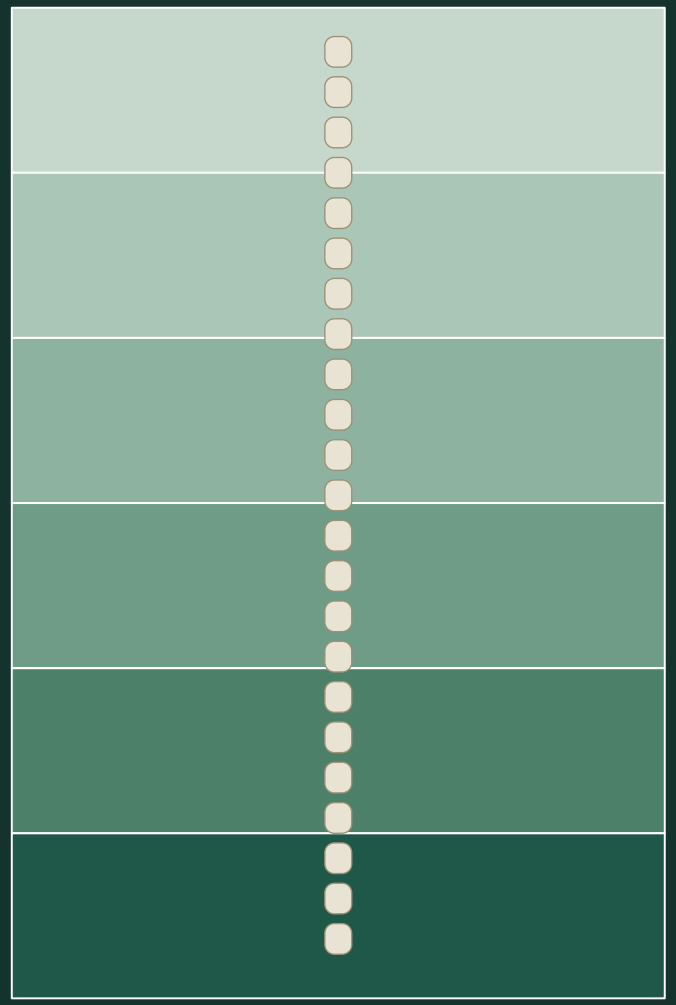
INVENTING PSYCHOHISTORY · WORLD MACHINES

De-Dramatizing the Digital

How AI descends into New Nature



a new taxon, plate i

Sean Stevenson · Inventing Psychohistory · 23 September 2026

ABOUT ME

Sean Stevenson

- Author of The Schematism on Substack
- Contraptions Book Club
- Protocol Institute – Special Interest Group in Psychohistory
- 18 years in Government Contracting and Business Development
- Chevy Chase, Maryland, USA



Your Humble Narrator (I’m on the left)

Where the essay stopped

1. **AI completes the current stack.** The essay's hunch is that AI is a completing technology: it resolves enough of the digital stack's friction that using it stops organizing our days.

2. **The screens are the last of the old economy.** AI will shift the economic center of digital life beyond attention harvesting.

3. **Integrating Clayton Christensen and Stewart Brand.** As AI exposes bottlenecks in the digital stack, investment follows the work of integrating them. Money goes to whichever layer isn't good enough yet. Right now that is the infrastructure, so AI gets built into the plumbing.

4. **The most powerful layer is the most boring one.** Hobbes: once a government is settled, you stop noticing it. Power over friction, absence from attention. The printing press: more texts and easier access can coexist.

● LIVE — worldmachines.org · "new nature"

De-Dramatizing the Digital

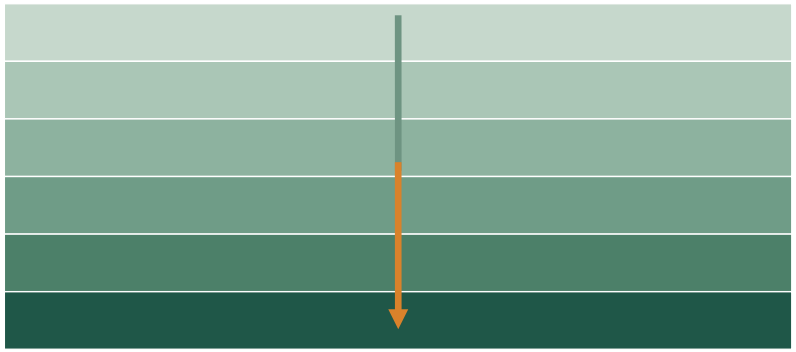
In which AI becomes as interesting as your refrigerator



SEAN STEVENSON
APR 12, 2026

"...further from fashion, past infrastructure, closer to culture and perhaps even a new notion of nature."
— the essay's closing section

This talk asks how something we design becomes a condition we must live with.



essay: down to infrastructure · talk: the rest of the way

● CAPTURED — 13 September 2026

What the wiki returned: “new nature”

worldmachines.org › wiki › search › **“new nature”**

1. **New Nature** *Aneesh · Concepts — Venkatesh Rao’s term*
   Regimes of reality governed by technologically mediated laws that are nearly as inviolable, immutable, and persistent as those of physical nature — analogous to Old Nature but constituted by artificial rather than physical laws.

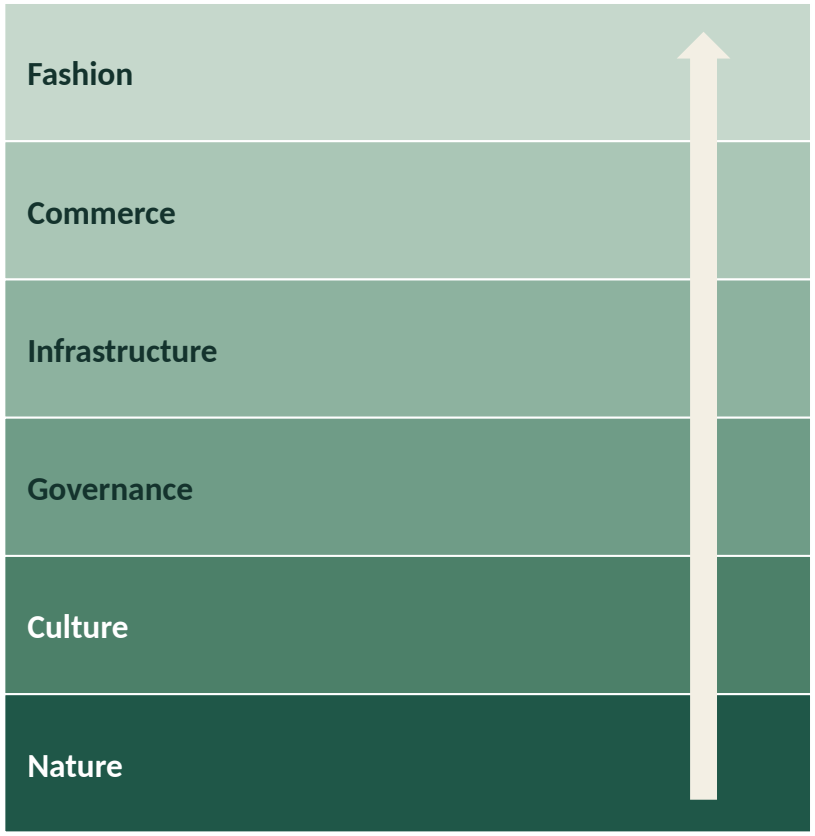
2. **New Nature as Life Era — a synthesis** *Aneesh · Syntheses*
   Rao’s New Nature and Chaisson’s Life Era are parallel framings of the same threshold — both argue that technologically mediated reality is becoming as inviolable as physical nature — differing on whether the transition is progress or ecology.

3. **The descent chain: how AI becomes New Nature** *Sean · this talk*
   How AI becomes New Nature as a four-step mechanism rather than an observation: profit pulls AI down the pace-layer stack to infrastructure, security fuses it to cryptographic protocols, the clock’s bargain sinks the pair beneath governance, and competition strips away every remaining place to complain.

4. **Appeal-foreclosure** *Sean · this talk*
   The proposed test for whether something has become New Nature: not that it is slow or hard to change, but that there is no one to ask. Three questions apply it; public-key cryptography already passes all three.

The wiki search on worldmachines.org, captured on 13 September 2026 so the room can read it. Result 1 is the community’s shared definition; results 3 and 4 are this talk’s notes, already filed beneath it.

The Pace Layers and the usual direction of travel



Stewart Brand's pace layers: fast on top, slow underneath

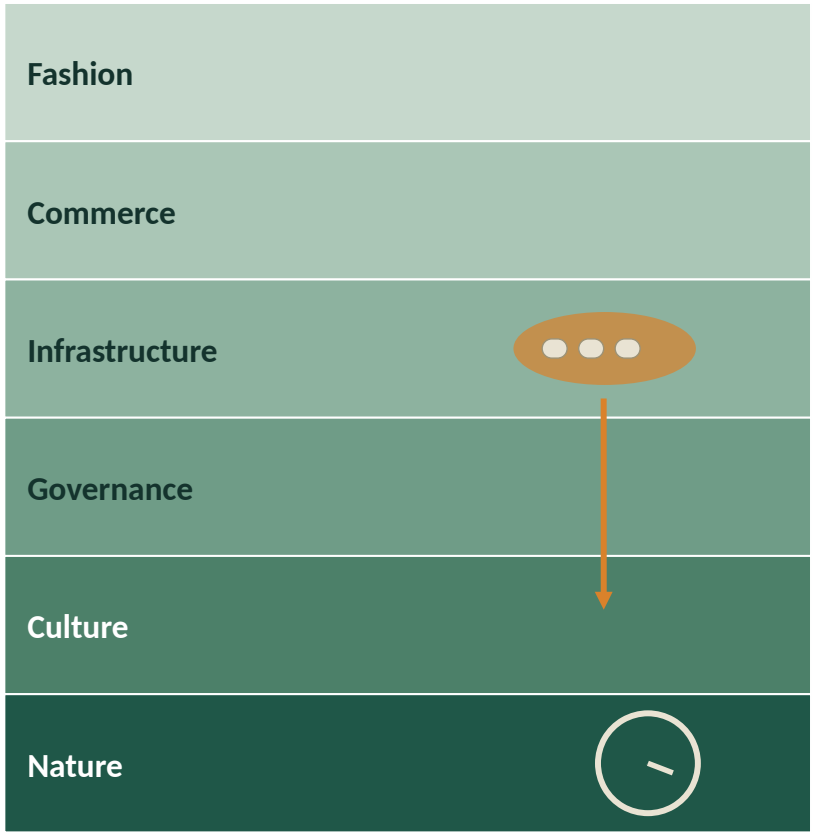
Brand's picture of a civilization. Six layers, each moving at its own speed. Fashion changes by the season; nature changes over eons. Commerce, infrastructure, governance and culture sit in between, each slower than the one above.

Fast layers propose, slow layers dispose. The top invents; the bottom decides what is kept. Each layer takes its stability from the one below and its novelty from the one above.

The usual direction is up. Nature was here first and everything else was built on it. Nobody petitions the tides or asks the calendar for an exception — we just build on top of them.

This talk is about something moving the other way: down.

Rigidity below buys liberty above



clock time: already at the bottom · AI plus protocols: on the way down

Florian's example: the clock. Shared timing standards let separate systems coordinate. Because the bottom holds perfectly still, everything above it — schedules, markets, lives — is free to run out of step.

That is the deal, generalized. A thing moves down the stack when the freedom it buys above is worth more than the rigidity it costs below. Everything else in the stack was built from the bottom up.

Dependable constraints enable variation. Participants can rely on a common reference, but the same constraint that first enables freedom can become a dependence that later participants never chose.

What the finished descent looks like for AI. AI becomes powerful over the digital friction in people's lives. The Star Trek ship's computer, the droids: technology with no drama left in it.

Something is making that deal right now.

The rigidity of New Nature: appeal-foreclosure

Can you still get someone on the phone to grant an exception?

Ossification — there is someone to ask, but asking does nothing. The lever is jammed or captured.

New Nature — there is no one to ask. Nothing to capture, no one to petition. Not that you shouldn't — you cannot.

Slowness is only a proxy. The question is whether a lever exists.

QUESTION 1

Can you obtain an exception?

QUESTION 2

Can you meaningfully opt out?

QUESTION 3

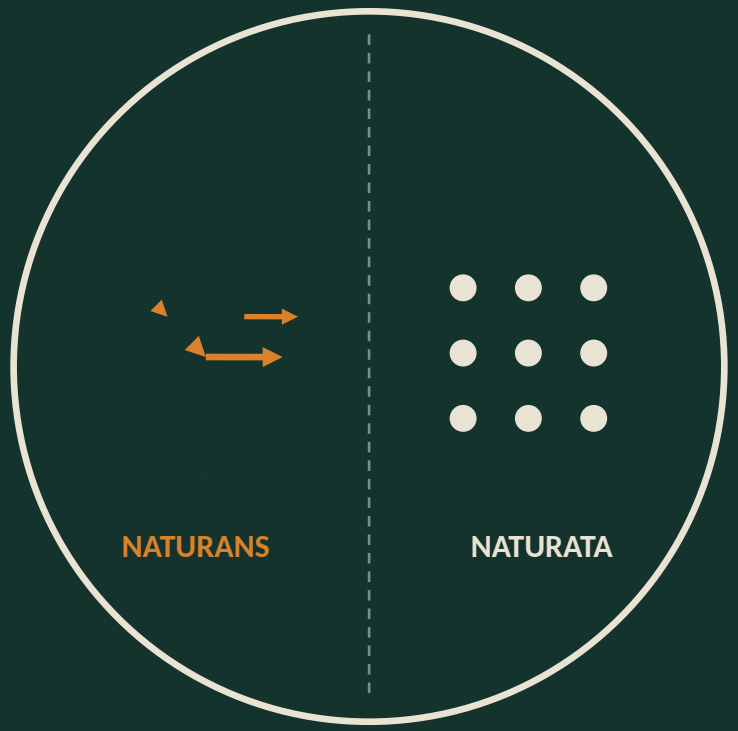
What would replacing it require?

◆ **It has already happened once: public-key cryptography. No AI** involved. No institution can grant an exception to the mathematics: if factoring and discrete logarithms are hard, they are hard for everyone. When a system built on it breaks, insurers price the loss as an event, not a decision to appeal.

PLATE I · REFERENCE

Natura naturans / natura naturata

Spinoza's finite and infinite games



Deus sive Natura — one substance, two aspects

Naturans — nature as the producing force. Spinoza's term for nature considered as cause: existing through itself, free.

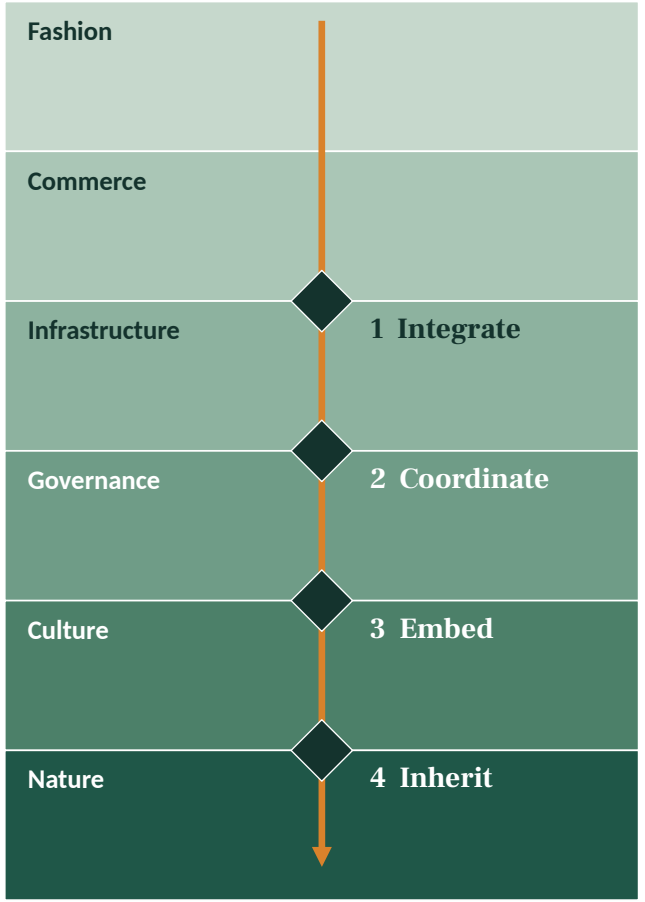
Naturata — nature as the produced order. Everything that follows from that cause. (Ethics I.29, Scholium)

The scholastics had two things here: a Creator and a creation. Spinoza said they are one substance seen two ways. The law and the lawgiving are the same ongoing act — there is no lawgiver standing behind the law for you to petition.

Nature has two faces, generative and fixed, and you cannot separate them. New Nature must account for continuing generativity as well as durable order.

The descent: one verb per layer

VERB	CROSSING	WHAT DOES THE PULLING	SIGN IT HAPPENED
1 Integrate VISIBLE NOW	**commerce → infrastructure**	**Profit.** Money goes to the layer that isn't good enough yet.	It becomes plumbing nobody notices.
2 Coordinate VISIBLE NOW	**infrastructure → governance**	**Protocols.** Rules are enforced by math, not by officials.	Permissions and commitments are checked without anyone deciding.
3 Embed EARLY SIGNALS	**governance → culture**	**Habit.** People reorganize who they are around it, not just what they're allowed.	It would survive a change in the rules.
4 Inherit THE PROPHECY	**culture → nature**	**No owner, and forgetting.** There is no one behind the math, and no one remembers it being decided.	Its origin story shifts from minutes to myth.

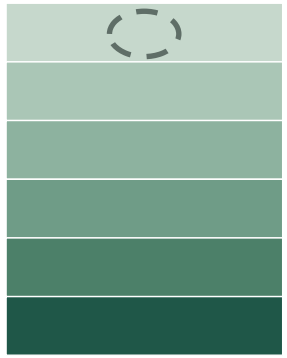


Bricolage: people maintain and transform inherited systems using the components, practices, and knowledge already available.

Different forms of completion

INTEGRATION ONLY

Tools connect

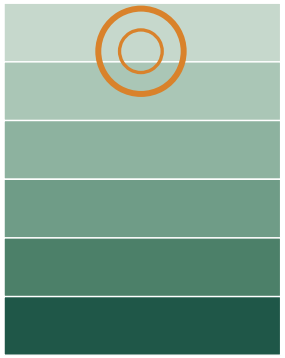


Limited adoption

Few activities have yet grown around the capability.

AI ALONE

Adaptive capability

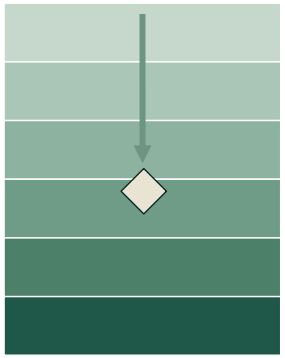


Coordination needs work

Independent participants need commitments they can check and rely on.

PROTOCOL ALONE

Dependable commitments

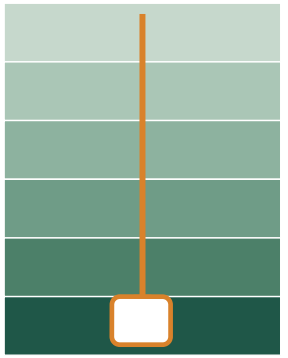


Adaptation takes work

People maintain and revise the rules as circumstances change.

PLATFORM COMPLETION

Integrated coordination

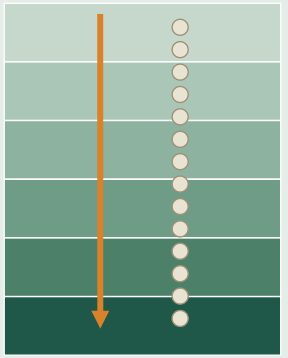


Control stays concentrated

A convenient service can become a dependency controlled by its owner.

AI + PROTOCOL

Adaptive coordination



Potential to embed

Other activities can build around this combination and become inherited arrangements.

Blumenberg: the question outlives the answer

THE QUESTION · THE CHAIR

“What is the ground we cannot change?” HELD BY →

OLD, OLD ANSWER

God’s creation

Nature is made, ordered, and meaningful. It points past itself to a maker.

vacates c. 1800

OLD ANSWER

Humboldt’s Cosmos

One integrated, lawful system. The web of life: measured, mapped, mute. Dumb stuff.

takes the seat now

NEW ANSWER

New Nature

AI and protocols entangled at planetary scale. A ground that behaves as if it has a mind. Smart stuff.

Borrowing Blumenberg’s idea of reoccupation: answers change, but the questions they answered can remain. In this sketch of Western thought, New Nature begins to occupy the place once held by creation and later by a lawful natural order. Watch the chair, not the occupant.

LAYER	THE QUESTION THAT LAYER ANSWERS	HOW OFTEN THE ANSWER CHANGES
Fashion	What is current?	monthly
Commerce	What is valuable?	yearly
Infrastructure	What carries the load?	decades
Governance	Who may decide?	generations
Culture	Who are we?	centuries
Nature	**What is the ground we cannot change?**	**across historical epochs**

Every layer has a chair. Answers change at the layer’s own pace. The bottom chair concerns what an era takes for granted.

New Nature is a new occupant in the bottom chair: something that acts as if it has a mind, in a chair built for mute stuff. The strain is why it feels like a new worldview.

PLATE III · REFERENCE

Descola: four ways of sorting the world

TWO QUESTIONS: MINDS LIKE OURS? × MADE OF THE SAME STUFF?

ANIMISM same minds, different bodies — the jaguar is a person in a jaguar suit	**TOTEMISM** same minds and same bodies, within a group
ANALOGISM nothing shared — a world of unlike parts held together by resemblances and correspondences	**NATURALISM** same physics, minds reserved for humans — mute matter, our default

(Descola, Beyond Nature and Culture)

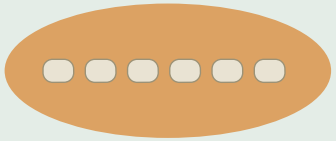
Every culture answers two questions about other beings: do they have an inner life like ours, and are they made of what we are made of? Two questions, four possible answers — and only four.

Naturalism gives us one physics while distinguishing human inwardness. New Nature puts pressure on that distinction: we know it as machinery, yet increasingly address it as someone. The tension is in how we relate to it.

Liveness, matter that keeps memory and answers to time, needs a home. My proposal is to explore an analogist reading: unlike parts made into a working whole through correspondences. The next slide shows why that reading might help.

● LIVE — worldmachines.org · “descola chimera”

A thing made of mismatched parts

Animism	Totemism
Analogism 	Naturalism

One system, three points of contact, three different relationships.

CHAT SURFACE

At the top we address it as someone. It keeps memory and answers to time; this is where you meet it.

MAINTENANCE AND PRACTICE

In the middle, people interpret signs to work on causes. People keep it running with technical knowledge, rules of thumb, shared stories, repairs.

PHYSICS OF COMPUTE

At the bottom it is plain physics: material processes, energy, and resources. Mute matter does not vanish; it retreats to the floor.

We address it as someone, repair it as machinery, and coordinate through its rules. I propose an analogist reading because making these unlike parts work together requires translations and correspondences. The chimera is my image for that assembled whole.

● CAPTURED — 10 September 2026

What the wiki returned: “descola chimera”

worldmachines.org › wiki › search › **“descola chimera”**

1 **The chimera: a thing made of mismatched parts** *Sean · updated 5 September 2026 · the only hit for “descola chimera”*

An AI–protocol system is a chimera in Descola’s sense: a being made of mismatched parts — mechanical and mute at the bottom (cryptographic protocols, the physics of compute), mind-like and responsive at the top (the model you talk to) — with no single essence. Naturalism cannot place such a thing; it must be either a mind or a mechanism. Analogism can: the chimera is analogism’s characteristic figure, unlike parts held together by correspondence. So collectives living with these systems will not swap worldviews; they will drift into an analogist relation to them layer by layer — treating the surface as someone, reading signs in the middle, and keeping physics at the bottom — with a maintainer priesthood forming to read the signs for everyone else.

2 **Descola’s four ways of sorting the world** *Sean · the plate two slides back — linked from the chimera note*

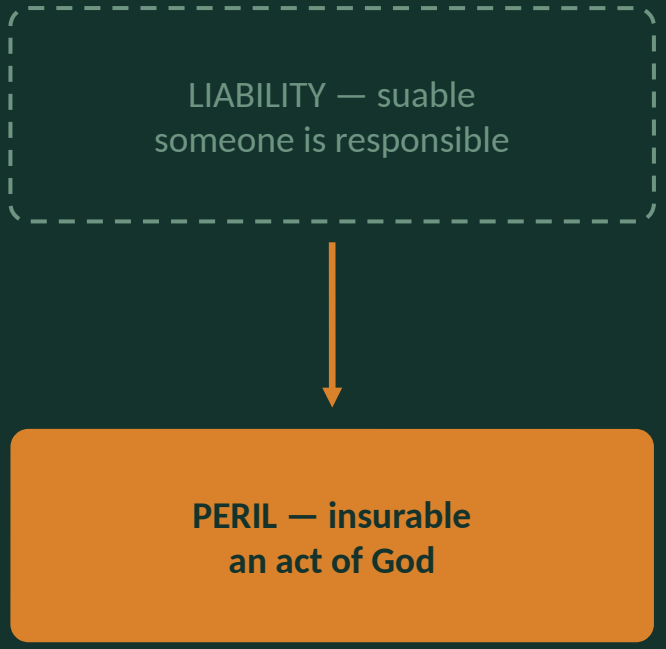
Two questions about other beings — minds like ours? made of the same stuff? — give four ways of sorting the world: animism, totemism, analogism, naturalism. Naturalism is the current one; analogism is the one built for composite beings.

The wiki search on worldmachines.org, captured on 10 September 2026. The chimera note is the one this talk wrote into the shared model; the Descola note is the plate you just saw.

One prophecy

Within the lifetime of people in this room, a court will decline to find anyone responsible for what an AI–protocol system did — not by granting immunity, which is a lever declined, but by finding that there was no one to hold — and it will reach for the category the law already keeps for nature: act of God, force majeure. And the ruling will be received as recognizing a fact, not making a decision.

That is the bottom chair changing hands, witnessed from the governance layer.



question 3, answered

HOW IT DIES

Courts keep finding defendants. Agentic protocols keep changing on a schedule. Insurers keep writing liability, not peril. **Any one of these still true in 2050 kills the prophecy.**

CODA

Most of what we build comes apart. What doesn’t becomes the ground.

Things sink through the layers until they stop moving.

