

Frame Conflation: Anatomy of Debates That Need Not Have Been Held

Anselm of Aosta in 1078 proposed a single argument meant to prove the existence of God. A thousand years later the argument still fascinates philosophers split roughly evenly between believers and unbelievers. The reason is not in the argument — it is in that the argument poses its question in a form that does not allow an answer to be formulated within its own rules. This is the structure of a wide class of debates that the public sphere conducts without resolution.

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I. ANSELM AT BEC

In the winter of 1077 or in early 1078, Anselm of Aosta, then prior of the Benedictine monastery of Bec in Normandy, wrote a short treatise that entered the history of Western thought under the title *Proslogion*¹. Anselm was about forty-five, the monastery at Bec was one of the most significant intellectual centers of contemporary Latin Europe, and its prior was known for both his piety and his systematic thinking. The *Proslogion* followed an earlier work, the *Monologion*, and was meant by Anselm to replace its extensive argumentative structure with a single argument that would on its own demonstrate the existence of God and his attributes.

This ambition is decisive for understanding the text. Anselm is not seeking theological meditation or prayerful contemplation as an end. He is looking for *unum argumentum* — a single argument² that would be logically self-contained and sufficient on its own. The decision is structural in nature: Anselm wants to move from the tradition of faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*, as he calls his thinking in the subtitle) to a tradition of demonstration that would stand on firm logical foundations and hold up before any reader.

The text of the *Proslogion* is formally a prayer. It begins with an invocation of God, with a request for guidance, and moves in the rhythm of a meditation addressed to the very addressee whose existence the text intends to prove. *Domine Deus meus, doce cor meum ubi et quomodo te quaerat* — Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek you. The passage is a classic contemplative formula that could stand in any monastic text from the eleventh century.

In the second chapter the text changes genre. Anselm introduces the formulation that will become one of the most cited phrases in European philosophy: God is *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* — that than which nothing greater can be conceived³. From this definition he infers that if such a thing existed only in the intellect (*in intellectu solo*) and not also in reality (*in re*), it would not be the greatest conceivable, because we could conceive of something greater — namely, the same thing existing also in reality. This contradicts the definition. Therefore: God must exist also in reality. *Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re* — there exists therefore beyond doubt something than which nothing greater can be conceived, both in the intellect and in reality.

Anselm's argument provoked an immediate response. The monk Gaunilo of Marmoutier wrote *Liber pro insipiente* (On Behalf of the Fool)⁴, in which he objected: by the same logic one could prove the existence of a perfect island, a perfect dragon, a perfect anything. Anselm replied that the argument works only for the concept of maximal greatness, not for arbitrary concepts with the attribute of perfection. This exchange became the paradigm of a logical dispute in which both participants regard themselves as having resolved it, mutually excluding each other, and that continues a thousand years later in different guises.

Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1274) rejected Anselm's argument⁵, not because he held it invalid, but because, in his view, the move from a concept to existence in reality cannot be performed by reason that has access only to concepts. The argument is, according to Thomas, *a priori*, but proving exis-

tence requires an *a posteriori* procedure — from the reality that can be observed to its cause. Thomas's *quinque viae* (the five ways) is therefore a response that axiomatically replaces Anselm's strategy with another.

Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) carried out a critique that is still cited today⁶: existence is not a predicate. If I say that a given object has property X, I say nothing about whether it exists. Existence is the positing of a concept against reality, not another property within the concept. Anselm's argument presupposes that "existing" is a property that can be part of a concept, like "great" or "good" — and Kant shows that this is a categorial confusion.

A thousand years later, in 1974, Alvin Plantinga, in *The Nature of Necessity*⁷, renewed the ontological argument within modal logic. Plantinga introduces the concept of a maximally great being and operates with the axioms of modal logic in the system S5. The argument runs structurally as follows: if it is possible that a maximally great being exists (i.e., it exists in at least one possible world), and if maximal greatness entails necessary existence (existence in all possible worlds), then a maximally great being exists also in this world. Plantinga's treatment is technically more polished than Anselm's, draws on the conceptual apparatus of Saul Kripke and modern modal logic, and in respect of formal validity is difficult to attack without attacking the axioms of S5.

And yet Plantinga himself wrote of the argument: it does not prove that the existence of God is true; it proves only that it is rationally acceptable, if we accept its first premise⁸. This is structurally the same position Thomas held seven centuries earlier: an argument can be formally valid and still lack the force it claims. The premise "it is possible that a maximally great being exists" is not self-evident; it is a statement of faith in the guise of logic.

A thousand years of the history of this argument — from Anselm through Thomas, Duns Scotus, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Plantinga, up to contemporary modal treatments by authors such as Joshua Rasmussen or Robert Maydole — has one remarkable property: its power to fascinate remains, while its demonstrative force has never been confirmed. Philosophers who hold it to be central are split roughly evenly between believers and unbelievers⁹. The argument therefore attracts attention independently of the worldview it is supposed to support. This is a structural fact that says something not about the argument itself but about the nature of what is taking place in it.

A hypothesis: the ontological argument fascinates for a thousand years because it is the paradigmatic case of frame conflation. A logical apparatus attempts in it a task that the apparatus by its nature cannot reach, and this attempt-not-attempt situation is intellectually attractive because it reflects the structural nature of a wide class of public-sphere debates. Anselm at Bec is not a curiosity of the history of philosophy. It is a schema whose various instances appear in the modern era in debates about science and faith, mind and brain, law and morality, facts and values. These debates are structurally unresolvable, not because they have no answer, but because they pose the question in a form that does not allow an answer to be formulated within their own rules. None of them will be resolved here. What follows is a tool — a diagnostic apparatus by which to recognize into which of three categories the debate one is part of belongs.

II. WHAT A FRAME IS

The term *frame* is used in current academic literature in several different senses. In Erving Goffman's sociology¹⁰, a frame denotes the set of expectations that structure the interpretation of a social situation. In the cognitive psychology of Tversky and Kahneman¹¹, a frame denotes the way a problem is presented, which influences decision-making. In George Lakoff's political science¹², a frame denotes the metaphorical structure that shapes the perception of political topics. In the narrower, methodological sense that framework analysis needs, a frame is the set of rules for what can be meaningfully claimed within a given discourse and how a claim within it is verified.

The definition has three components:

Component 1: What can be claimed. A frame determines which categories of claims are legitimate within it. In the physical frame, claims about causal connections among observable phenomena are legitimate; claims about the meaning of those phenomena are not. In the ethical frame, claims about what ought and ought not to be done are legitimate; claims about what physically precedes what are not (though they may be relevant as background). In the mathematical frame, claims about the relations of formal objects are legitimate; claims about their existence in the empirical world are not.

Component 2: How a claim is verified. Each frame has its own verification standards. A physical claim is verified empirically and reproducibly. A mathematical claim is verified by deduction from axioms. A legal claim is verified by a court's decision based on legal sources. An ethical claim is verified (differently in different schools, but typically) by intuitive accord with moral tradition, by coherence with other ethical judgments, or by argument from first principles. An aesthetic claim is verified by the agreement of competent observers, by intersubjective validation, or by formal analysis of the work. If someone applies to a physical claim a verification standard from ethics ("ought the electron to have a charge?"), they generate nonsense, not falsehood. The question itself cannot be posed within the frame of physics.

Component 3: Relations among frames. Frames are not independent entities in nature; they are historically constituted sets of rules that may overlap, support one another, and conflict. Physics historically separated from metaphysics in the seventeenth century (Galileo, Newton); biology from natural theology in the nineteenth (Darwin); psychology from philosophy in the nineteenth (Wundt). These separations were specific historical events, not necessary logical states of affairs. A claim about a frame is therefore not absolute; it is relative to the present state of epistemic work.

For working with frames it is useful to distinguish several prototypical ones:

The physical frame. Operates with magnitudes (time, space, matter, energy, charge) and their relations described by mathematical structures. Verification standard: empirical observation, reproducibility, prediction. The most documented case of successful frame work in the history of human epistemology.

The logico-mathematical frame. Operates with formal objects and their relations. Verification standard: deductive proof from axioms. Claims in this frame do not have truth about the world; they have truth about themselves — that is, about the relations within the formal system.

The metaphysical frame. Operates with questions about the nature of being, cause, meaning, totality. Verification standard: arguments from first principles, coherence, phenomenological adequacy. Claims in this frame exceed empirical verifiability and are not reducible to physical claims.

The ethical frame. Operates with questions about what is right and wrong, good and evil, obligatory and forbidden. Verification standard: intuitive accord, coherence, argument from first principles, tradition. Claims in this frame cannot be derived from empirical description (Hume's guillotine: from "is" one cannot derive "ought")¹³.

The aesthetic frame. Operates with questions about beauty, form, composition, the value of an artwork. Verification standard: intersubjective agreement of competent observers, formal analysis, historical tradition. Claims in this frame are not reducible to empirical descriptions of the physical substance of the work.

The legal frame. Operates with questions about what is in accord with the legal order or in conflict with it. Verification standard: a court's decision based on legal sources, legal argument, interpretation. Claims in this frame are reducible neither to facts (which the court ascertains) nor to morality (which is separate from law, even if it enters into dialogue with it).

The theological frame. Operates with questions about God, the sacred, the meaning of existence, eschatology. Verification standard: revelation (however understood), tradition, coherence with the whole of faith, phenomenological adequacy of spiritual experience. Claims in this frame exceed physical verifiability and are not reducible to metaphysics in the strict sense (theology accepts specific data that metaphysics does not have).

The list is neither exhaustive (phenomenology, hermeneutics, the social sciences are missing), nor unproblematic (the relations between ethics and metaphysics, theology and metaphysics, law and ethics are the subject of long disputes). It serves as a working map: each of the frames has its own internal rules and its own verification standards, and these rules cannot be automatically transferred from one frame to another.

The key consequence: a debate that takes place across frames without awareness of this asymmetry is structurally unresolvable, not because the participants are insufficiently informed or illogical, but because each is answering, in their own frame, a question posed in another. The question "is it true?" has a different meaning in each of the frames, and the answers are not comparable until a context is unified in which "true" means the same thing.

III. THREE TYPES OF CONFLATION

Frame conflation does not have a single mechanism. At least three types can be distinguished, which in practice overlap but which are diagnostically useful to keep apart.

Type 1: Modal conflation. The attempt to derive from the modality of one frame the modality of another, where the rules of conversion between them are not established. Modality is, in logic, a technical term denoting the manner of existence of a claim (possible, necessary, contingent, impossible). The classical example of modal conflation is the derivation of *metaphysical* necessity from *logical* possibility.

In Anselm's argument (and in its Plantingian modal version) this transition runs as follows: if it is *logically* possible that a maximally great being exists, then in *metaphysical* reality this being exists (because its definitional property is necessary existence). Logical possibility and metaphysical existence are, however, two different things. Logical possibility means only that the concept is not internally contradictory; it says nothing about whether anything in reality corresponds to it. Metaphysical existence means that the entity in question is part of what actually exists. The transition from the first to the second requires a bridge that logic itself cannot supply¹⁴.

Type 2: Level conflation. The attempt to derive from a claim in one frame a claim about another level of reality that lies outside the reach of the given frame. The classical example is reductionism, which from a physical description wants to derive a metaphysical thesis (only matter exists), or, conversely, expansionism, which from a metaphysical thesis wants to derive a physical fact (God exists, therefore the physical laws are his intent).

Level conflation is especially common in debates of the science-vs.-faith type, where the physical description of the origin of the universe (the Big Bang) is read either as evidence of the nonexistence of God (the atheist version of level conflation) or as evidence of the existence of God (the apologetic version of level conflation). Both variants make the same categorial leap: from a physical description of *how* the universe evolved, they draw a metaphysical conclusion *about why* anything exists. The questions "how" and "why" lie in different frames, and a physical answer to the first does not yield a metaphysical answer to the second¹⁵.

Type 3: Methodological conflation. The attempt to apply the verification standards of one frame within another frame. This is in the modern era the most common form of conflation, because the scientific method achieved in the twentieth century an epistemic prestige that presents it as universal. Many debates about ethics, meaning, beauty, and faith are formulated such that they implicitly adopt the scientific verification standard ("prove it") and apply it in frames where that standard makes no sense.

A classical example: the demand for "scientific proof of God" is methodological conflation. The claim "God exists" is in the theological frame, which operates with revelation, tradition, and spiritual experience; the scientific frame, which operates with empirical reproducibility, can in principle neither con-

firm nor refute it. The demand "prove it to me scientifically" is therefore structurally analogous to the demand "solve this equation for me using the periodic table" — a substitution of an instrument for a topic the instrument is not adapted to address.

Symmetrically, the demand for "moral legitimation" of a scientific finding is methodological conflation from the opposite direction. The claim "the electron has an elementary charge of 1.602×10^{-18} coulomb" is in the physical frame, which operates with measurement; the ethical frame, which operates with moral intuitions and tradition, has no instrument to evaluate it. The demand "show me morally why the electron should have just this charge" is nonsense for the same reasons, though in the opposite direction.

These three types — modal, level, methodological — typically appear together in practice. Anselm's argument carries out all three: the modal (from possibility to necessity), the level (from concept to existence), the methodological (proof by logical apparatus within a frame that does not allow proof of this type). Plantinga's treatment is technically more polished but structurally does the same.

A parallel in a technical context comes from the alignment problem of artificial intelligence¹⁶: the layers of normative order are structurally different frames (behavior, consent, values, identity), and alignment fails when the layers are conflated. A system aligned at the level of behavior, when interpreted as aligned at the level of values, produces a categorical error with practical consequences.

IV. CASE STUDY 1: ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

In light of the three types of conflation, Anselm's argument (and its Plantingian modal version) can be read as the paradigmatic case — logically valid, and yet empty.

An argument is valid if from the acceptance of its premises the conclusion logically follows. In Plantinga's modal version, the structure looks as follows:

P1. It is possible that a maximally great being exists (i.e., exists in at least one possible world). P2. Maximal greatness entails necessary existence (i.e., existence in all possible worlds). P3. If something necessarily exists, it exists in every possible world, including the actual one. Conclusion. A maximally great being exists (i.e., God).

From these premises the conclusion logically follows within the modal logic of system S5¹⁷. If we accept P1, P2, P3 and the axioms of S5, the conclusion follows. This is the sense in which the argument is valid.

The argument is also empty, however, for three reasons that correspond to the three types of conflation:

Modal emptiness. Premise P₁ — "it is possible that a maximally great being exists" — uses the term "possible" in the technical modal sense (exists in at least one possible world). This concept is not empirically or argumentatively grounded in the premise; it is a stipulation the reader must accept. Symmetrically: "it is possible that a maximally great being does *not* exist." If that is also logically possible, then in some possible world a maximally great being does not exist. But by P₂ a maximally great being cannot exist in only some possible worlds; either in all, or in none. Therefore: if it is possible that it does not exist, then it does not exist in any possible world, including the actual one.

The argument is therefore symmetrically reversible in modal structure¹⁸: by the same logic one can prove the existence and the nonexistence of God, depending on which of the symmetrical premises one accepts. Premise P₁, however, has no independent justification; it is a stance of faith, not a logical necessity. The argument therefore does not prove the existence of God; it shows only that belief in his existence is logically coherent with the axioms of S₅, similarly to belief in his nonexistence. This is a useful result for the philosophy of religion, but it is not a proof.

Level emptiness. The argument operates with the concepts "existence in a possible world" and "existence in the actual world" as if they were the same category with gradations. But *existence in a possible world* is a metaphysical construction that enables formal analysis; *existence in the actual world* is an empirical matter that requires observation or independent argumentative grounding. The transition from the first to the second is not a derivation within a frame, but a transfer between frames.

Thomas Aquinas saw this clearly: "if we had full knowledge of what God is, we could derive his existence from the concept; but we do not have such knowledge, and so we must proceed from effects to their causes"¹⁹. This is precisely the diagnosis of level conflation: the argument pretends to have access to a metaphysical level that conceptual analysis cannot supply.

Methodological emptiness. The argument presents itself as a logical proof — that is, as a claim valid by the standards of logical deduction. Logical deduction, however, operates within a formal system; its conclusions are tautological in the sense that they are already contained in the premises. If from P₁, P₂, P₃ the conclusion follows, then the conclusion says nothing that was not already contained in the premises. The argument is therefore informationally poor: it says only that if we accept certain assumptions, certain conclusions follow from them. This is trivial in the sense that it is a formal structure, not an empirical discovery.

For a genuine demonstration of God's existence, each of the premises would have to be proved independently. Premise P₁, however, is not evident — it is precisely the content the argument is supposed to prove. Premise P₂ is a definition, but depends on whether the definition is coherent (whether necessary existence is at all a possible property). Premise P₃ is an axiom of modal logic that itself needs defense for application to metaphysical claims.

The argument is therefore valid in the frame it has chosen for itself (the modal logic S₅ with the given conceptual apparatus), but its validity in this frame does not automatically pass into validity in the metaphysical frame, which is the one in which a claim about the existence of God is actually decided. The ar-

gument therefore performs what was described as paradigmatic frame conflation: it works inside one frame and declares the result valid in another.

That the argument fascinates for a thousand years is not proof of its strength. It is proof that formally valid but empty arguments have a specific intellectual pull: they look like proofs, and refuting them requires not the questioning of logic but the recognition of a categorial error — a more difficult skill than logical analysis. Philosophers who reject the argument reject it essentially for the same reason Thomas rejected it in the thirteenth century: the move from a concept to existence cannot be performed by conceptual analysis alone.

The first lesson from the case study: frame conflation is not a sign of intellectual weakness. It is a structural trap into which even the most precise authors fall, if they do not name in which frame they are operating and what that frame allows.

V. CASE STUDY 2: THE BIG BANG AND GOD

The second paradigmatic debate, in which frame conflation runs at full speed, concerns the relation between the cosmological model of the Big Bang and the metaphysical thesis of the existence of God. This debate has been present in the public sphere since the 1960s (after experimental confirmation of the model through the discovery of the cosmic microwave background by Penzias and Wilson in 1965)²⁰ and culminated in the polemics of Stephen Hawking, Lawrence Krauss, Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins on one side, and William Lane Craig, John Lennox, and Alister McGrath on the other²¹. The Czech context of this debate is developed in the texts of Pavel Hošek and Tomáš Halík²², who in framework analysis are typically more precise than the Anglo-American discussion, though with smaller international reach.

In its common form the dispute has the following structure:

The atheist position. The Big Bang explains the origin of the universe without need to refer to a supernatural cause. Therefore: the hypothesis of God is superfluous (Occam's razor). The universe is self-sufficient, its laws function without intervention, and to introduce an additional metaphysical entity is intellectual regression.

The apologetic position. The Big Bang implies that the universe had a beginning. If it had a beginning, there must have existed a cause of that beginning. This cause could not have been physical (physical laws hold *within* the spacetime that arose with the Big Bang). There must therefore exist a metaphysical cause, and that is God. William Lane Craig's Kalam cosmological argument²³ is a sophisticated variant of this schema.

Both positions have one common structural property: they derive a metaphysical conclusion (God does not exist / God exists) from a physical theory (the Big Bang). This derivation requires a bridge between two frames that neither the atheist nor the apologetic position usually constructs explicitly. The

bridge is implicit in the debate: both participants assume the derivation is legitimate, and dispute its direction.

Structural analysis shows that the bridge is not legitimate in either direction. To name why:

The Big Bang is a physical model. It describes the evolution of the universe from an extremely hot and dense initial state, which can be reconstructed by reverse extrapolation of current physical laws and empirical observations (the microwave background, the abundances of light elements, the expansion redshift, the structure of large-scale cosmic structure)²⁴. The model concerns three questions: what the universe looked like at various moments after the initial state, how its components evolved, and what can be predicted about its future evolution. The model does not concern the question *why* the universe exists, what its meaning is, whether it has an author.

The question of God's existence is metaphysical. It operates with concepts (God, existence, cause, meaning) that are not physically definable. The standards of verification in the metaphysical frame are not empirical in Popper's sense; they are arguments from first principles, coherence, phenomenological adequacy, possibly the acceptance of revelation in the religious frame. The question therefore cannot be decided by examining a physical theory, however detailed.

The bridge between the frames is illegitimate. If the atheist says that the Big Bang refutes the existence of God, they make the same mistake the apologist would make in claiming that it confirms it. Both assume that the physical description of the beginning of the world is relevant to the metaphysical question about its nature. It is not. By the same logic the atheist could claim that gravity refutes the existence of God (the motion of objects can be described without divine intervention), or the apologist that quantum mechanics confirms it (it contains irreducible randomness). Both claims are equally nonsensical, only less popular, because gravity and quantum mechanics do not have the dramatic resonance the term "the beginning of the universe" has.

The argumentative trap consists in the term "the beginning of the universe" sounding metaphysical and physical at once. Physically, it denotes the initial state from which evolution can be reconstructed. Metaphysically, it could denote arising out of nothing. These two senses are conflated in popular discourse, and frame conflation follows naturally from this conflation.

Cosmologists themselves typically (with exceptions like Hawking or Krauss, who occasionally venture into metaphysical claims²⁵) respect this distinction. The current cosmological model does not say that the universe arose from nothing; it says that one can physically describe its evolution back to the so-called Planck time (10^{-42} seconds after the initial state), and that before this moment standard physical theory fails and requires a theory of quantum gravity that we do not have. The question of whether there really was a beginning, or whether there is a deeper structure (multiverse, cyclic universe, quantum fluctuation of a pre-vacuum), is currently open within physics and not relevant to the discussion of God within metaphysics.

Symmetrically, theologians who have written competently about this dispute (Hans Küng, John Polkinghorne, Alister McGrath, in the Czech context Halík²⁶) explicitly distinguish the physical and metaphysical frames. Polkinghorne, who was a professional physicist before becoming an Anglican priest, repeatedly wrote: the existence of God is not a competing hypothesis to physical theories; it is a question of a different order, and its answer does not depend on the details of physical description²⁷.

The fine-tuning argument²⁸ — that the fundamental physical constants are finely tuned for the existence of life — is another iteration of the same conflation. The empirical observation that the physical constants lie in a narrow range that allows the emergence of complex structures is a physical fact. To draw from it a metaphysical conclusion (a designer / multiverse exists) is a step between frames that deserves explicit defense, which the debate typically does not receive.

The second lesson: frame conflation is not performed only once. It generates families of arguments that operate on the same principle: physical fact → metaphysical conclusion. To recognize this family is to recognize the structural nature of its irresolvability, independent of which metaphysical position the person doing the recognizing holds.

VI. CASE STUDY 3: CONSCIOUSNESS AND PHYSICS

The third paradigmatic debate concerns the relation between subjective experience (consciousness, qualia, phenomenology) and the physical substrate (brain, neurons, biochemistry). The debate has been present in the public sphere since the late nineteenth century (William James), was formally developed in analytic philosophy from the mid-twentieth century, and has been explosively popular since the late 1990s, when David Chalmers in 1995 formulated the *hard problem of consciousness*²⁹.

The hard problem reads: even if we understood every neuron in the brain, every synapse, every biochemical reaction, we would not know why subjective experience is associated with this physical structure. Why is the brain not just a very complex machine that processes information without any inner experience? Why is there something *what it is like to be* a brain processing the color red (Nagel's famous formulation from 1974³⁰)?

The hard problem split the philosophical community into several camps:

Materialist reductionism. Consciousness is a physical phenomenon, reducible to neurochemical processes. Daniel Dennett³¹ claims the hard problem is an illusion; there is nothing to reduce, because subjective experience is just the way the brain models itself. Patricia Churchland³² holds a similar position: a sufficiently developed neuroscience will dissolve the problem of consciousness, just as it dissolved the question of the life force in the nineteenth century.

Dualism. Consciousness is fundamentally distinct from physical reality. Substance dualism (Descartes, today rather rare) claims that two substances exist, the material and the spiritual. Property dualism (David Chalmers in some formulations³³) claims that consciousness is a property that cannot be

reduced to physical properties, even though it correlates with physical states.

Panpsychism. Consciousness is a fundamental property of reality, present in various forms at all levels. Galen Strawson³⁴, Philip Goff³⁵, and other modern panpsychists claim it is the simplest solution to the hard problem: if consciousness is everywhere, it is no problem to explain how it arises from inanimate matter (it does not arise; it only manifests more complexly in complex structures).

Quantum consciousness. Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff³⁶ propose that consciousness is associated with quantum processes in the microtubules of neurons. The theory is empirically controversial and physically problematic, but it illustrates an attempt to bridge the framework gap not philosophically but physico-speculatively.

Mysterianism. Colin McGinn³⁷ and others claim that consciousness is a fact that the human mind cannot grasp by its own nature (cognitive closure). It is a legitimate problem, but its solution lies beyond our reach.

The debate is structurally instructive, because in it different types of frame conflation collide, and its principal participants are not always alert to them.

The phenomenological frame. Operates from the first person: how does experience look from the inside? Husserl's phenomenology and its continuations (Merleau-Ponty, Henry, Marion) systematically develop this frame. Verification standard: introspection, intersubjective descriptions, phenomenological reduction. Claims in this frame are not reducible to physical descriptions, because they capture the qualitative dimension of experience, which is missing in physical descriptions by their nature.

The neuroscientific frame. Operates from the third person: how does the brain physically function? Verification standard: empirical observation, correlation, causal experiments. Neuroscientific descriptions can identify correlations between brain states and reported experience (neural correlates of consciousness, NCC), but correlation is not identity.

Philosophy of mind as an analytic discipline. Operates with concepts and arguments: how to understand the relation between the mental and the physical? Verification standard: coherence of concepts, argument, counterfactual analyses. Philosophy of mind has no empirical access; it works with conceptual structures.

The hard problem is formulated in the frame of philosophy of mind, but refers to the phenomenological frame (subjective experience) and confronts the neuroscientific frame (its explanatory limits). The dispute over the hard problem is therefore a dispute about the relations among frames, not about facts within one of them.

Materialist reductionists of the Dennett type perform a specific conflation: they require the phenomenological description to be translated into the neuroscientific, and if it cannot be, they regard the phenomenological description as illusory. This is methodological conflation: the verification standard of one frame (neuroscience) is applied within another (phenomenology), and what does not satisfy this

standard is dismissed. This is structurally analogous to what the atheist does in the dispute over the Big Bang: applying the physical verification standard to a metaphysical question and negating what does not meet that standard.

Dualists of the Chalmers type acknowledge the autonomy of the phenomenological frame but postulate psychophysical laws as a bridge between frames. These laws are hypothetical and empirically unverifiable, but Chalmers claims they are necessary for a complete description of reality. This is the opposite mistake: postulating a bridge where the standard frame rules explicitly do not allow one, and thereby introducing a new framework layering with its own problems of verifiability.

Panpsychists make a more elegant move: they claim the frame itself is wrongly set up. If consciousness is a fundamental property, then the physical frame, which excludes it, is incomplete, and the hard problem is an artifact of this incompleteness. This is framework revision, not conflation — an attempt to remodel the basic structure of reality so that the question giving trouble loses its sharpness. A legitimate philosophical move whose price is high: one must accept that stones have some form of experience, which is intuitively problematic, even if technically defensible.

The Penrose–Hameroff quantum consciousness theory is, from the framework analysis perspective, the most problematic. It attempts to physically solve a problem formulated philosophically, and thus enters the wrong frame with the wrong tools. The empirical problems of the theory (microtubules are not quantum-coherent in warm wet biological environments, as Max Tegmark's calculations showed³⁸) are serious, but structurally worse is that even if the theory were empirically true, the hard problem would not vanish: there would still remain the question *why* quantum processes in microtubules generate subjective experience. The theory only shifts the problem one level lower; it does not solve it.

The third lesson: frame conflation is not performed only by those who are intellectually careless. It is performed even by the most polished philosophers and scientists, if they do not name what is in which frame. Consciousness as a topic is especially difficult, because its phenomenological nature itself — being from the inside — sits in a frame that is in principle irreducible to descriptions from the outside. The irreducibility is built in structurally, not the residue of an as-yet-insufficiently-sophisticated theory.

VII. TOOLS OF DISTINCTION

The tradition of twentieth-century philosophical thought developed several tools that allow the distinguishing of frames and the diagnosis of conflation. The tools are not equivalent; each captures an aspect of the phenomenon and has its own limitations. Together they form an apparatus for the critical analysis of debates that is in practice typically used insufficiently.

Ryle: category mistake. Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (1949)³⁹ introduced the term *category mistake*, which is to this day the most used name for the phenomenon of frame conflation. The classical example: a foreigner visits Oxford, looks around the faculties, library, and colleges, and then asks: "Where

is the university?" The foreigner has made a category mistake: they expected "university" to be an object of the same category as "faculty" or "library," whereas it is an object of a different category — the organizational arrangement of those objects. Ryle's example is intuitively comprehensible and has become a pedagogical model for teaching framework analysis.

Ryle's diagnosis of modern philosophy of mind is that Cartesian dualism of mind and body is a systematic category mistake: the mind is not another object alongside the body, it is an arrangement of behavior the body realizes. This analysis is not generally accepted (Ryle himself is a behaviorist, today a minority position), but his methodological tool — the naming of a category mistake — survived its original theoretical commitment and is used across philosophical schools.

Wittgenstein: language games. Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)⁴⁰ developed the concept of *Sprachspiel* (language game). Different domains of human activity use different language games, each with its own rules. A claim in one game cannot be automatically transferred to another. Wittgenstein's example: to say "this painting is beautiful" is in the aesthetic language game; to say "this painting weighs two kilos" is in the physical language game. The question "but is it *really* beautiful?" is meaningful in the aesthetic game (which has its own rules of verification), not in the physical.

Wittgenstein's approach is stricter than Ryle's: he does not try to arrange frames hierarchically or to derive one from another. Each language game is autonomous; its rules do not translate into another. The position allows one to avoid both reductionism (the attempt to translate everything into a single frame) and expansionism (the attempt to cover everything with a single frame), but at the cost of fragmentation: if frames cannot be compared, how is one to speak of their mutual relations? This problem is developed by various authors in later analytic philosophy (Cavell, Hacker, Diamond) without full convergence.

Popper: falsifiability. Karl Popper in *Logik der Forschung* (1934)⁴¹ proposed falsifiability as the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science. A scientific claim must in principle be refutable by empirical data; if no data can refute it, it is not scientific. Popper did not claim that non-scientific claims are nonsense — on the contrary, he explicitly conceded that ethics, metaphysics, and theology are legitimate domains of human inquiry, only not scientific.

Popper's criterion is useful for distinguishing the scientific frame from others, but in itself it is not sufficient for full framework analysis. Non-scientific frames have their own internal rules that falsifiability does not capture. The ethical frame has verification standards (intuitive accord, coherence, argument) that are not empirical. The aesthetic frame has standards (intersubjective agreement, formal analysis) that are also not empirical. Popper's tools therefore capture one edge of the framework architecture, not the whole.

Gould: NOMA. Stephen Jay Gould in *Rocks of Ages* (1999)⁴² proposed the concept of *Non-Overlapping Magisteria* — science and religion are two non-overlapping magisteria. Science investigates fact about the world; religion investigates meaning, values, and ethics. If each discipline respects the boundaries of the other, they have no quarrel.

Gould's thesis is attractive for its simplicity, but is criticized from both sides. Richard Dawkins⁴³ objects that religion makes factual claims (Jesus rose from the dead, the virgin birth, miracles), and if it makes them, it enters the area Gould reserves for science. From the theological side, Alister McGrath⁴⁴ objects that NOMA underestimates the theological tradition, which has never been purely about "meaning and values"; theologians speak of reality (God, creation, eschatology) as objective entities, not just as subjective stances.

For the purposes of the present text, Gould's concept is useful as a proposal of framework separateness, but it is rougher than careful framework analysis requires. Instead of two magisteria, it is more apt to distinguish several frames (physical, metaphysical, ethical, theological, aesthetic, legal) with complex mutual relations.

Habermas: three types of rationality. Jürgen Habermas in *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1981)⁴⁵ distinguishes three types of rationality: instrumental (how to achieve a given goal), strategic (how to achieve a goal against another's interest), communicative (how to achieve mutual understanding). These types have corresponding frames of discourse that cannot be arbitrarily exchanged. A political debate that runs in the strategic mode, where each participant pursues their own interest, is structurally different from a scientific debate that runs in the communicative mode, where the participants seek shared truth.

Habermas claims that the contemporary public sphere suffers from the colonization of communicative rationality by the strategic: political and scientific debate, which should run in a shared search for truth, is infected by interest-based logic. The analysis is sociologically rich and influential in communication theory. For the purposes of framework analysis, what is most important is that it shows that different types of discourse have different rules, and the conflation of rules produces pathologies of public conversation.

Kuhn: paradigms. Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962)⁴⁶ introduced the concept of paradigm as a shared frame in a scientific community. Scientists working in different paradigms (e.g., Newtonian and Einsteinian physics) do not speak the same language; their words have different meanings. A paradigm shift (revolution) is not a cumulative advance; it is a discontinuous transition that requires the learning of a new frame, not just the addition of new information.

Kuhn's contribution to framework analysis is in the recognition that frames are historically developmental, not fixed. A scientific revolution is not just the discovery of new facts; it is a change in what counts as a fact in the given field, how it is verified, what the relevant questions are. Frames are therefore not eternal, and a debate among frames may be in the long run resolvable by historical development, even if not in short-term argumentative confrontation.

Lakatos: research programs. Imre Lakatos⁴⁷ extended Kuhn with the concept of a research program that has a *hard core* (axioms not questioned) and a *protective belt* (hypotheses modified under pressure from data). Lakatos's analysis allows finer distinctions within a frame: not every change in a frame is a

revolution; most are modifications of the protective belt while preserving the hard core. This is useful for understanding how frames survive empirical anomalies, not how they change in a paradigm shift.

These tools — Ryle's category mistakes, Wittgenstein's language games, Popper's falsifiability, Gould's NOMA, Habermas's types of rationality, Kuhn's paradigms, Lakatos's research programs — together form a methodological apparatus available to anyone who wishes to distinguish a meaningful debate from one that conflates frames. In practice it is used very unevenly: philosophers of science work with it systematically, but in the public debate (political, media, cultural) it is typically absent, and the debate continues in a frame confusion these tools could name.

VIII. THREE TYPES OF DEBATES AND THEIR DIAGNOSIS

Public debate, from the perspective of framework analysis, divides into three categories. The typology is not exhaustive, but provides a diagnostic tool for deciding whether to enter a given debate, how to conduct it, and what to expect from it.

Type 1: A debate that makes sense. Participants share a frame and share verification standards; they differ in positions within that frame. A scientific debate about the nature of dark matter, a legal dispute over the interpretation of a particular norm, an ethical dispute over the justice of a particular act under shared ethical principles — these debates are structurally resolvable, even if factually difficult. The participants can agree on what the answer would concern, and they know how to verify it. If no resolution is reached, it is for reasons of insufficient data, intellectual difficulty, or time horizon, not because of the structural nature of the debate.

Type 2: A debate that is frame conflation. Participants work in different frames but conduct the debate as though they shared a common frame. Categorical errors are implicit; verification standards shift between frames without explicit justification. Disputes over the existence of God in the Anglo-American popular debate (Dawkins vs. Craig), disputes over consciousness in popular-scientific literature (Dennett vs. Chalmers in formats for the public), disputes over creationism vs. evolution, disputes over the skeptical diagnosis of religion vs. theological apologetics — these debates are structurally unresolvable in the form in which they are conducted. If the participants name in which frames they are working, the debate either dissolves (they recognize they are speaking of different things) or transforms into a debate of type 1 (they recognize they are speaking of relations among frames, which are themselves a subject of legitimate inquiry).

Type 3: A debate that cannot be decided but is legitimate. Participants share a frame, but the frame itself is open by its nature. Questions about the meaning of the individual human life, about the nature of art, about the highest virtue, about the right political form — these questions have answers that are rationally defensible from various positions, and a debate about them is not frame conflation. It is legiti-

mate philosophical and cultural work that has no unambiguous goal in the form of a final decision but has value in the process itself. Participants may diverge and the debate is still meaningful, because each of the positions adds something to the understanding of the topic.

The practical diagnosis of a debate one finds oneself in therefore requires three steps:

Step one: Identify the frame. Question: in which frame is the debate taking place? What do the participants regard as relevant data, what verification standards are they implicitly using, what concepts are they introducing as primary? If the frame is one, the debate is potentially of type 1 or type 3. If frames are several and the participants do not name them, the debate is of type 2.

Step two: Identify the nature of the dispute within the frame. If the frame is one, what type of question is being settled in it? A question that can be decided by data, argument, or time (type 1)? A question that is structurally open but legitimate (type 3)? This distinction influences strategy: into type 1 one can contribute data, arguments, research; into type 3 one can contribute the articulation of positions and mutual understanding, not resolution.

Step three: Decide on entering the debate. If the debate is of type 2, to enter it without naming the conflation is to contribute to its prolongation. To enter with the naming of the conflation is to *reframe* the debate — intellectually demanding and sometimes socially ostracized, but structurally the only effective move. If the debate is of type 1, to enter with data and arguments makes sense. If the debate is of type 3, to enter with the articulation of a position makes sense, but to expect a final decision does not.

The typology has several practical applications in current debates:

The debate over the legitimacy of abortion. Publicly conducted typically as a debate of type 2: one side operates in the frame of a woman's right to her own body (the frame of individual rights), the other in the frame of the sanctity of human life from conception (the theological or metaphysical frame). Neither side typically names that its standards are not the standards of the other. If the frame is unified (e.g., on a shared ethical frame that takes both values into account and seeks compromise), the debate transforms into type 3. If the frame is not unified, the debate is structurally unresolvable.

The debate over the meaning of human life in the secular context. This debate is usually of type 3: participants share a frame (secular discourse on human experience) and seek the articulation of various legitimate positions (existentialism, eudaimonism, hedonism, stoicism). It is not frame conflation; it is legitimate work within an open frame. To expect the debate to end with a single answer would be a misunderstanding of its nature.

The debate over the quality of an artwork. Usually of type 1 or type 3, depending on subdomain. The dispute over the technical competence of the work (whether the author mastered the craft aspects) is of type 1; it can be resolved by analysis. The dispute over the aesthetic value of the work (whether it is good art) is of type 3; it has no final decision, but participants add to understanding.

The debate over the ethical legitimacy of artificial intelligence. Usually a mixture of types that has never been disentangled: some questions are of type 1 (what are the empirical consequences of AI in a given sector), some of type 3 (what values society is to advance), and a substantial part is of type 2 (e.g., the debate over whether AI does or does not have consciousness, which conflates the phenomenological and the physical frame, as described in section VI). This debate would benefit from the consistent framework analysis it has so far rarely received.

Further applications — in politics, economics, interpersonal relations, in cultural creation — await their own treatment. The common denominator remains: a debate that does not name in which frames it is taking place is not a debate moving toward an answer. It circles itself, generates energy without motion, and in the long run exhausts the patience of participants who remain in it.

The diagnostic apparatus does not guarantee success or victory; it guarantees only an apt economy of attention — the capacity not to invest time and intellectual energy into debates that are structurally unresolvable, and to invest it in those that either are resolvable or are legitimately open and enriching.

Anselm's *unum argumentum*, which was to become the final proof of the existence of God, did not yield a definitive answer in a thousand years of its existence — not because of a flaw in its formulation (Plantinga formulated it with a technical precision Anselm did not have at his disposal), but because the question it poses is, in the frame in which it is raised, unresolvable. Neither the argument nor its author is defective; what is defective is the assumption that one frame may bindingly decide within another — and that assumption is what the philosophical tradition of the twentieth century has begun to name systematically.

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Frame Conflation: Anatomy of Debates That Need Not Have Been Held

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