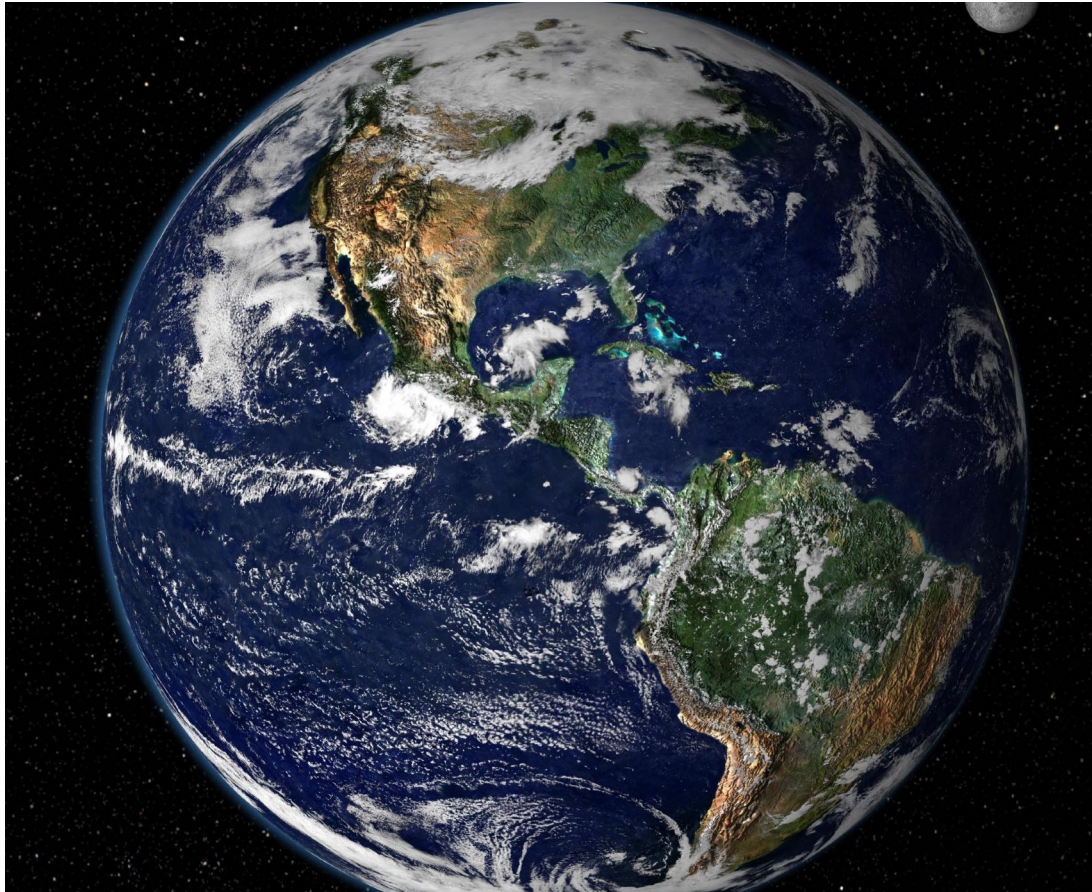




Toward a new Economic Paradigm

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Key Questions

- ▶ What do we value and why?
- ▶ What stories have shaped our worldviews and sense of self?
- ▶ What values and stories are currently harmful for human and planetary flourishing?
- ▶ What new values and stories would serve a flourishing future?





Cultural stories act as **human worldview codifiers** operating across multiple domains

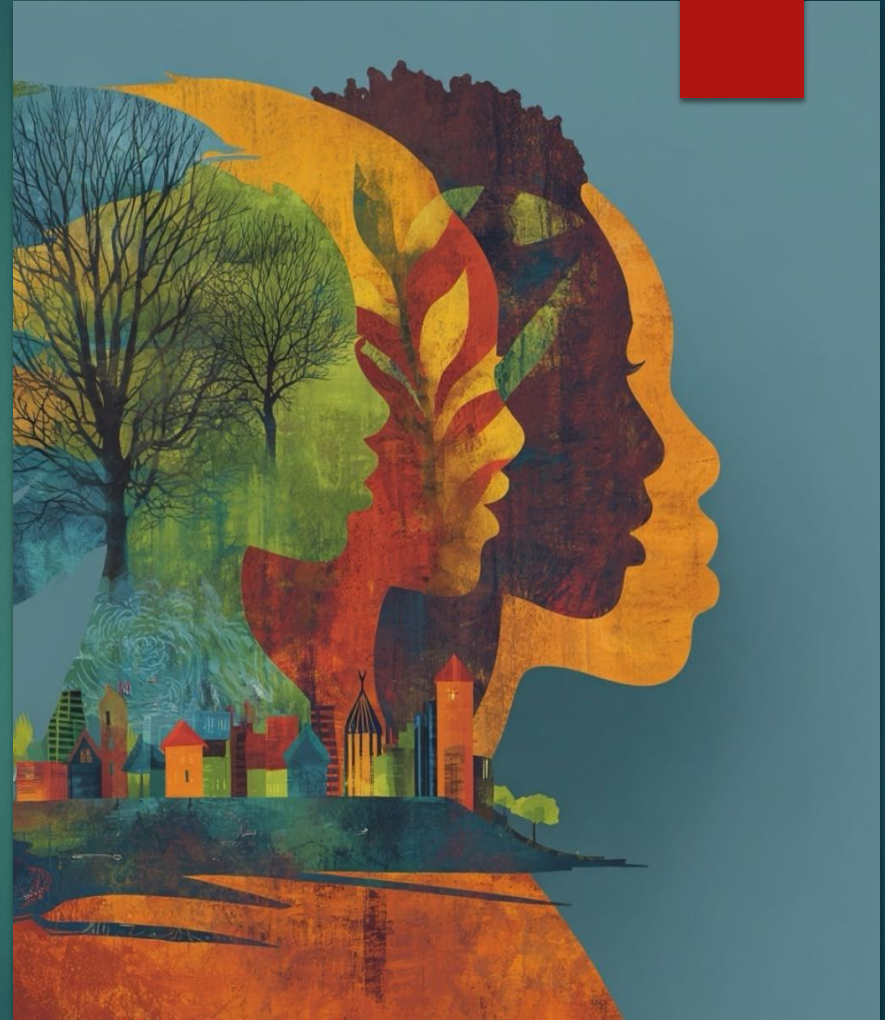
- ▶ Economic metrics define what is valued.
- ▶ Learning systems transmit identity and purpose narratives.
- ▶ Media systems reinforce cultural norms.
- ▶ Environmental policy determines intergenerational responsibility.

Economics as Cultural Expression

Economics is often presented as a neutral, technical discipline governed by objective laws.

Yet historical and anthropological evidence suggests that economic systems **are deeply shaped by prevailing paradigms and worldviews** i.e. shared assumptions about reality, human nature, and what constitutes a good life.

From this perspective, the economy is not an independent system, **but a reflection of how societies understand value and organise relationships**. As worldviews evolve, so too do economic structures, priorities, and metrics.



Google

Economics is the branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth. Wealth is an abundance of valuable possessions or money.



EXAMPLES

Wikipedia

Economics is a social science that studies the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Wealth is the abundance of valuable financial assets or physical possessions which can be converted into a form that can be used for transactions.

Indigenous

Economics refers to the diverse, sustainable systems of production, trade, and resource management that prioritize long-term ecological sustainability, reciprocity with nature, communal wellbeing, and self-determination over profit. Wealth is defined as the ability to live reciprocally, focusing on the quality of community health, strong relationships, and stewardship of the land.



We are facing converging challenges:

- ▶ ecological breakdown
- ▶ social fragmentation
- ▶ economic inequality
- ▶ rising mental distress

They reflect **a growing misalignment between human systems and the living systems they depend upon.**

This points to a deeper problem - **not simply of policy, but of paradigm .**

Conventional economics assumes rational individuals, stable preferences, and market-based optimisation.

While powerful, this model overlooks key realities:

- ▶ human behaviour is relational and developmental
- ▶ values are culturally shaped
- ▶ long-term wellbeing depends on ecological and social systems

As a result, economic systems often reinforce extraction, competition, and short-term thinking

Even when these undermine collective flourishing.



Human cruelty and suffering is often enabled by worldviews and sustained by economic incentives

Many harmful systems have been economically “successful”:

- ▶ Slavery → high-profit plantation economies
- ▶ Colonialism → large-scale resource extraction
- ▶ Forced labour → industrial and wartime output

Distress becomes economically justified and viable when:

- ▶ People are **dehumanised**
- ▶ Costs are **shifted onto others**
- ▶ Value is defined **narrowly (profit, growth, output)**



All economic activity is fundamentally relational.

- ▶ Production depends on cooperation
- ▶ Markets depend on trust
- ▶ Innovation depends on shared knowledge
- ▶ Value reflects collective priorities

Seen in this way, the economy is not a machine to be optimised, but a dynamic web of relationships evolving over time.





The hidden architecture of behaviour

- ▶ Biological systems depend on **resource distribution networks**
- ▶ Cities depend on **social and infrastructural interaction networks**
- ▶ Organisations depend on **communication networks**

The structure and density of these networks determine:

- ▶ The flow of **energy and materials**
- ▶ The exchange of **information and ideas**
- ▶ The emergence of **collective behaviour**

In cities, dense social networks enable innovation but also increase systemic interdependence and vulnerability.

Conventional Economic Model

- ▶ Growth is linear and scalable
- ▶ Bigger systems are always better harms
- ▶ Efficiency guarantees sustainability

Scaling Insight

- Growth is non-linear and constrained
- Larger systems amplify both benefits and
- Efficiency can coexist with systemic fragility

From a regenerative perspective, the key question becomes:

How can human systems emulate the bounded, optimised scaling of living systems, rather than the accelerating dynamics of industrial growth?

Paradigms as lived symbolic systems

At the deepest level, economic systems are shaped by paradigms. These are not abstract theories, but **lived symbolic systems** that include:

- ▶ stories and narratives
- ▶ cultural norms and values
- ▶ assumptions about human nature and reality

They shape what is considered rational, valuable, and possible, and are embodied through everyday life .



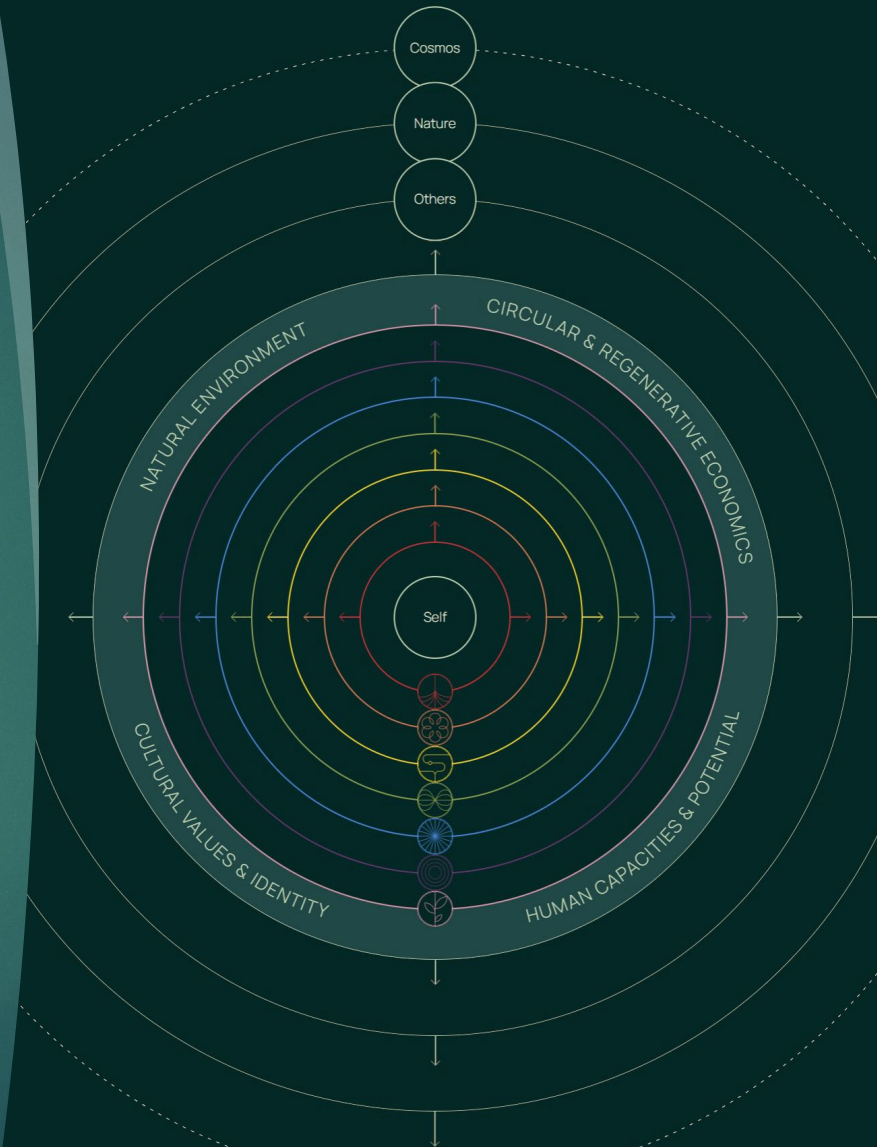
Reframing the Foundations of Economics

The Flourish Project has been exploring whether we could transform our understanding of economics by shifting our attention from external outputs **to the underlying conditions that generate them.**

It recognises that economic systems are not self-contained, but emerge **from the interaction of four interdependent domains of life:**

- ▶ the natural environment
- ▶ human capacities and potential
- ▶ cultural values and identity
- ▶ and economic activity itself

Rather than treating the economy as primary, ESF positions it **within a wider ecology of relationships.**



Human Development as Economic Infrastructure

Biological living systems invest heavily in early development and long-term resilience.

A distinctive contribution is its **integration of human development into economic thinking**.

It identifies **seven interrelated dimensions of human flourishing** and shows how these shape behaviour, motivation, and participation over time.

This insight **reframes caregiving, education and culture as foundational economic infrastructures**

and positions **the cultivation of human capacities and relational wellbeing as central to the regeneration of economic systems**.

Seven Motivations





Examples of global
initiatives that are
challenging the
current worldview



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