

METAMODERNITY

Based on the book [Metamodernity](#)
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Metamodernity is an alternative to both modernity and postmodernism, a cultural code that presents itself as an opportunity if we work deliberately towards it. It is a vision, an option and a possible future scenario. As a cultural code, metamodernity contains both indigenous, premodern, modern, and postmodern cultural elements and thus provides social norms and a moral fabric for intimacy, spirituality, individuality, and complex thinking. It has the potential to protect our cultures and cultural heritage as the economy, the internet and exponential technologies are going global and disrupting our current modes of societal organization and governance.

Indigenous culture can provide a connection to nature that we have lost and the circularity that we need to solve a host of problems. Premodern culture provided strong existential frameworks through what we today call religion. Modern culture emancipated humans and gave us science, human rights, democracy, prosperity, and safety. Postmodern analysis has the capability to expose hidden power structures and take an outside perspective on our own culture. We need it all. We also need to choose right; otherwise, we risk having to live with the worst of everything.

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Why metamodernity?

The world is changing. Our old knowledge and general understanding of the world do not provide sufficient answers anymore. As our old understandings and the answers we get from them are insufficient, the ways we are used to reacting and behaving do not work well anymore either. We are at a transition point in history where we need to decide what kind of future we want. We have the knowledge and technologies that allow us to solve practically all of our problems, but the development may also get out of hand. Many old institutions and structures are not up for today's challenges because they were created to solve the problems of 30, 50 or 100 years ago.

A general problem that we face as humans is that we do not solve the problems we have; we solve the problems we understand. In order to solve more problems and create better solutions, we need to understand more of the world. In fact, we need to understand the world in different ways; ways that are unfamiliar to us today. We have to push and expand our understanding of the world so that it matches the world we ourselves are creating.

Among the challenges are a number of simultaneous crises, one of them is a meaning-making crisis. Our understanding of the world is insufficient when we see it through an indigenous, pre-modern, modern, or postmodern perspective only. We are not creating the understanding we need in order to be able to grasp our own world and solve our problems. But we could. We could use our local, national, continental and global cultural heritage much more wisely. We could also become much better at satisfying our needs for intimacy, spirituality, knowledge, and self-knowledge. We could expand our understanding and imagination; we could increase the complexity of our inner world so that it matches the complexity of the outer world. We could empower ourselves. Whether we do this or not is entirely up to us.

Metamodernity

Metamodernity is a cultural possibility through which we can enjoy the cultural heritage that allows us meaning making at a deep existential and emotional level. It also allows us to look forward in ways not yet familiar to us. Metamodernity can allow us to appreciate the entire historical human experience as a meaningful and connected whole. This human experience in all its many aspects is not something we are above or even outside, we are embedded in it. We belong in it and it can allow us to seek out different kinds of knowledge and wisdom in different places for different purposes. Personal intimacy, strong communities, solid science, robust institutions, spirituality, faith, cultural heritage, satire, facts, knowledge, personal freedom, responsibility, and a sense of belonging and connectedness are all crucial. They serve different purposes in our lives, and each one of them provides an irreplaceable part of a meaningful life in a complex world. Metamodernity offers to contain and promote it all.

Neither modernity nor postmodernity were anticipated, they just emerged, but thanks to modernity and postmodernity we now have knowledge about ourselves, our heritage and the deeper structures in global development that we never had before, and we, both as individuals, as societies and as a species, therefore have options and choices we never had before. Metamodernity is a cultural code, but it is also a choice; it is something we can choose to co-create. I would say that it is a choice we need to make, as opposed to just waiting for whatever will emerge.

Cultural Codes

Cultural codes are the structures of society that change and must change as societies grow in size and complexity. They define the distribution of freedom and responsibility throughout society, and they are thus the moral fabric that can keep violence at a minimum as more people need to live, collaborate, compete, and thrive in bigger societies within certain physical boundaries. Cultural codes are cultural, moral and meaning making structures that are shared across a number of cultures with similar distribution of freedom and responsibility. The five cultural codes to which this applies and which we are going to explore are:

- **indigenous code:** Stone Age hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads and the earliest agriculture
- **traditional or pre-modern code:** Bronze and Iron Ages with city states and empires, incl. medieval Europe
- **modern code:** industrialized nation states with science, universal human rights and democracy
- **postmodern code:** stable and prosperous industrialized societies confronted with a multicultural world and realizing that all truth is context-bound, which leads to an intellectual, often ironic deconstruction of the previous codes and what they represent
- **metamodern code:** integration and appreciation of all of the above

Usually, cultural codes are something that emerge by trial and error, and then social sciences come afterwards and find the common denominators across cultures. Suggesting Metamodernity as a code before it has manifested itself throughout any actual culture is thus a radical and unusual endeavor and metamodernity is so far mostly an idea and a hope.

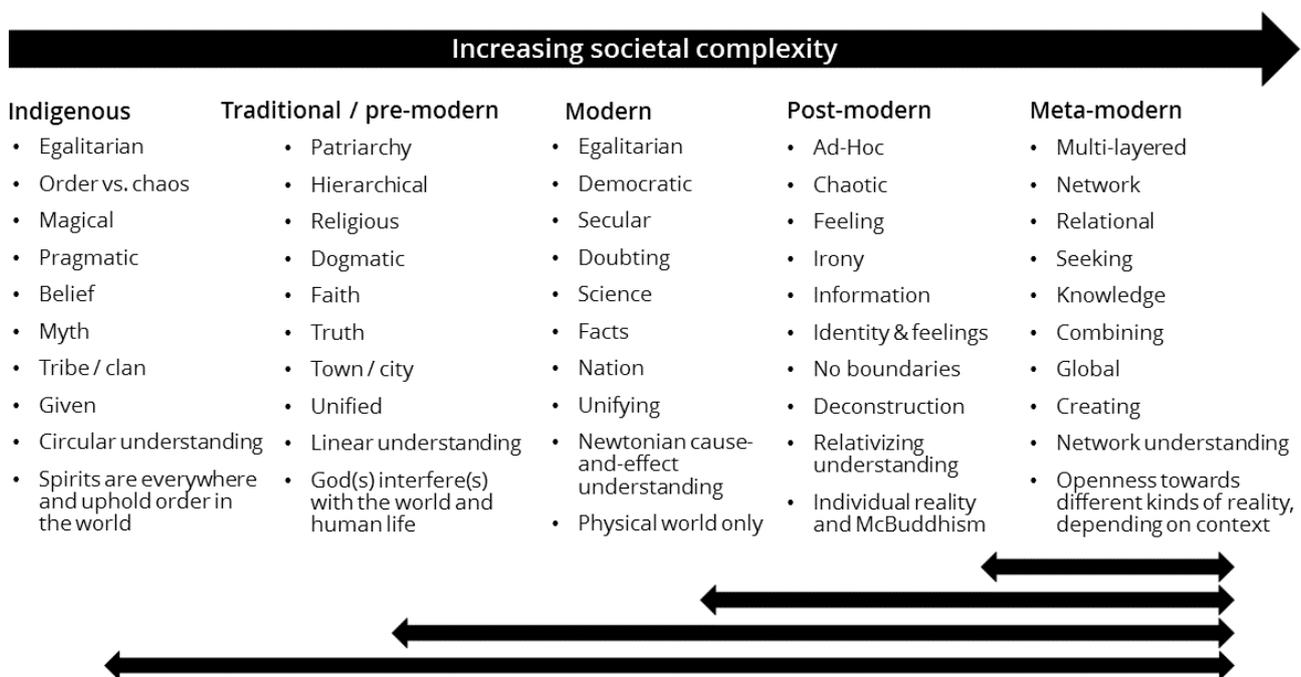


Fig. 1: Cultural codes

Transitions between codes

There is a transition phase between the cultural codes. New codes emerge in arts and aesthetics and in intellectual circles before they become manifest as shared norms. That is, in fact, one of the most crucial aspects of art: a premonition of the cultural code to come. Philosophy and social analysis then emerge, which put into words and concepts what art has shown us in glimpses; they concretize what is changing and what art has captured and expressed in elusive form. There is thus an 'ism,' which points forwards, but which is hard to grasp for contemporaries, and later, the 'ity' emerges:

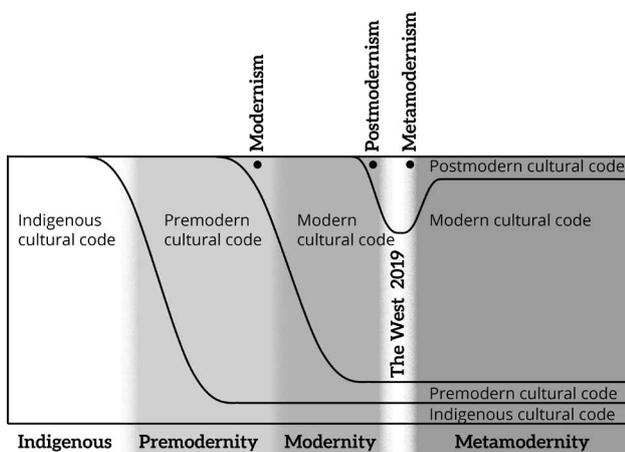


Fig. 2: *Isms and Cultural Codes*

Indigenous cultural code

Indigenous culture was the earliest form of human culture and cultural code. Though very different narratives, rituals, traditions etc. emerged around the globe, some common denominators remained among the many indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peoples saw themselves as part of nature and not something 'outside' nature; their worldview was holistic, everything was a connected whole and humans participated in it and its rhythms. Among indigenous peoples, the world was perceived as cyclical or circular: seasons, generations, weather, behaviors etc. kept repeating themselves when the world was in order. Only when chaos disrupted the order did something new happen and that was usually not a good thing. Indigenous peoples were animists, which meant that nature was understood as animated by spirits. All was

nature, all had spirit and the spirits of all things were accessible through magic and could be contacted through shamanic rituals. Knowledge about the environment was stored in myths, and there were many beliefs that modern people would classify as superstitions, but which served as important and useful rules of life and allowed people to survive.

Agriculture and pastoral nomads

Around 9000 BCE, tribes in the Middle East started domesticating animals and gradually they became pastoral nomads; other groups started developing agriculture and settled in villages. The first nomads and farmers kept much of the indigenous worldview, but the Middle Eastern nomadic tribes added a bull deity in the sky, and the settled farmers typically added a Mother Earth goddess who was the one making the grain grow out of the soil. As agriculture spread or was invented in other parts of the world, the circularity, animism and Mother Earth goddess tended to define the cultural code there as well.

The indigenous code thus covers both hunter-gatherer, pastoral nomadic and agricultural Stone Age, and though life styles and technology changed considerably in many ways, the codes are rather similar. Circularity and animism ruled, humans were a part of nature and integrated in its cycles, the culture was oral and knowledge was stored in mythology, artifacts, body ornaments, other ornamentations, and ritual.

Pre-modernity or traditional code

The era producing the pre-modern cultural code covers the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, and in Europe the medieval epoch. Though the Bronze and Iron Ages are different from each other in a number of ways, cultural foundations laid in the Bronze Age survived well into the Iron Age, and some parts are still active in codes around the world today.

The modern Westerner probably imagines that premodern peoples built cities and then provided the city with a temple; history shows it was the other way around. Sacred places in nature were equipped with altars, and as spiritual gatherings grew due to population growth and density, temples were erected and cities emerged around them.

With power and wealth came economic surplus (and slaves) to build even bigger temples and support a caste of priests, who could also devote their time to intellectual pursuits such as astronomy, math, architecture, and the sciences of the time. As the cities grew bigger and wealthier, new and specialized crafts and professions developed such as scribes, idol makers, potters, rope makers, bronze smiths, etc. Along with professional specialization and increased complexity emerged polytheistic mythologies, new power structures, and new institutions. Among them were strong hierarchies and big power distances, and the societies became highly patriarchal. The Mother Earth goddess may not have been neglected, but she got new colleagues: the wine god, the god of writing, the god of war, the goddess of love etc. As artisanship and other professions specialized, so did the various gods; each trade its god.

From around 2300 BCE, the earliest written legislation appears on tablets of stone with the legislation engraved on them.

Iron Age

The second part of the pre-modern era emerged with the Iron Age, which unfolded in the Middle East from around 1200 BCE and in China around 600 BCE.

Around 1100 BCE, somebody Semitic in what is currently Israel and Palestine invented the alphabet. Writing went from signs that meant what they showed, to signs where meaning and sign were increasingly detached from one another. Over the course of that development, the level of abstraction increased in the culture and thereby in the humans. As the alphabet spread, new thinking followed.

With iron and alphabet, the inventiveness, productivity and trade increased considerably, leading to The Axial Age approximately 800-300 BCE. The Axis giving name to the Axial Age is the climate belt from Italy via Greece, the Middle East, Asia, and all the way to China. Along this axis, domesticated animals and plants could be exchanged and traded, and the economy boomed: some cities reached 100,000, some even 300,000 inhabitants.

It was in those big cities during the Axial Age that not only Greek philosophy emerged; along the axis, so did the foundations of all the major world religions that

we know today. What the modern world calls religion was the simplest way to make people internalize the same moral values throughout a society. The 'trick' used by all religions is a narrative that promises some sort of later bliss if one keeps the rules, and the narrative is wrapped in the most transcendence-evoking aesthetics available. With hundreds of thousands of people and only hand written scrolls for communication (beyond meeting face-to-face), any society that could have people internalize the same set of moral norms and social rules would be a much better functioning society than the society that could not.

Modernity

The transition from pre-modernity to modernity was a long and war-torn process that began in Europe in the 1400s, and which can really only be said to have been completed in the West, Japan and Korea. Modernity is characterized by, among other things, religion being kept out of both politics and science. Modernity replaced the faith in God(s) and hopes of otherworldly rewards with results: science, medicine, technology, economic development, and political ideology and action gave hope and improved people's lives here and now.

Only in modern societies have there ever been secular politics and the basic egalitarian principle that all adults are equal political subjects. This modern world and its democracies are intimately tied to the nation-state. It is as peoples with sovereign states we have created our modern sense of peoplehood, shared fate and shared expectations, institutions, legislation, economies, and public spheres in our own national languages. This sense of peoplehood was promoted by the invention of the printing press, newspapers, public schools, and the radio, which homogenized the national languages and framed the world from a national perspective.

Postmodernism and postmodernity

As early as the 1970s, postmodernism was defined by philosophers as the breakdown of all meta-narratives, i.e. the narratives that hold our societies together, such as religion and political ideology; the narratives that tell us what is good and bad, right and wrong.

As already mentioned, there is a distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity:

- **postmodernism** is a cultural trend in modernity,
- **postmodernity** is a (potential) cultural code.

Currently, postmodernism plays a major role in our modern societies but it has not taken over entirely and become a full-blown cultural code of postmodernity; the West is still caught up in a struggle between modernity and postmodernity.

Postmodernism's five main moral values are: Always taking multiple perspectives, which is generally a very good idea, but which, to the extent there is no value hierarchy, only leaves people with their personal emotions as guidelines, and which therefore enforces subjectivism. The second moral value is just that: subjective emotions, since there is not much more to go by, which leads to the belief that 'what I feel must be the truth,' which leads to a sense of truth-destruction whenever the world does not share one's emotions. This in turn leads to personal identity based on subjective emotions only and not collective culture, which makes one's sense of identity very vulnerable whenever other people do not recognize it: one only has one's own emotions to protect one's identity. This leads to the third postmodern moral value: the insistence on not hurting anybody's emotions, which is, of course, always a noble endeavor, but since these emotions now constitute not just personal emotions but the truth and one's entire sense of identity, the hurting of emotions automatically becomes an offense that threatens more than just one's emotional wellbeing in the moment. Minor discomforts become micro-offenses caused by micro-aggressions. The result is the fourth postmodern moral value: identity protection through identity politics, and the fifth moral value: political correctness. Political correctness is actually very useful in societies of great diversity; there are safe ways of communicating that do not push people away before one gets a chance to know them. The problem arises when all of the above becomes as intolerant and totalitarian as previous cultural codes have often been.

The other major problem is that if postmodernism does become postmodernity and thus replaces moder-

nity as the cultural code, our collective ability to create a shared narrative will be constantly deconstructed, everything will be judged by subjective emotions, not collective moral values, and our societies will lose their ability to function. Therefore, we need to move beyond postmodernism and go meta, where we can both deconstruct our value hierarchies, norms, and shared narratives and keep them and strengthen them at the same time.

Conflicts between the codes

The journey from indigenous via pre-modern and modern cultural codes to the current postmodern battle for postmodernity was, and is, not without conflicts and crises. The reason is that cultural codes are about the core values of our moral fabric. Our moral fabric is an integral part of who we are as individuals, and from one code to the next, it looks as if people have no moral compass.

If we are in a less complex society with an older cultural code looking at the more complex society that has developed a newer, more complex cultural code with higher degrees of individual freedom and responsibility, it looks as if that more complex society has no moral values. With only the pre-modern cultural code and its epistemology in the meaning making toolbox, the modern society looks amoral. From the perspective of modernity, postmodernity looks amoral.

If, on the other hand, we are in a more complex society with a newer cultural code looking at the less complex society with less individual freedom and responsibility, we tend to call those societies (and their inhabitants) primitive. Calling others and their societies primitive is not a white, Western invention; the old, city dwelling Mesopotamians called the surrounding nomads and village peasants primitive too, and the Old Testament has few hesitations against killing peoples without written legislation.

Since the cultural codes are about moral values and these are about our meaning making and how we find love among our loved ones, some heavy emotional clashes can happen between individuals of different cultural codes and between societies of different cultural codes. Cultural codes other than our own often promote behaviors that we find utterly appalling.

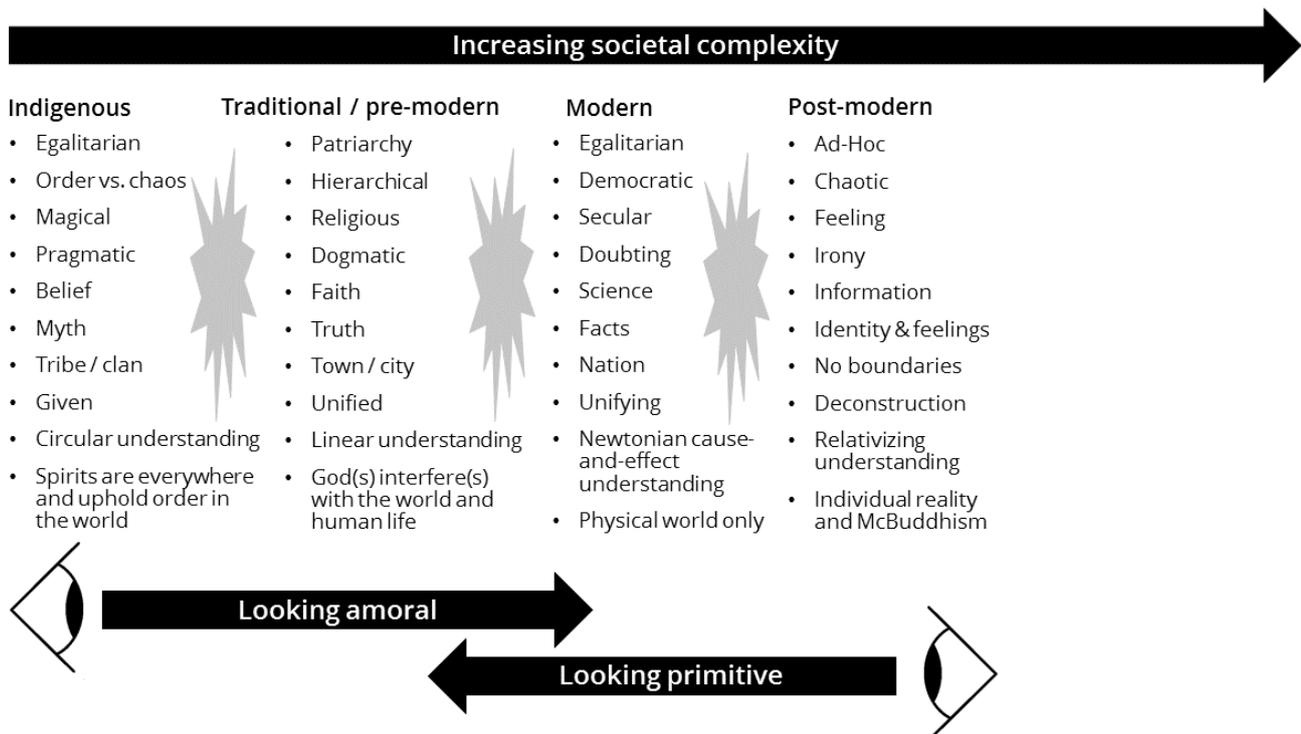


Fig. 3: Conflicts between Cultural Codes

Since there are these deep moral conflicts between cultural codes, societies rarely go through the transition from one cultural code to another without great inner conflict: some individuals approach and adopt new values, new norms, i.e. a new code before others, and between the people of the old code and the new, a heated emotional clash of moralities generally emerges. It is not just a difference in opinion or political interest and persuasion; it is a clash of that, which is most dear to us. It is a clash of that which tells us if we are moral beings or not, and this is physically stored in our brain and controls our emotional wellbeing. Everybody tends to think that they follow the right moral code, and except the psychopaths and sociopaths to whom other people's emotions and wellbeing do not matter, we all generally want to be morally good people who are loved by others. As a consequence, loving a person with a different cultural code and moral fabric is generally painful.

The clash between new morality and old morality and the inability to see the new morality as anything but amorality often makes people, including the political

leadership, fight the new cultural code with all possible means. This is why religious leadership in many parts of the world has insisted on keeping political authority and remaining pre-modern, even as societies grew and complexity increased, and even though new means of communication allow their populations to see that things can be different and modern: secular societies can thrive. In fact, secular societies generally thrive much better than pre-modern societies with religious politics.

Different cultural codes are also the source of the conflicts arising from increasing migration: people from pre-modern societies cannot spontaneously decode the moral values of modern and increasingly postmodern societies and thus, most likely, they do not see much need for integrating, much less assimilating. Why would anybody integrate or assimilate into a society they can only interpret as amoral? From the perspective of the modern citizen, pockets of pre-modern cultural code within the modern and/or postmodern society are seen as primitive. In that regard, from the perspective of the postmodern subject, there is no categorical difference

between the pre-modern and modern, it is all hierarchical, oppressive and politically incorrect. Ironically, though the fully modern society is the only society capable of tolerating and sustaining postmodernism, the

modern is perceived as more politically incorrect than the indigenous and premodern by many postmodernists since modernity is in power and hierarchies of power must be deconstructed.

Metamodernity—a future scenario

On their own, none of the existing cultural codes is sufficiently complex to handle our current and future reality. Indigenous code can only regulate small, 'intimate' groups, pre-modernity does not offer individual freedom and democracy, modernity is reductionist and cannot see its own shortcomings, and postmodernism leaves society with identity politics based on subjective sentiments.

Metamodernity vs. metamodernism

Metamodernity is nowhere yet as a culture defining code, but premonitions are emerging, and metamodernism is found in pockets in art and academia. As metamodernism is currently explored, though, it focuses on the integration and/or juxtaposition of modernity and postmodernity only, not on all four cultural codes:

- **Metamodernism:** an emerging strand in the arts, philosophy and cultural theory integrating / juxtaposing modernity and postmodernism.
- **Metamodernity:** a cultural code integrating all four previous cultural codes indigenous, premodern, modern, and postmodern.

Metamodernism, therefore, is not sufficiently complex to handle the current human condition either, since modernity and postmodernism are not enough.

One reason for this lack of depth in metamodernism may be that it is mainly a younger generation of artists, philosophers and scientists who occupy themselves with metamodernism, and due to growing up in the West no earlier than the 1980s, they may not have personal experience with the pre-modern cultural elements of their culture that are familiar to older generations. Alternatively, the explanation may be that history

has not been taught properly in schools so they simply do not know the development that brought us here. Anyway, this is speculation and the only thing important regarding this, is that there is a difference between how most people use the term metamodernism and what must be meant by metamodernity if it is to be sufficiently complex as a cultural code to provide the necessary meaning making.

Suggesting a future

It is very unusual to suggest a future cultural code as it is emerging; normally, cultural codes have been extracted from existing cultures and then described. The cases where people actually did try to predesign a future civilization have usually ended in disaster and bloodbaths; among the examples are the Third Reich and the Soviet Union.

So, on the surface of it, suggesting a new civilization before it unfolds by itself seems like a really bad idea. Maybe it is. But not considering it and not trying to understand up front what kind of civilization we want in the generations to come, as technologies, tech ownership, power structures, migration, and the environment are going to radically change is definitely a bad idea.

What metamodernity can offer

Rather than seeing conflicts between the various cultural codes that humanity has produced so far, we can see each one of them as contributing with something crucial, emancipating and meaningful under different circumstances and in different kinds of groups and social settings. By integrating the best of the previous codes, a metamodern culture becomes multilayered, and it admits that the world is not static but it is a constant process. Culture is both the heritage and the evolution of culture.



Metamodernity as it is imagined here and as it is emerging in pockets in modern/postmodern societies is more than just lumping different kinds of cultural norms and moral values together; integrating the four known cultural codes into one richer code creates a synergy and has its own unique qualities. We also need to be aware of and make some conscious choices about which elements from the previous codes to appreciate and apply onto our current and future complex world. All four codes contain elements that promote freedom and responsibility, and all four codes contain elements that produce the opposite. If we aim for emancipation and empowerment, we need to be careful.

Since we are talking about the future, everything proposed here is, of course, up for discussion and may end up unfolding in entirely different ways. Metamodernity is a suggestion. What is obvious, though, is that the current code in the West of ambivalent postmodern modernity is creating both personal and societal confusion and too many conflicts between worldviews, rather than an actual appreciation of diversity of mind.

The best from indigenous culture

Our brains and emotions evolved in indigenous culture. It would thus be fair to assume that if we allowed ourselves to develop more life circumstances that match the environment that matches our brains, particularly in childhood, we would suffer from less stress, depression and anxiety, and we would feel better, do better, be happier, and have an easier time fitting in. Three of the most important elements of indigenous code are spirituality, circularity and connectedness to nature.

Spirituality is intimately connected to the vulnerability we share in true intimacy. Many have lost the tightknit spiritual community that used to nurture our soul, our vulnerability, our sense of belonging, and our need for transcendence. All of this used to be there and helped us deepen our emotional spectrum. We have lost our tightknit tribe. We have also lost the deep sense of wonder and awe that allows us to let go of ourselves and experience our being as embedded in nature and in an ordered universe saturated with meaning and purpose.

Circularity and our **connectedness to nature** are basic human conditions. Humans are not separate from nature; we are nature. We are part of the grand circles

of life and when we try to escape it, we die. Furthermore, there are still indigenous peoples out there and they have ancient and deep knowledge about the local nature that humanity needs if we are to solve our environmental crises.

The circular and most natural way of seeing the world and being in the world is slowly entering our overall ways of thinking. Circular economy and cradle-to-cradle principles are emerging, and the so-called bio economy approaches innovation and economic development from the perspective of getting a 'free ride' on processes already present in nature, such as harnessing enzymes and creating no-waste cycles of production. By implementing circular methods and seeing ourselves as an integral part of nature, our production and consumption do not equal production of waste but is a contribution to new cycles of use and usefulness.

The best from premodern culture

The premodern cultural code could keep tens of thousands of people united over long distances in the days of clay tablets and handwritten scrolls. What we all gained from the pre-modern era was rule by law and symbolic worlds that help us struggle with existential and moral questions in societies where we live among strangers and must be able to navigate society on our own as individuals. Some of the narratives of this era still define major civilizations and are the foundations of our moral values and maps of meaning. Worth cherishing from the premodern heritage is the sense of reverence for the ever-present moral struggle of becoming a responsible individual, the pursuit of beauty and transcendence, and the subjugation of self-interest to the collective good.

The old, pre-modern stories that are still around and have managed to survive the Renaissance, the printing press and modern science have everlasting qualities that allow us to keep finding existential truths in them. That is why our pre-modern heritage is still important and meaningful. What we inherited from the pre-modern code can open more insights about ourselves, even today, if we are open to it, explore the narratives with love and curiosity and care to struggle with them.

What the pre-modern cultural code introduced and which we could never survive without today is the ability to unite in societies that are held together by a shared

narrative, and through that, a sense of shared fate. It is through our sense of peoplehood and our shared history that we can maintain the modern state that guarantees individual emancipation and rule of law, and which protects our human rights. What we gained from pre-modernity and cannot afford to lose is the ability to gather around an idea and feel responsibility towards it and work for it.

The best from modernity

The entity that could be held together through liberal democracy turned out to be the nation state: people sharing not only a landmass but also a shared language that allows there to be a democratic debate, and a shared sense of fate due to history.

Without modernity, we would not have modern medicine, modern education, modern technology, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and equal opportunity for women and men. We cannot be free as individuals without modernity; we cannot flourish and take responsibility for our own lives and for others and their freedom, if we do not have the freedom to do it. Modernity not only allowed but grew from the individuality of mind: the ability to think for oneself and disagree with authority. Modernity also produced the institutions to protect and promote freedoms, rights and opportunities, and without it, we could not have had as relatively little violence as we have enjoyed in the West since 1945. The implementation of modernity is not complete, far from it, but as a species, we are both closer than ever before and in dire danger of losing the modern freedoms, rights and opportunities.

The best from postmodernism

Postmodern analysis deconstructs biases and preconceptions. It makes us aware of hidden power structures in our societies and cultures, and it points out that all meta-narratives are human constructs. Postmodernism enables multiple perspectives and a constant change of perspective, it also sees contextuality and how that influences and defines any phenomenon. Both the multiple perspectives and the understanding of context are crucial if we are to fully understand ourselves and our interactions in this world, particularly as more people

move around and we are inevitably going to have to collaborate with people who come from other cultures.

Metamodernity – An evolutionary systems perspective

Since the increase in complexity in the world around us is exponential, and exponential developments, particularly several exponential developments simultaneously, make it impossible to make concrete predictions about the future, we need to be able to stand firm and confident in the whirlwind of unpredictability and constant evolution. This firmness and confidence cannot be stupid stubbornness; it must be supported by an inner stability and mental complexity that matches the outer world, so that it can allow us to point out the moral and ethical direction that is worth pursuing in whatever choices we are making. As the world goes exponentially fast up the ladder of complexity, we need to have the inner moral compass that can keep us safe. Personal inner development, maturation, responsibility, curiosity, rootedness, openness, and moral courage therefore become key.

Metamodernity can allow us to appreciate the entire human experience as a connected developing whole. It can allow us to seek out different kinds of knowledge in different places for different purposes. Intimate personal relationships and big societies based on modern values and science serve radically different purposes in our lives, and the relationships with others that we enjoy in each of them are thus different and provide different things. Oral stories within a 'tribe,' grand narratives passed down through the centuries and scientific facts all provide very different kinds of knowledge about the world, and we need all of them but for very different purposes and in different contexts. We can approach indigenous spiritual intimacy in the smaller setting while rejecting it in politics. Yet, we can use indigenous symbolism and apply it to global politics if it adds meaning and clarity (talking about Mother Earth feeding and nurturing her children makes symbolic sense and may be deeply meaningful, but it could not be part of any legislation). Group sizes, collective sensibility and the purpose of increased freedom and responsibility define how elements from various codes may be applied.



With a metamodern understanding of the complexity of our heritage and the evolution of our meaning making, and with a metamodern understanding of connectedness and progress, we can search and choose wiser and make wiser decisions. We can combine different kinds of knowledge to serve our questions in ways that are more complex.

The many cultures around the globe, the many ways of being human that have emerged in our species also say something about each one of us: any unfamiliar way of living, way of perceiving, way of understanding, and any kind of meaning-making is a potential that I too harbor, simply by being human.

Not only is there normally a moral clash between consecutive cultural codes, there is also a clash between concurrent, particularly neighboring, imagined communities, be they religions or nations. From a metamodern perspective, we can transcend this clash and allow ourselves to appreciate the diversity. Rather than mere relativism (as in postmodernism), with a metamodern perspective, we can both defend the higher degrees of freedom and responsibility and appreciate that there are so many meaningful ways of being human, and that there is also progress towards increased freedom and responsibility plus increased uniqueness and connectedness whenever we insist on it and work for it. We can build a stronger, richer and more meaningful world with more diversity and depth.

Keep your current meaning making

Abstract as this may sound, at the very simplest level it allows us to keep our preferred meaning-making as long as we recognize that 'I will never have the full picture, and no matter how meaningful my current meaning making is to me, it is only one perspective on the world.' In the ocean of abstractions and millions of things I have no clue about, my simplest meaning making is OK, as long as I recognize that it is not the full truth about the world. As long as I am willing to accept this limitation, and as long as I am willing, at some point, whenever I am ready, to open my mind to the world beyond it, keeping my current meaning making is not a problem, it is just a step on the way and I need to be rooted in something.

What should be reassuring about metamodernity is that since all the cultural codes are important, nobody is going to lose their current cultural code, which is providing their current moral values, but we are all going to add new understandings to our existing way of seeing the world. That which is most meaningful to us is not going to be taken away from us by a cultural code that appears to be amoral and which destroys what we love. Rather, that which is most meaningful to us can be part of a more complex meaning making code: metamodernity.

The easy pitfall: the worst from everything

Since we are facing a necessary upgrade of our cultural codes to something that matches the complexity of the challenges we are facing as a species, we are also facing the risk of much discomfort, as we have to re-invent our moral fabric. During such times of anxiety and moral discomfort, succumbing to the worst elements of the previous cultural codes is very tempting, but we cannot afford to do so because that would not allow us to address global problems. Changing our perspective on the world to see it from a higher level of complexity will never be like snapping our fingers. Rather, our spontaneous urge will be to seek simple answers

appropriate for smaller groups and work hard to keep them.

All four existing cultural codes contain elements that speak directly to our sense of comfort and familiarity, and which cannot help us solve the challenges we are facing. This poses a problem, because it makes us prone to being sucked into something that feels really good and safe but which is going to make our life circumstances worse. All four cultural codes have their own pitfalls, their own measure of luring gravity towards ideas and solutions that are not going to promote freedom and responsibility:



Indigenous pitfalls

Our brains have evolved for the indigenous life and the small tribe. Tribalism is very appealing: it simply feels good to serve the people closest to us and not to bother with the bigger picture. In larger societies, this tribalism is detrimental and we know it as corruption.

Our brains also evolved for following the opinions of people we trust and, worryingly enough, we generally follow those who speak with the most confidence and least doubt. Instead of seeing doubt as a quality leading to wiser decisions, we spontaneously perceive it as a weakness; the self-confident buffoon has greater power of persuasion than the person who weighs his words and vents his doubts. We also follow our emotions and gut feelings, and see cause-and-effect, even where there is none. Our brains did not evolve for abstract and scientific thinking. Hence, science denial that arouses us emotionally, be it the belief that the earth is flat or that tested vaccines cause autism, speaks to our brains and emotions in a way that science itself does not.

Indigenous code must be administered in the right ways in the right contexts in order not to break down freedom and responsibility in larger societies—and not to turn healthy skepticism into deadly idiocy.

Pre-modern pitfalls

Pre-modern cultural code is the source of fundamentalism, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and institutionalized violence, torture, oppression, persecution of minorities and freethinkers, violent enforcement of obedience and conformity, and the creation of order out of chaos through patriarchy, dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. It institutionalizes us-versus-them thinking and the sense of identity that grows from an idea of moral superiority, and it is frequently backed by the prospect of heroic war.

Strange as it may sound, this all has a very strong appeal, even to modern people who are used to living in open democratic societies with high degrees of individual freedom and responsibility, whenever the world is becoming too complex or chaotic for comfort. If our known world is threatened, and we sense that we are about to lose control in our own life, we are all prone to long for pre-modern-style order and authoritarian leadership. Pre-modern-style order has the luring capacity

of providing simple answers to complex problems, of offering strong emotional in-group bonding, of handing us a moral compass even though it points in the wrong direction, and of putting us in a strong scaffolding where our options are clear-cut and where simple tasks can lead to heroic status.

Modern pitfalls

Modernity has produced racism, national chauvinism, communism, Marxism, fascism, Nazism, and other nastyisms, but structurally these ideologies are pre-modern cultural code in a modern dress and provided with modern technology for persecuting and killing 'the others.'

Modernity has also produced a tendency for scientism and a blindness to our inner dimension and meaning making; modernity lacks the deep emotional timbre that comes from religious spirituality. This emotional depth is a dimension of the human existence that rationality can neither provide nor handle and thus tends to destroy—unless it is channeled into national chauvinism or totalitarian ideology with majestic aesthetics.

As societies become more complex and increasingly individualistic, modernity is a source of nihilism, loneliness and the current meaning-crises. It may thus drive people into the arms of religious and other fanatics who offer a meaning-making alternative.

Postmodern pitfalls

The loneliness and nihilism produced by modernity is nothing compared to the loneliness and existential emptiness that is often the result of postmodernity, i.e. when postmodernism becomes a cultural code or an ideology in itself and not just a current within aesthetics and the arts. With everything relativized and the moral value systems deconstructed, there is no grand moral truth to pursue, no honorable endeavor to embark on, and no obligation to stick around when life is tough and people really need you—which means that nobody else is around either when you really need them. Duty has been dismantled, and commitment and resilience in the face of the long and demanding haul have been replaced by an ironic shrugging of the shoulders. Unless there is a violation—or even a micro-violation—relating to identity. Maybe just a self-perceived identity.

Existentially, in a postmodern world, we are not



pushed to grow (up) and align our emotions with the pillars of our civilization and share the load. Since we are social animals, we cannot handle this. We cannot survive as detached entities, and new group identities evolve. Because these new identities are based on subjective feelings and not on that which is universal within society, they cannot carry a democratic society.

At the individual level, postmodernism/-ity deprives us of something really important: the clear-cut moral values that allow us to feel safe in childhood and to come of age with a sense of whether we are good people or not. Even more so than this is the case for modernity, postmodernism, to the extent it is becoming a cultural code and thus postmodernity, there is every reason to believe that it opens the floodgates to making religious fundamentalism very appealing to young minds who cannot find moral guidance in the greater, postmodern society. Without clear moral values that can be easily grasped by teenagers and young adults, religious fundamentalism kicks in an open door.

For those to whom postmodernism and political correctness have become the infallible ideology, everything must be deconstructed and postmodernism becomes the totalitarian ideology that cannot tolerate any other cultural code. As a result, postmodernism is currently tearing Western civilization more or less apart and laying it open to religious fanatics on the one hand and to commercial interests on the other, particularly surveillance capitalism in the narrow interests of tech developers and The Market. As a bitter irony, postmodernism also prevents us from protecting our democratic system from cyber warfare, manipulation, fake news etc. The intellectuals who were supposed to guard and upgrade our moral compass have, instead, poo-pooed that which tends to be the most important foundations

of meaning making and social cohesion for most people: their nation, their religion, their biological sex/gender, and their traditional food, i.e. meat.

Combined pitfalls and shortcomings

Combining indigenous, premodern, modern, and postmodern codes the wrong way we thus risk tribalism and corruption combined with religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism, and surveillance capitalism, which moves the ownership and control over algorithms onto still fewer hands. Meanwhile, the ability of our technologies to monitor, control and kill us based on autonomous swarm intelligence is increasing—and postmodernism is not able to explain why that is wrong.

All of the four 'old' cultural codes thus have their shortcomings; none of them can handle on their own all our needs in the globalized, digitized 21st century. All of the codes have some luring inadequate, if not toxic, elements that—were they to dominate—would tear all civilization apart given the technologies that already exist. Even more so with the technologies currently in the pipeline.

When we combine the four cultural codes, as we will be doing, one way or the other as we are struggling for a meaning-making foothold, and as we move on into the future, it is up to us to decide what parts of our meaning-making past upon which we base our future.

Holding us back from transcending into a metamodern cultural code that will increase both meaning making, freedom and responsibilities is primarily our own perception of the world and our lack of awareness of the alternatives. There are severe obstacles in the outer world, but our one big challenge is to see the world differently, to develop new values, to educate ourselves, and to expand our imagination.

Metamodern Meaning and Hope

The world is changing due to a number of factors, where technological development, climate change, globalization, existing debt, marketization, and migration between cultural codes are the big six. This means an increasingly complex world for all of us. In order to be

able to handle this increased complexity, we need to upgrade our meaning-making capabilities and the content of the meaning making itself, so that they match the complexity of the world in which we live.

Appropriate education and meaning making now



and in the future are not something that can be accomplished during primary and secondary school, hardly during tertiary school either. It will be a life-long process that requires different kinds of cultural experiences, education, curiosity, and open-mindedness throughout life; it requires Bildung. If our medieval ancestors could walk through life illiterate and with a deep faith in God taking care of everything, and our great-grandparents 100 years ago could do with 7 years of school, perhaps some faith in God and some involvement in unions and politics, and we ourselves, until recently, could do with 10-15 years of education, following the news and enjoying pop-culture plus some of our cultural heritage, then the future will demand even more of us. Not just life-long learning for vocational and professional skills, but also life-long pursuit of expanding our general knowledge and imagination, i.e. our meaning making; Bildung for life.

We need to see and experience ourselves as being part of something bigger than the here and now and the communities right around us. We also need to belong in bigger, meaning-making communities such as religions and nation states that can carry the various loads presented to us by the planet, by our own collective actions, and by the sum total of our individual actions. We need to see how we can grow our inner world and capacities so we can become active co-creators of the outer world. We need hope and somebody with whom to share it and work for it.

Initiating the conversation about what kind of life and civilization on the other side of our current cultural code we would love to live in, is up to each one of us. Increasing freedom and responsibility through metamodernity should be among the options considered.

Metamodernity

This paper is a summary of Lene Rachel Andersen's book *Metamodernity—Meaning and Hope in a Complex World*

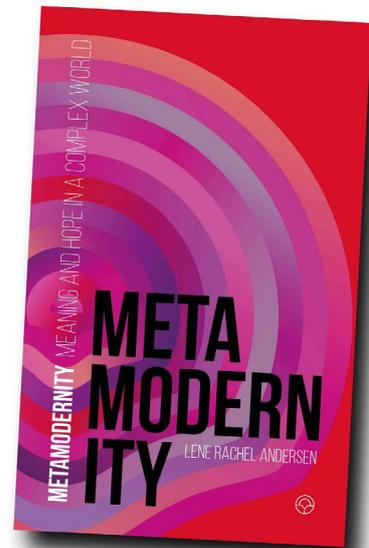
ISBN 978-87-93791-01-5

138 pages

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Lene Rachel Andersen



Lene Rachel Andersen is an economist, author, futurist, and Bildung activist. After studying business economy for three years, she studied theology. During her studies, she wrote entertainment for Danish television until she decided to quit theology, become a fulltime writer and focus on technological development, big history and the future of humanity.

Since 2005, Andersen has written 15 books and she has received two Danish democracy awards: Ebbe Kløvedal-Reich Democracy Baton (2007) and Døssing Prisen, the Danish librarians' democracy prize (2012). Among her books are [The Nordic Secret](#) (2017), co-written by Tomas Björkman, and [Metamodernity](#) (2019).

Andersen is one of the co-founders of the Copenhagen based think tank [Nordic Bildung](#), and she is a [full member of the Club of Rome](#). Andersen is also the initiator of [European Bildung Day](#) and one of the initiators of the [European Bildung Network](#).

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