

WAY OF LIFE THEORY

**THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURE OF
WORLDVIEWS, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND LIFESTYLES**

Michael Edward Pepperday
mike.pepperday@gmail.com

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Way of life theory: the underlying structure of worldviews, social relations and lifestyles

DECLARATION

I declare this thesis to be entirely my own work.

Mike Pepperday.
mike.pepperday@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

What is the structure of society? Many thinkers have pondered the regularities. Way of life theory (WOLT) shows the relationship of every rational, social issue to every other rational, social issue.

From two dichotomised, theoretical dimensions called grid and group, Mary Douglas deduced four ways of life usually called individualism, hierarchy, egalitarianism, and fatalism. WOLT shows the same four ideal types may be deduced from any significant pair of social issues, including competition, cooperation, coercion, freedom, justice, self-identity, nature, human nature, and more. Since four types may be divided pair-wise in three ways, there are three, not two, dimensions or axes.

WOLT also deduces Douglas's fifth type (the hermit) and resolves the long-standing logical anomalies of grid-group theory.

In all, seven social theorists have independently deduced four types from various dimension pairs. Mistakes aside, they find the same four theoretical types. Evidently, the four types are natural kinds. Between them these theorists use three axes.

Numerous intuitive theorists from across social science have developed types without dimensions, and dimensions without types. Though incomplete, they show no significant disagreement.

It appears that every issue that must be taken into account to live socially fits the three axes. There is no flexibility: each issue fits the axes one way. Geometrically, three dichotomised dimensions yield eight types, however four of them are not viable and do not arise. Given just four valid points, the number of dimensions is necessarily limited to three. The axes generate thousands of predictions.

Since deduction yields the same four types whatever issues are placed on the dimensions, the four types are, like objects of natural science, independent of any theorist. In turn, these four types control which issues fit and how they fit, delimiting the scope and refining the meaning of the issues—which places the issues, too, beyond any theorist's determination.

As in natural science, the sphere of application is set by the deductive theory, not by a theorist's pronouncement: what fits, fits. The domain appears to cover matters which people must take a position on to live socially. Emotional and internal personal issues will not fit.

WOLT sharpens meaning, formalises structure and extends connections in areas as diverse as equality, liberalism, game theory, corporate culture, national culture, political right and left, religion, and working-class health.

Like a natural science theory, WOLT is *relational*, not only taxonomic. As in natural science, no person, organisation, or social situation will conform exactly to its ideal types. It is falsifiable by deducing, or finding empirically, rival social types or a social phenomenon that will not fit. Empirical testing of the theory as a whole is awkward owing to its structure and to parochial effects. Three data sets failed to refute it.

WOLT reveals how every social issue relates to every other social issue, providing a tool for analysing worldview, social structure, and social behaviour. □

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

(Brackets enclose alternative terms found in the grid-group literature)

1, 1-ism: Individualist, -ism; (entrepreneur, market, competition); a social *type*

2, 2-ism: Hierarch(ist), hierarchy; (bureaucracy, oversight, positional); a social *type*

3, 3-ism: Egalitarian, -ism; (sectarians, enclavists, critical activists, mutuality); a social *type*

4, 4-ism: Fatalist, -ism; (isolates, ineffectuals, randomness); a social *type*

5, 5-ism: Hermit, autonomy; the non-social *type*

Axis: three axes, *X, Y, Z*, hold all *issues* necessarily underlying social relations. *Dimension* is almost synonymous but may imply a particular issue.

Bias = *cultural bias* = *worldview*

Cosmology = *worldview*

Cultural bias = *bias* = *worldview*; and see *way of life*

Cultural Theory (CT) = GG theory

Culture: shared beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, sometimes used for *way of life*

Dichotomise: distinguishing absence v. presence (or No v. Yes) of an *issue*.

Dimension = *axis* but *dimension* may imply a particular *issue* on the axis. *WOLT* shows there are 3 dimensions of social relations. They are called *X, Y, Z*, but it does no harm to think of them as length, height and width.

Grid: extent to which the social environment is characterised by involuntary, coercive social interaction; degree of prescription; the social relations of the *Z axis*.

Group: extent to which the social environment is characterised by voluntary, cooperative social interaction; degree of collectivism; the social relations of the *X axis*.

GG theory: Grid-group theory (Cultural Theory, neo-Durkheimian theory)

Issue = relational issue: a concept, a social preference or policy or concern, on one of the *axes, X, Y, Z*. A pair of dichotomised issues form, or fit with, the four social *Types 1, 2, 3, 4*.

Lifestyle: behavioural preferences (or tastes) in dress, grooming, recreation, food, drink, house, garden, car, music, etc that match worldview and social relations. See *way of life*. Some expected descriptors of the types' lifestyles are:

1: flamboyant, stylish, exotic, expensive, extravagant, self-confident

2: appropriate to station, compartmentalised, smooth weave, strait-laced, formal, dignified

3: unstructured, 'natural', messy, coarse weave, thrifty, righteous, critical

4: vulgar, over-priced, heedless, casual, unaffected

5: serene, comfortable, detached, aloof, other-worldly

Nature: the whole physical environment supporting living, not just the natural biological environment.

Objective judgement: judgement from outside the social structure. Objective is not a synonym for unbiased.

Rational: that which is not emotional. Rational beings try to make sense of the social world and assume others do the same. The meaning is not confined to goal-oriented maximising of self-interest (the *Type 1 rationality*).

Rationality = *way of life*

Relational issue = *issue*

Social relations: structure of relations corresponding to *worldview*:

- 1: negotiate one on one, competitive, respect winners
- 2: ranking; the right person in the right job, respect higher rank
- 3: cooperative, harmonious, egalitarian
- 4: casual, isolated, uncertain, mistrustful, ape 1s, fear 2s
- 5: no social relations.

Solidarity = *way of life*

Subjective judgement: judgement by a participant in the social structure.

Type: one of the four logical outcomes of two dichotomised *issues*, generally an ideology (ism). A fifth type is independent of *issues*. Type may mean *way of life* itself, or a person or a group adhering to a way of life. Common descriptions of the types are:

- 1: independent, self-regarding, opportunist, competitive
- 2: rule-respecting, cooperative, competitive and coercive
- 3: norm-following, small group, cooperative, political left
- 4: fragmented, coerced, authority-dodging
- 5: socially detached, withdrawn, autonomous.

Way of life: (type, solidarity, culture, rationality) may be divided into three aspects: *worldview*, *social relations* and *lifestyle*.

WOLT: Way of life theory: all rational, social issues fit on three axes and form four social types.

Worldview (bias, cultural bias, cosmology, orientation): one of the five subjective views of how the (social) world works or should work, including morality, beliefs, values, attitudes, political ideology and economic preferences.

- 1: self reliant, compete within bad human nature to get ahead
- 2: loyal to the properly authorised; people are trainable, tradition
- 3: everyone should voluntarily cooperate as equals
- 4: mistrustful, fatalistic, short-term, grab whatever is going
- 5: autonomous, detached from the material 'rat-race'.

X, Y, Z: Three *dimensions* or *axes* holding relational *issues*. The three dimensions are the three possible ways to pair-wise divide the four *types*. Dimensions are dichotomised as absence v. presence, of (views of) issues such as:

- X: 1+4 v. 2+3; cooperation, (*group*), interdependence, social optimism, material pessimism, positive freedom, sincerity
- Y: 3+4 v. 1+2; competition, self-reliance, social pessimism, material optimism, negative freedom, integrity
- Z: 1+3 v. 2+4; coercion, (*grid*), rules, authority, rank inequality, clear categorisation, fidelity

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Way of life theory: the underlying structure of worldviews, social relations and lifestyles**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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PREFACE

This PhD project did not set out to develop grand theory. It began with the intention of testing Mary Douglas’s grid-group theory. Two things happened: standard social science testing approaches proved inappropriate and the theory evolved fundamentally.

I accepted, with Popper, that unless a test could potentially refute the theory, it was not a test. What survives of the plan to test the theory is presented as Chapter 7.

Douglas has two issues, grid and group, on two axes; other theorists also designate two issues on two axes. They are not the same issues yet they all find the same types. They are not the same axes: they need three axes between them. After finding that many pairs of issues deliver the same types, I accepted that all social relations issues fit on three axes and adopted the name *way of life theory*. It still astonishes me: there appears to be no rational social relations issue which does not fit. At the same time, issues of passion and personality cannot be made to fit.

A PhD thesis is supposed to add a brick to the edifice of knowledge, not rebuild its foundations. Writers have remarked, with varying degrees of irony, on grid-group theory’s ambition to explain everything. Way of life theory is much worse. Strict methodological conservatism seemed appropriate: scrutiny of premises, methods of irreproachable precedent, plain language, everyday examples, falsifiable claims.

WOLT’s applicability across the breadth of social science means this thesis often ventures outside my expertise. May the simplifications never undermine the argument.

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