On the Intended Direction of Analysis

A Note on Responsible Use of the Hierarchy of Relational Claims

A supplementary document to the Hierarchy of Relational Claims. The framework was conceived and developed by Jim Grusendorf; this document was drafted with AI assistance under the author's direction. See the white paper preface for a full account of the collaborative process.

The Hierarchy of Relational Claims is a tool for evaluating relational claims that are already on the table. It is not a tool for generating them.

This distinction matters, and it is worth stating plainly.

Bottom-Up, Not Top-Down

The model is designed to be applied bottom-up: you begin with two things that appear related, examine the nature and depth of that relationship, and determine what tier the evidence actually supports. The tiers impose discipline on claims that are already being made — they ask whether the relationship has been characterized at the right level, whether the analogy is being asked to carry more weight than it can bear, whether what looks like deep correspondence is constraint-governed or coincidental, whether what appears to be two things might actually be one.

That last question — whether two apparently distinct things share identity — is the province of Tiers 4 and 5. These tiers are necessary completions of the analysis when the evidence warrants them. They are not invitations.

The Temptation of the Identity Tiers

The identity tiers can create a temptation that the model does not sanction. Because the model establishes that correspondence and identity lie on a single axis, and because Tier 5 represents the most complete form of relational claim, there is a rhetorical gravity that pulls toward the top. The implicit suggestion becomes: shouldn't we always be asking whether two things might actually be one? And from there, only a short step to: consciousness and the universe might be the same thing; the self and the cosmos might be identical; what appear to be distinct phenomena might be aspects of a single underlying reality.

This is not analysis. It is speculation dressed in the model's vocabulary.

The Hierarchy provides no license for this move. Reaching Tier 4 or Tier 5 requires evidence — grounded, evaluable, tier-appropriate evidence — not the observation that identity would be interesting or meaningful if it obtained. The fact that the model can represent identity claims does not mean that identity claims are the goal of analysis, any more than the existence of the numeral 5 means that every count should aim to reach it.

Butterfly-Netting Possibilities

There is a practice — common in certain philosophical and spiritual registers — of treating the conceivability of identity as reason to entertain it seriously. Two things could be one thing; we cannot rule it out; therefore the possibility deserves weight. Call it butterfly-netting: casting the net of identity over phenomena that have not earned that characterization, on the grounds that something interesting might be caught.

The Hierarchy explicitly does not support this practice. A Tier 5 claim requires that two apparently distinct perceived things be the same individual object or referent — not that they might be, not that a certain philosophical tradition holds that they are, not that the claim would be profound if true. The same standard applies to Tier 4: type identity requires a definition, a demonstration that both things instantiate it, and a showing that the definition is calibrated to the analogy at hand. "Consciousness and the universe share something deep" is, at best, an unspecified Tier 1 impression awaiting analysis. Promoting it to Tier 4 or 5 without the intervening work is not an insight the model licenses — it is a category error the model was designed to prevent.

When the Identity Tiers Are Appropriate

None of this is to say that Tier 4 and Tier 5 findings are rare or unimportant. They are neither. What distinguishes legitimate identity findings from speculative ones is the direction of travel.

A legitimate Tier 4 or 5 claim arrives because the analysis, conducted bottom-up, forced it — because the evidence at Tiers 2 and 3 accumulated to the point where asking whether identity obtained became unavoidable. The morning star and the evening star were observed, their orbital behavior was characterized, their positions were mapped, and the question of whether they were the same object arose from the data. The identity finding was a discovery, not a premise.

If there are grounded reasons — specific, articulable, tier-appropriate reasons — to ask whether two things might actually be one, then the question is worth pursuing rigorously. The model supports that pursuit. What it does not support is beginning with the identity hypothesis and working backward, or treating the possibility of identity as sufficient grounds for treating identity as probable.

The Positive Epistemic Role of Tier 2

The foregoing concerns the misuse of the identity tiers. But there is a corresponding discipline required at Tier 2 that is worth making explicit — not as a restriction but as a positive capability the model sanctions.

A well-formed Tier 2 mapping can perform a legitimate epistemic function short of asserting necessity: it can demonstrate structural coherence between two domains and thereby block premature negation. If a skeptic claims that two things are incompatible — that no coherent relationship between them is possible — a Tier 2 mapping that demonstrates such a relationship refutes that claim. It does not establish that the relationship is necessary or that it corresponds to actual structure. It establishes that a coherent mapping exists, and therefore that incompatibility has not been demonstrated.

The claim this licenses is precise: a solution exists within the constraint space. This is not the same as asserting that the solution is actual, or that it rises to Tier 3 necessity. It is sufficient to defeat impossibility arguments and to sustain the legitimacy of further inquiry. Used in this way, Tier 2 is defensively sound and epistemically patient.

What it cannot do is substitute for constraint evidence. The existence of a coherent mapping does not raise a claim's tier. A Tier 2 mapping that demonstrates possibility cannot be promoted to a Tier 3 claim by the observation that it is dense, coherent, or explanatorily satisfying. These are grounds for continued investigation, not for tier advancement.

The Model's Intent

The Hierarchy of Relational Claims is an instrument of epistemic discipline. Its purpose is to prevent relational claims from carrying more weight than the evidence supports — to identify when an analogy is being stretched, when a correspondence is being overstated, when an identity claim is premature. Applied in that spirit, it is useful precisely because it is demanding.

Applied in the opposite spirit — as a framework that validates the aspiration toward unity, that lends philosophical respectability to the intuition that everything might be connected to everything else — it becomes the thing it was designed to resist: a way of making weak claims sound stronger than they are.

The tiers go up to five. That is not a destination.