

1.2 A 4-dimensional world

This is an explanation of the world we will work with. The picture in the middle of the page represents our fictional universe, the boy in it is a character. Read the following boxes by following the numerical order given from 1 to 4:

[1] Nature: Look at the big picture: you can see a planet with a boy on it. This planet, with the stars and other planets surrounding it, is the **external world**. On the planet there are some flowers, a little tree and a erupting volcano. But there is also an **internal world** in this picture. It is in the boy, in his **body**, his **drives** and the **feelings** which emerge from inside him: hunger, thirst, sex, likes and dislikes. This is the first dimension we work with:

- NATURE
- the world AS IT IS
- nature is divided into EXTERNAL & INTERNAL nature

[2] Society: But nature is not the only dimension that exists, in our picture you can also see other people and the things they make, in this case a house. Human beings are **social animals**, we **live together** with other human beings, and that makes it necessary to create **rules of coexistence**. Human beings also **make things**. We start from nature, the world as it is, but we make something out of it: **material** things (e.g. houses) or **immaterial** things (e.g. institutions, ideas, culture). We will call this dimension

- SOCIETY
- the world AS IT IS MADE
- the world AS RULE



[3] Metaphysics: But again, our world is not only composed of nature and society. Much in our world can be reduced to either the natural or the social, but some things seem to transcend these two dimensions (see the skull in the picture)

- Things we fear and cannot explain like death or evil
- Things we like magic, the wonder of looking at a beautiful landscape, or falling madly in love.

These moments somehow transcend the natural and social world we live in. Of course some people do not believe in transcendence. It is open whether you want to be a 'religious' or 'materialist' believer. But fiction and culture work with such transcendental moments. We will call this dimension

- METAPHYSICS
- the world AS MYSTERY

[4] Individuality: The 3 dimensions discussed somehow define us as human beings. I am defined and limited by

- my body, feelings and drives (my nature)
- living with other people, going to school or paying my taxes (society)
- my birth and death (metaphysics)

But I am also more than that. Look at the guy in the bottom right-hand picture: naked, swimming after a white doughnut. Would you do that? No. Would I do that? No. But he does. Like us, he is constituted by nature, society and metaphysics, but he is also more than that. He does what nobody else would do: he is an individual. So am I, and so are you. We call this dimension

- INDIVIDUALITY
- the world AS UNIQUE

Want to know more?

This world has a long pedigree in philosophy.

1. Greek thought: Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, used 3 dimensions when he distinguished between "the life of enjoyment [...], the political and [...] contemplative [life]" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b.18-20).

2. Christian thought: In V B.C., St. Augustine provided the first full formulation of this world. He posits "four kinds of things that are to be loved, first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us" (*Doctrina Christiana* 1.23.22).

3. Contemporary academic thought: Nowadays, this 4-dimensional world appears in literary semantics, which studies underlying meanings of literary texts. The 4 dimensions are called alethic and deontic modalities, their distribution is covered by an axiological modality

4. Other ideas: We will see in unit X that much psychoanalytic, Darwinistic, feminist and postcolonial thinking coincides with the 4 dimensions.