intrinsic and therefore inalienable in a more primordial way than any previous grounding of natural rights.

Domains: Each operator has a domain of influence, but most space contains the overlapping domains of multiple operators. This means that changes occurring anywhere (and everywhere) are the result of the concurrent exercise of the capabilities of operators, which makes every change a resolution of the comingling of the exercise of the rights of the operators. This observation demonstrates that the universe is a moral machine incessantly resolving multiple, colliding rights (capabilities). This can seem like the law of the jungle operating everywhere, and indeed, one may see it in that light. However, there is another, more revealing view.

Apparently, nature is demonstrating that higher orders of agents have rights superior to those of lower orders. Animals consume plants, and plants consume sunlight and soil. Here we can also mistakenly cast this as a war for existence, or we can cast it as the balance of nature, or better still, as the universal ascendancy of existence through ordered dependency, wherein each operator's authority is exercised within, and limited by, the prior conditions that make its operation effectual. Those conditions are determined by the operations of other operators in their coincident domains, so that authority and limitation are generated simultaneously by existence itself rather than imposed by moral decree. There is no need for an abstract principle floating over and somehow arranging things. This is just the pure reality of capabilities and their intrinsic rights mingling in symbiosis and inhibition.

The balance of nature is a permission structure imposed by the limitations operators place on one another. Even at the atomic level, stability does not arise from opposition but from the constraints imposed by permissible states, illustrating that

existence is sustained by ordered dependency rather than conflict. Another foundational insight from TR.

Morality: TR ethics are not inferred but demonstrated. The exercise of rights—authority intrinsic to an entity's capabilities—necessarily constrains the exercise of authority by other entities. But the beaver was killing the tree to protect and nourish his family. This view sees moral events like a "food chain" where operators build survival and progress.

A moral event, as used here, does not imply moral responsibility or culpability. It denotes an interaction in which the exercise of one operator's capabilities necessarily constrains or terminates the capabilities of another. Moral responsibility arises only in agents capable of reflective choice; moral events occur wherever operators interact.

Neither should moral events be misconstrued as a war between operators. It is no more a war than the reciprocal flows of waste and nutrients across the membrane separating a blood vessel from a cell, where interaction, limitation, and dependence are constitutive of life itself. Taken all together, we see a universe inexorably moving toward higher forms, denser information, and negentropy. This is not war, but resolution and accommodation. The realization that the universe exhibits itself as an ethics machine is another paradigm shift coming from the TR framework of natural rights.

The Temporal Rights Unification Function

Typically, physical unification has been along a force or capability axis. Maxwell unified magnetism and electromagnetism; current physical research is looking to unify atomic and subatomic phenomena. The search is for an underlying principle that can explain how various demonstrations of natural processes arise from a single principle.

However, the TR approach to unification is not along an axis of force or capabilities, but along a perpendicular axis: viz. agency.

Agency cuts across all the laws of nature, of existence. Whenever a collision occurs between a law of nature and the agency of its operators, agency always wins. But in that process, it ties them all together. Indeed, the laws of nature are descriptions of capability accommodations.

A simple dependency statement demonstrates that operators exist at a more fundamental level, viz. you can have an operator without force capability, but you cannot have force capability without an operator.

No deeper unification is conceivable because agency is the primordial feature of existence itself: to be is to operate with authority. Physics' TOE, even if achieved, would describe *how* operators interact but not *why* those interactions carry intrinsic moral weight or hierarchical value. TR bridges that ontologically, making it ultimate, secular, observable, irrefutable, and extensible to every domain without excluding anything.

Agency unification is accomplished by simply recognizing the exercise of natural rights as agency: this is an abstraction suited to alignment on an abstract agency axis, where unification becomes existentially apparent.

TR enforces paradigm shifts that reveal more fundamental views of the universe, and those perspectives in turn afford a unification also more primordial. This could have been expected because force (previous unification theory) is dependent on the agency of operators, which are therefore an existential layer more foundational.

Agential Unification: Unifying Dichotomies, Merging Silos

TR exposes historic, supposedly fundamental distinctions as false dichotomies. By dissolving these artificial boundaries, it reveals what centuries of philosophy sought for: the unification of the principles of the physical, moral, religious, and human universes into a single, coherent framework. The following dichotomies are

dissolved:

Conflict & Harmony

Love & Hate

Intelligence & Agency

Individual & Collective

Positive & Negative Rights

I Have a Right to Freedom

Thermodynamics & Authority

Sacred & Secular

Physics & Ethics: (This has already been described above under the [Morality](#) heading.)

Human Exceptionalism & Metaphysical Privilege

Living & Non-living

Normative & Prescriptive, aka "Is" & "ought"

Society & Nature

Victim & Perpetrator: Innocent & Guilty

Nihilism & Moral Realism

Eastern & Western Thought

Conflict & Harmony: These are not the opposites that we have been taught. They are the symptoms of progress. Every lever of progress requires a fulcrum, every wheel of progress needs traction. Harmony leverages conflict to move forward. Harmony and conflict have been perceived as static states while nature demonstrates them as coincident activities, the overlapping operations of symbiotic agents in a common domain where the tension of conflict facilitates progress.

The TR perspective validates the law of the jungle, showing that TR is an honest view. Meanwhile, the law of the jungle converts solar energy, water, soil, and grass into elephants and primates. These are extremely complex but existentially higher states. The balance of nature is not wholly balanced; it leans toward progress. In a raw physics vocabulary, it [leverages entropy to create negentropy](#).

[←This link will work once that paper is published.]

Because this discussion of conflict and harmony is a foundational one, we are going to discuss this further. This beautiful, natural, symbiotic dance will set up a framework upon which the resolutions of dichotomies may be placed. False dichotomies imply conflict where harmony could reign.

In the astrophysical domain, gravity gives larger masses (operators) the capability to draw in and absorb smaller operators. But as these masses fall, their already existent angular momentum causes them to spin faster (similar to water spinning at a bathtub drain), creating a resistance to being consumed by the larger mass. Some masses will be consumed, while others will become orbiting bodies in a stable, higher-order structure.

In the chemical realm, plant respiration and decomposition by decay and various creatures feeding on plants, release carbon dioxide that was captured during growth, while decomposition and so-called “waste products” are not wasted but enrich and create new soil. Meanwhile, these processes increase CO₂ levels, which allows plants to grow faster and more vigorously. This symbiosis creates a balancing dynamic that tends toward stability. The resulting biomass becomes a “battery” where solar energy is stored as coal and oil, which in turn provides the human population with the energy to flourish.

In the biological domain, pioneering operators such as lichens and mosses violate the property rights of stone operators, breaking them down. Yet their own waste products alter their domains, making it more suitable for other operators to enter with their capabilities. The eventual climax forest has orders of magnitude more biomass, more order, and more biodiversity than its antecedent rocks. The whole of it demonstrates the universe’s inexorable ordering and moral progress, i.e. the progress needed to create an environment suitable for the highest forms of life. This was the process that terraformed Earth.

Each operator exhibits intelligence (See the next dichotomy)

sufficient for its needs, intrinsically “choosing” to act even while being severely acted upon, and yet the outcomes of this apparent conflict nurture progress. This is not war; it is cooperative leveraging and symbiosis. This grand system is baked into the nature of nature. As human beings, we can support and even accelerate this process by the application of love: that force that never forces anything. Love gives us the highest capability available in the universe, for by love we can nourish and build relationships, families, and joy.

Love & Hate: We perceive these as polar opposites, but both are exhibited by the choices made by a single operator using a single capability. Hate is more than the absence of love, but both are revealed in the exercise of a capability. You know how to “turn on your heart light” (“Heartlight”, Neil Diamond, 1982), and that makes loving and hating a choice. At least the higher animals experience similar capabilities.

Intelligence & Agency: Intelligence is the capacity to process information and respond appropriately, and this is found all along a spectrum from the simplest entity to the most complex, the human being. The human operator senses conditions and exercises his agency (rights or capabilities) in response. The beaver does the same. Trees are not usually thought to have intelligence, yet they respond in ways that augment their growth and stability, intelligently sending branches into lighted space. We might object and say that it just does this naturally because that space’s available light stimulates growth. The TR paradigm would respond: “You’re catching on!”

The intelligence of a tree is found at a rather primitive level, and that is exactly what the TR framework identifies. This unifies agency and intelligence by grounding them on the same basis. I want to protect the human species with the highest possible recognition, so I am going to elaborate a bit here.

As we move down the spectrum of intelligence, there is no magical threshold where “intelligence” suddenly disappears—only decreasing sophistication in information processing. This reframes human dignity by identifying the human race as the most information-dense, organizationally complex system in the known universe, with correspondingly sophisticated capabilities and therefore with the most powerful natural rights. We are largely comfortable with the fact that we terminate the life of virtually everything we eat, and that is because we are at the top of the intelligence and complexity hierarchy.

Furthermore, TR does not deny the existence of God. If anything, it supports that belief by demonstrating that the universe is tending to produce higher and higher forms of intelligent life.

Individual & Collective: This is not a clear dichotomy in today’s politics but a conflation that grants collectives equality, or notably, in communist and socialist contexts, higher moral value. Those political theories say that because a collective includes more than one individual, it is more important and has therefore more moral weight.

TR proves that collectives have no natural rights because they have no self-existence but are abstractions. But abstractions can’t have natural rights. A simple dependency statement proves this fact:

You can have a person without a collective, but you cannot have a collective without a person.

Thus, the individual is logically prior and more fundamental than a collective. So ascribing rights to a collective puts the two improperly on the same political and moral plane. In other words, because a society has no self-existence, it has no self-capabilities or natural rights. When a collective interfaces with an individual, it does so via another individual. Society cannot think, read, write, claim, dismiss, or do anything of itself. It always “speaks” through the individuals in control. Therefore, granting rights to a

collective only gives it entitlements. It is those in control who receive the power to enhance their control and extortion.

Several freedom-loving societies have attempted to implement collective ideas, except that they based them on love rather than coercion. From the records of these attempts, it appears that they might have succeeded if there had been enough love: if the focus could have remained on service to others as opposed to service of self. TR predicts the outcomes of both regimes given their opposite foundations. This is particularly evident in the hierarchy of the [AIMM](#).

(It is noteworthy that legislation granting ~~rights~~ entitlements to a class of citizens is both inherently discriminatory and destructive of individual natural rights. In the world of TR, [the individual is paramount](#).)

Positive & Negative Rights: TR demonstrates that all natural rights are purely negative. They do not demand anything from other operators. They do need some freedom in their domains to be able to exercise their operations, but even if we frame that as a demand, it requires nothing of other operators except recognition of the boundaries of their domains.

I Have a Right to Freedom: This is not a dichotomy, but it is a frequent philosophical conflation of rights and states/conditions. Properly expressed, this conflation must be “dichotomized” because freedom is the state in which rights can be exercised without restriction. But freedom can be absent while rights (capacities) remain. It is vital to the preservation of rights and of freedom that they are not intermingled willy-nilly. The conflation produces trouble via the cobra effect.

Communism and its various varieties leverage this conflation by claiming, among other false claims, “I have a right to freedom from X”. This reframing of rights presents them as positive, creating a burden on other operators. Then this burden is placed on the

governmental operator, which responds with various centralized laws and programs that enforce some version of “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” which is the underlying principle of these political theories.

Thermodynamics & Authority: Thermodynamics is a category of physical, mechanistic laws governing energy. While authority is an abstract idea about dominion and exerted control, it is demonstrated in the exercise of TR, which recognizes both of these at the same existential base of reality. There is a thermodynamic signature at the micro-scale: lower operators assert dominion through dispersal or disorganization, creating an increase in entropy. The capability to *do* this *is* existential authority in action, and the capability of higher operators, like living ones, to *undo* this, to organize things, is also an existential authority. There’s no dichotomy; thermodynamic “law” is measurable, sovereign, and enforced by the exercise of natural rights. Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington’s intuition was profoundly correct – the second law reigns supreme in our universe.

This unification of nature’s most fundamental law with existential authority proves TR’s veracity—and confirms that the insight revealed by the beaver at the tree was cosmologically correct from the moment the first chip fell.

Sacred & Secular: Although based on observable physical reality, TR is compatible with both religious and secular worldviews. It neither affirms nor denies theological claims. Religious believers may see TR as revealing how God embedded moral threads in the fabric of creation itself, providing evidence that reality is fundamentally ordered by divine intention. Atheists may see it as demonstrating that morality emerges naturally without divine intervention and that they can be moral agents without God. The TR perspective allows both commonly held views.

More importantly, TR dissolves the sacred/secular dichotomy: if

physical reality and moral reality are two perspectives on the same phenomenon, then the natural world and divine order cannot be separate realms—they must be one and the same. Perhaps the realization that they are both on the same playing field can foster greater mutual respect between communities that have long seen themselves as opponents.

Some religious believers will object that TR mechanizes human beings and reduces them to mere machines. But TR does the opposite; it recognizes a progression of intelligence and agency and puts their God at the top. The [AIMM's hierarchical dependency stack](#) of natural rights explicitly acknowledges that humans possess capabilities (bonding, nourishing, optimizing, peak actualization) far beyond simple mechanical systems. In this framework, God represents the highest expression of capability and authority—and if God is real, His existence unifies sacred truth and secular fact.

Physics & Ethics: This unification of physics and morality was treated earlier in this paper under the heading [Morality](#).

Human Exceptionalism & Metaphysical Privilege: Traditional philosophy and theology have long granted humans a special metaphysical status—a privileged position in the cosmic hierarchy based on qualities like rationality, soul, divine image, or moral agency. This “human exceptionalism” claims we are fundamentally different in *kind* from other entities. Free will, moral agency, the inherent value of human life have been cited in support.

TR clarifies this framework by revealing that what makes humans special is not metaphysical but physical privilege demonstrated by our organizational complexity. Humans aren't categorically different from beavers, trees, or rocks—we're at the far end of a continuous spectrum of information density and capability sophistication.

Some will say that this degrades the human species and makes it just a higher animal. This ignores the fact that these considerations are relative to the human being, who is recognized at the apex of all

operators. The TR view does not degrade humans, it elevates animals.

Living & Non-living: Traditional biology draws a line between life and non-life based on criteria like metabolism, reproduction, and response to stimuli. But each criterion either includes things we don't want to call alive or excludes things we do. Where exactly does "life" begin? Viruses? Prions? Self-organizing chemical systems?

This is a false dichotomy. There's only a continuous gradient of information density and organizational sophistication. "Life" is a useful linguistic convenience for systems above a certain complexity threshold, but the universe doesn't actually have a line there. A bacterium is vastly more complex than a rock, but both operate under the same principles of capability and authority. It's all physics.

Normative & Prescriptive, aka "Is" & "ought": Philosophy has long struggled with Hume's observation that you cannot derive "ought" statements from "is" statements—normative claims from descriptive facts. In other words, we cannot extract a moral obligation (ought) from a statement of what is. We certainly have sensibilities about this: a need to comfort an injured child, but there is no logical necessity, only an emotional one. This creates an unbridgeable chasm: no matter how completely we describe physical reality, we seemingly cannot derive what we *should* do from what simply *is*.

Temporal Rights dissolves Hume's gap through the dependency stack. That hierarchy isn't arbitrary—it reflects observable prerequisite relationships in nature, e.g. you *cannot* metabolize without existing. This is not a normative issue; it's a physical fact. However, this fact reveals a normative principle: violations at higher capability levels do greater harm because they destroy more capabilities.

So "ought" emerges naturally from "is" because capability loss is measurable, and greater capability loss is objectively worse. The connection between them is intrinsic.

Society & Nature: We typically think of human society as existing in some special cultural realm, transcending mere physics. But this too is a false dichotomy. The TR framework recognizes that our laws, institutions, and moral debates are particular patterns of rights-mingling among complex agents. A courtroom doesn't transcend physics; it is natural law resolving conflicting rights by symbiosis, where linguistic creatures cooperate.

Simultaneously, the framework brings the universe to life. What was dead matter is infused with agency. The tree resisting the beaver, the rock robustly defending its property rights, the star asserting gravitational authority – these are exercises of capability and authority, not metaphors. The universe looks more like an organism whose cells are the ubiquitous operators.

Victim & Perpetrator: Innocent & Guilty: These two dichotomies are actually different from one another, but related closely enough to yield to a common dissolution. Jurisprudence cannot be even-handed while seeing crime under these lights. Present laws seek to address these dichotomies, but they do so somewhat obliquely. The TR view sees that both parties' rights are in play, and in a significant percentage of cases, there needs to be a sentence for each party. Collisions between demonstrators and police often produce such scenarios.

Nihilism & Moral Realism: TR demonstrates that the physical universe is infused with intrinsic authority. And that authority demonstrates an ethics that rejects a meaningless, amoral universe of mere cause and effect. This dissolves the dichotomy of valueless conflict vs. inherent meaning.

Eastern & Western Thought: TR shows us that both of these lack what the other has; that a correct view of the universe is recognition that the fundamental entities (operators) are separate but linked in an existential dance where both the freedom of individuals and harmony between them unite in the inexorably moral dance of

progression. In other words, both individuality and harmony require constant, balanced nourishment for maximum flourishing. This principle applies to humans, ecosystems, and chemical reactions.

Powerful, Simple, Beautiful, Temporal Rights

TR finds its most powerful vindication (if it needed any) not by argument alone, but by its quiet, sweeping power to dissolve the very divides that have fragmented human thought. Pressing them down onto the substrate of reality, TR demonstrates that dichotomies are not separate categories but points on a continuous scale or spectrum, and reveals conflated principles that have led to flawed perspectives that have impeded progress. TR reveals continuity—rooted in the single, self-evident truth that existence itself demonstrates authority.

TR almost puts the observer inside reality, letting him see the universe from the inside out for a change. Perhaps new discoveries await those who crawl inside this vehicle of comprehension and see every subatomic particle/energy capsule as an operator with natural rights to exercise its capabilities.

TR addresses complexity and chaos and converts them into natural symbiotic operators forming an ethical engine that drives the universe toward higher and higher states. It gives us a view of existence that swallows nihilism by breathing life and intelligence into all things, and reveals beautiful order, coordination, and progress without compulsion.

TR is not merely accurate; it is beautiful. Like the cleanest code or the deepest theorem, it achieves vast integrative force with austere simplicity. It vindicates itself by showing reality to be more coherent, more purposeful, more alive than we dared imagine—an ubiquitous unity humming beneath every surface.

And we are not outsiders to this order. As operators of the highest earthly scope, we are invited to accelerate it—not by force, but by love, the capability that honors without overriding, lifting the

operators in our domain toward ever-richer expression and ever-widening domains. In seeing pure existence, we glimpse its beauty—and our own place within it. It reveals that the universe will produce Gods if it has not already done so, not in imaginations but in some kind of cold, hard, reality: a living, breathing, warm, exciting, intelligent, and loving apex operator worthy of the adoration that will lead us to follow Him.

¹The Temporal Rights employed here are developed formally in *Jackson Pemberton, "Existence & Natural Rights: Locke, Hobbes, and Moral Rights,"* and the forthcoming *"Entropy: the Physics of Natural Rights and Ethics"* SSRN (2026). The present paper applies that grounding to demonstrate the unification of a number of traditional false dichotomies.