

The Fantasy Attractor of Force: Why the West Cannot Learn

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The Puzzle

The most heavily armed civilization in human history keeps losing wars of choice. It spends trillions on weapons, deploys the most advanced military ever assembled, and commands unparalleled economic and technological resources. Yet decade after decade, its interventions fail to produce their stated outcomes. Afghanistan crumbles the moment the troops leave. Iraq descends into chaos and gives birth to ISIS. Libya becomes a failed state. Iran grows stronger under decades of pressure. Sanctions do not change behavior. Bombing does not produce stability. Escalation does not create compliance.

The West is not failing because it lacks capacity. It is failing because it is applying the wrong tool to the wrong kind of problem—and it is structurally incapable of recognizing this fact.

This is not a political opinion. It is a formal prediction of the attractor framework.

The Framework in Brief

The attractor framework distinguishes between two fundamental types of systems:

Conservative systems – like electrons, protons, and the universe as a whole – persist without consuming energy or exchanging entropy with an environment. They are the floor and roof of reality: the eternal skeleton upon which everything else is built.

Dissipative systems – like life, consciousness, societies, and belief systems – maintain their structure by continuously exchanging energy and entropy with their surroundings. They persist only at the cost of generating entropy. They are the transient dance in between.

The West is a dissipative system. It maintains its structure through continuous economic, military, and cultural activity. It persists by consuming resources and generating entropy (chaos, waste, blowback). But persistence is not the same as health. A system can persist indefinitely in a deeply dysfunctional state—if it is locked into a **fantasy attractor**.

A fantasy attractor is a sealed basin. It is a stable state that the system cannot escape because it is *impermeable to corrective information*. Feedback that would disrupt the attractor is filtered out, reframed, or dismissed. The system persists in its delusion because it is structurally incapable of recognizing that it is deluded.

The West is locked in a fantasy attractor centered on a single core belief: **force is the ultimate tool**.

The Belief System

The belief is rarely stated explicitly, but it underpins every institution, strategy, and intervention:

- Force is the ability to compel compliance.
- Strength is demonstrated through domination.
- Resistance is evidence of insufficient force.
- Escalation is the appropriate response to failure.

This belief system is self-sealing. Every failure is interpreted as evidence that force was not applied *hard enough*. Every defeat is reframed as a betrayal, a lack of resolve, or an enemy's cunning—never as a failure of the belief itself. The system cannot ask: “*What if force is fundamentally the wrong tool for this kind of problem?*” because that question would require abandoning the identity of the system.

This is the defining characteristic of a fantasy attractor: it persists not because it works, but because the system cannot see that it doesn't.

The Empirical Record

Consider the evidence:

Vietnam (1955-1975). The most powerful military in history could not defeat a guerrilla force. Millions died. The outcome was communist victory—the very outcome the intervention was designed to prevent. The response was not to abandon the belief in force. It was to invent the “Vietnam syndrome” and spend decades trying to overcome it.

Iraq (2003). A war justified by weapons of mass destruction

that did not exist. The regime was toppled. The country was destroyed. ISIS emerged. Iran was empowered. The region was destabilized. The outcome was the opposite of every stated goal.

Afghanistan (2001-2021). Twenty years. Trillions of dollars. Thousands of lives. The stated goal was to defeat the Taliban and build a stable democratic state. The actual outcome: the Taliban walked back into power the day after the withdrawal.

Libya (2011). A “humanitarian intervention” that destroyed a functioning state and replaced it with chaos, slave markets, and an open migration crisis. The stated goal was to protect civilians. The actual outcome: more civilians died, more suffered, and the region was destabilized.

Syria (2011-present). Covert interventions, proxy wars, and force escalations produced no resolution. The stated goal was regime change. The actual outcome: Russia and Iran were empowered, the country was devastated, and a humanitarian catastrophe unfolded.

Iran (1979-present). Decades of sanctions, covert operations, and military posturing have not changed Iran’s fundamental trajectory. The regime has only hardened. Its nuclear program has only advanced. The stated goal is a stable, compliant Iran. The actual outcome is a more determined, more hostile Iran.

Gaza (2005-present). Repeated military campaigns, blockades, and escalations produce cycles of violence with no endpoint. The stated goal is security. The actual outcome is radicalization, destruction, and perpetual conflict.

The pattern is undeniable: **force, applied to complex systems, produces the opposite of its intended outcome.**

Why This Keeps Happening

The attractor framework provides a formal explanation.

Corrective permeability (κ) is a measure of how open a system is to corrective information. A high- κ system can incorporate feedback, adjust its behavior, and shift its attractor. A low- κ system is sealed. It cannot learn. It cannot change. It persists in its current state, regardless of the consequences.

The West's κ is approaching zero. It is a sealed system.

Why?

Because the West interprets all information through the filter of its core belief: *force is the answer*. Every failure is reframed as evidence of insufficient force. Every defeat is seen as a reason to escalate. Every catastrophe is understood as a demonstration of the enemy's evil, not the intervention's folly. The system is epistemically closed. It cannot see what it is doing, because seeing it would require abandoning the belief that defines it.

This is the formal definition of a fantasy attractor: **a sealed basin that persists because it cannot recognize that it is sealed.**

The Entropy Cost of Persistence

Every dissipative system pays a cost for its persistence. It generates entropy—disorder, waste, blowback—in the process of maintaining its structure. The West is no exception.

The West's persistence is maintained at an enormous cost:

- Trillions of dollars diverted from productive investment to military expenditure.
- Hundreds of thousands of lives lost in wars of choice.
- Millions displaced by conflicts the West initiated or exacerbated.
- Global instability created by interventions that destabilize rather than stabilize.
- Moral authority eroded by actions that undermine the very values the West claims to uphold.
- Ecological destruction accelerated by the industrial-military complex.

This entropy is not noise. It is the cost of maintaining a fantasy attractor. The West persists in its delusion, but the price is visible everywhere: in the rubble of cities, in the refugee camps, in the radicalized populations, in the distrust of the global majority, in the exhaustion of the system itself.

The Attractor of Force

The West is not choosing to fail. It is locked into a basin that makes failure the only possible outcome.

A basin is a stable state that the system naturally settles into. Once you are in a basin, you are pulled back to it whenever you try to leave. The West's basin is organized around force:

- Institutions built for force projection.
- Culture that rewards decisive action and punishes patience.

- Media that demands visible results and cannot see invisible cultivation.
- Electoral cycles that incentivize short-term fixes and punish long-term thinking.
- Ideology that frames the world as a battle between good and evil.

Each element reinforces the others. The basin is deep. It is self-sustaining. And it is sealed.

This is why the West cannot learn. Learning would require stepping outside the basin. But the basin is all the West knows. It has no reference point for a different mode of being. It cannot conceive of a non-force intervention, because force is the only language it speaks.

The Alternative: Cultivation

There is an alternative.

It is not new. It is not complicated. It is not even hidden. It is the ancient wisdom of cultivation:

- Observe before you intervene.
- Understand the system before you try to shift it.
- Apply precision and restraint, not force and escalation.
- Be patient. The system will shift on its own timeline.
- Accept that you cannot force a living system to comply with your will.

This is the Taoist principle of *wu wei*: action that is so aligned with the natural flow of things that it appears effortless. It is not passivity. It is not surrender. It is the recognition that force, applied to complex systems,

generates more chaos than order—and that the only way to produce lasting change is to cultivate conditions that allow the system to shift on its own.

The West cannot implement this approach because its basin prevents it. But individuals can.

My sleep experiment is an example. I did not force deep sleep to appear. I observed. I adjusted. I added saffron and ashwagandha. I went outside in the morning. I reduced alcohol. I let the system shift on its own timeline. And it did. REM increased. Continuity improved. Deep sleep began to stir.

I did not force the change. I cultivated it.

The Three-Body Problem

This is the deepest lesson: you cannot force a system into a state that does not exist in its phase space.

In astrophysics, the three-body problem has no general stable solution. The system either collapses, ejects one of the bodies, or oscillates chaotically. You cannot force a three-body system into a stable orbit because that state does not exist.

Geopolitics is a many-body problem. It has no stable low-energy attractor. You cannot force Iran, Israel, Russia, China, or Afghanistan into compliance because the stable state you are aiming for does not exist. You are trying to force a square peg into a round hole—and then escalating when it does not fit.

The West's demand for stability is a category error. It is trying to impose a state of affairs that is not part of the system's phase space. The result is not stability—it is chaos,

blowback, and collapse.

The Fantasy Attractor

The West's belief in force is a fantasy attractor. It is a sealed basin that persists despite—or *because of*—its detachment from reality. The system cannot correct itself because correction would require abandoning the belief that defines it.

This is why the West is stupid. Not because it lacks intelligence, but because it is structurally incapable of learning. It is trapped in a basin that prevents it from seeing what it is doing. It keeps doing the same thing and expecting a different result—and it cannot see that the result cannot be different because the system has no attractor for the outcome it seeks.

There is no end in sight. The West will continue to escalate, continue to fail, continue to generate entropy, and continue to interpret its failures as evidence of the need for more force. It will collapse or eject, just like a three-body system. There is no other outcome.

For the Individual

The civilization cannot learn. But you can.

You can see the pattern. You can recognize that force is not the answer. You can step outside the basin—if only for a moment. You can cultivate patience, observation, and precision. You can apply the attractor framework to your own life, your own habits, your own beliefs. You can ask: “*Am I*

locked in a fantasy attractor? Am I sealed against corrective information? What would it take to become permeable?"

This is not a political program. It is a personal practice. It is the work of a lifetime. But it is the only way out.

The Invitation

Fantasy Attractor is a research program. It invites challenge, correction, and collaboration. It does not claim to have all the answers. It offers a framework—a common language for comparing systems that appear unrelated. It asks: *What persists? What changes? What is the cost of persistence? What is the cost of change?*

If you see a flaw, a gap, or a better way, contact us. The framework is living. It is open. It is permeable.

That is the opposite of a fantasy attractor. That is the beginning of learning.

Robert Galida is an independent researcher and the founder of the Fantasy Attractor Research Program. His work develops a formal framework for understanding persistence and change across physical, biological, cognitive, and social systems.

Metronome, Memory, and the

Threefold Anchor: A Relational Account of Time [F] (2026)

Abstract

This paper presents a relational view of time based on the attractor framework.

We argue that two very different kinds of attractors work together to create what we call time:

- **Conservative attractors** (electrons, neutrinos, protons) act as metronomes. They provide a steady, repeatable rhythm – a ruler for measuring duration.
- **Dissipative attractors** (living cells, minds, societies) act as memory. They accumulate irreversible changes, giving time its direction.

Time is not a mysterious substance. It is the coupling between these three fundamental metronomes and the irreversible flow of memory. What binds all dissipative systems – from a bacterium to a brain to a galaxy – is the continuous recycling of the same three eternal metronomes.

This view offers a conceptual account of how clocks work, why time has an arrow, and how aging, entropy, and history fit together.

The dance of time has three metronomes and a memory.

1. Two Classes of Persistence, Two Roles for Time

In the attractor framework, everything that persists does so by resisting disturbance. We identify two distinct types of persistent structures, each giving rise to a different aspect of time.

1.1 Conservative Attractors – The Metronome

Conservative attractors are protected by physical conservation laws (charge, baryon number, energy). They are:

- **Eternal** – they do not age or decay (or are effectively stable on all observable timescales).
- **Time-symmetric at the level of intrinsic persistence** – their existence as attractors is symmetric under time reversal, though some interactions (weak force) violate CP and thus T.
- **Type-identical** – every electron has the same Compton frequency; every neutrino mass eigenstate has an invariant (though not yet precisely measured) frequency.

Because of these properties, conservative attractors serve as reference standards for duration – metronomes. The international definition of the second is literally a fixed number of such ticks.

1.2 Dissipative Attractors – Memory

Dissipative attractors (cells, minds, ecosystems, societies) are different:

- They require a continuous flow of energy and must export entropy.
- Their dynamics are irreversible – you cannot return to a past microstate without enormous cost.

- This irreversibility creates a directional arrow: before and after, past and future.
- They accumulate memory – irreversible state changes that persist and affect future behaviour.

Memory = irreversible accumulated state change (inscription).
 Examples: synaptic plasticity, scars, fossil records, cultural archives, radioactive decay (the daughter nucleus retains a record of the parent's disintegration).

2. The Three Metronomes: Our Most Fundamental Clocks

The Standard Model contains many particles, but only three classes are absolutely or effectively stable and serve as fundamental metronomes. The photon is not a metronome – it has zero rest mass, hence no rest-frame Compton frequency. It is a mode of propagation, not a standalone persistent entity.

Class / Particle	Symbol	Key Property	Role as Metronome
Electron	e^-	lightest charged lepton	Compton frequency $\sim 1.24 \times 10^{20}$ Hz
Neutrino mass eigenstates (collectively)	ν_1, ν_2, ν_3	neutral, tiny masses	Compton frequencies (mass-dependent); effectively stable
Proton	p	lightest baryon	Compton frequency $\sim 2.27 \times 10^{23}$ Hz; no observed decay

These three classes form what the framework calls the *eternal skeleton* – the collection of conservative structures that persist without decay and provide the stable background

against which dissipative change occurs.

Stability notes

- Proton decay has never been observed; lower limit on half-life $> 10^{34}$ years – effectively eternal. The proton is composite, but its stability derives from baryon number conservation, not merely nuclear binding energy.
- Neutrinos oscillate between flavours, but the underlying mass eigenstates are stable on cosmological timescales. Their exact Compton frequencies are not yet known to metrological precision – only mass-squared differences have been measured – but they are theoretically invariant.

These three metronomes do not need energy input to persist. Their frequencies are invariant (known for electron and proton; theoretically invariant for neutrinos). Any clock based on one agrees with any other after accounting for relativity, as confirmed by atomic clock comparisons.

3. Time as the Coupling Between Metronomes and Memory

Time is not a primitive substance. It is the relationship between the metronome ensemble and dissipative memory.

- The three metronomes provide a metric – an invariant ruler for “how much” duration has passed.
- Memory provides direction – which events are past, which are future.
- Without metronomes, change would be unmeasurable – no ruler.
- Without memory, change would be reversible and

directionless – no before/after.

Both are necessary for what we operationally call time.

As a working placeholder, let the rate of memory inscription be $dM/dt=f(M,v)$, where v is a characteristic metronome frequency and M is the current accumulated memory state. Two limiting cases anchor the idea:

- As $v \rightarrow 0$ – no metronome – duration becomes undefined. Change occurs but cannot be quantified as a metric interval. This is the “no ruler” condition.
- As dissipation $\rightarrow 0$ – no memory – M remains constant. Change leaves no trace, so there is no before/after. This is the “no arrow” condition.

What binds all dissipative systems – a bacterial cell, a human brain, a galaxy, a social institution – is the continuous **recycling of the same three eternal metronomes**. Every dissipative system operates by exchanging electrons, protons, and neutrinos with its environment. The metronomes are the invariant substrate; the memory is the transient pattern. The coupling is the recycling.

Thus, time is not merely a coordinate; it is the ongoing, irreversible reconfiguration of eternal components into transient, memory-bearing structures.

The three metronomes are time-symmetric at the level of intrinsic persistence. The arrow of time comes from dissipative systems that accumulate history. Time is the coupling between these two regimes.

4. Thermodynamic Information Theory and Persistence

The persistence functional $P(x)P(x)$ measures how deep an attractor basin is – formally, the depth of the basin in the system's phase space (the energy or Lyapunov function value required to escape the basin). Higher PP means a more stable attractor.

- In a dissipative attractor, maintaining memory requires continuous energy export to counteract thermal noise.
- Landauer's principle: erasing one bit costs at least $kBT \ln 2$ of free energy. Retaining memory against thermal fluctuations requires energy input.

We interpret $P(x)P(x)$ as a measure of information retention: systems with higher PP preserve mutual information between past and present for longer. The decay rate $-P'/P - P'/P$ relates to entropy production, connecting the attractor framework to non-equilibrium thermodynamics.

5. Consequences and Applications

- **Clocks** – Atomic clocks derive stability from electron transitions. The three metronomes guarantee cross-calibration.
- **Aging** – Biological aging is the accumulation of irreversible memory, measured against metronomes like circadian rhythms.
- **Critical slowing down** – As a system approaches a bifurcation, $-P'/P - P'/P$ decreases, providing early-warning signals (rising autocorrelation, variance) in physiology, ecology, and social systems.

- **Hysteresis in beliefs** – Fantasy attractors exhibit hysteresis – the path of belief change differs when accumulating vs. removing evidence. The hysteresis loop area quantifies memory.¹
- **Cosmological time** – The cosmic microwave background is a memory of the early universe (here “memory” is metaphorical). Atomic clocks measure the duration since those imprints were formed.

¹ *Fantasy attractor*: in the attractor framework, a dissipative structure (typically a belief system) with abnormally low corrective permeability, resistant to updating despite counter-evidence.

6. Relation to the Broader Attractor Framework

The metronome-memory distinction is a special case of the conservative vs. dissipative attractor dichotomy. It sharpens the “eternal skeleton / transient dance” metaphor.

The three metronomes are the most fundamental layer of the eternal skeleton – the collection of conservative structures that persist without decay and provide the stable background against which dissipative change occurs.

The framework does not claim that time is “made of” attractors. It claims that the measurement and experience of time rely on the interaction of these two persistence regimes. Because every dissipative system continuously recycles the same eternal metronomes, all such systems are materially unified across space and time. That unity is what makes a universal, relational time possible.

7. Open Questions and Refinements

- **Formalising $P(x)P(x)$** – Rigorous derivation for deterministic (Lyapunov), stochastic (escape time), and information-theoretic (surprisal) cases.
- **Coupling equations** – Specify $dM/dt=f(M,v)$. Can it be tested empirically?
- **Category clarity** – Conservative attractors span strict symmetry-protected invariants (elementary particles) and emergent approximate invariants (clocks). Future work should stratify these.
- **Falsifiability** – Concrete falsifiers: a persistent system without dissipation, or a social attractor that never updates despite counter-evidence.
- **Relation to other relational accounts** – Converges with Barbour (1999) and Rovelli (1996). The difference: the present framework identifies the two required poles (conservative metronomes providing metric invariance; dissipative memory providing direction) and grounds both in attractor dynamics.

8. Conclusion

Time is not a primitive. It is the relational coupling between:

- the three fundamental conservative attractor classes – electron, neutrino mass eigenstates (collectively), and proton – which provide invariant metric structure (the metronome), and
- dissipative systems that accumulate irreversible state

inscription (memory).

What binds all dissipative systems – from a bacterium to a brain to a galaxy – is the continuous recycling of the same three eternal metronomes. The metronomes are the invariant substrate; memory is the transient pattern; time is the coupling.

This account respects how physics measures time, explains the arrow via entropy and information persistence, and offers transferable concepts across neuroscience, ecology, sociology, and AI.

The dance has three metronomes and a memory.

References

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