

The Grammar of Openness

Hilary Lawson's Closure Theory and the CC-C Framework: Convergence, Divergence, and What Each Provides the Other

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The world is open and it is we who through our senses and language close openness and in the process create what we take to be reality.

Hilary Lawson, *Closure: A Story of Everything*, 2001

Every finite closure generates remainder. The remainder is not noise. It is the proof that the grammar is finite.

CF Dietz, *Consciousness, Closure, and the Cosmos*, 2026

Abstract

Hilary Lawson's closure theory, developed across *Reflexivity* in 1985 and *Closure: A Story of Everything* in 2001, proposes that the world is fundamentally open and that all human experience, perception, language, and science arise from the process of closing that openness into something. This paper argues that Lawson's closure theory and the closure framework developed in *Consciousness, Closure, and the Cosmos* are the same foundational insight stated in different philosophical registers, arrived at independently from different directions. The convergence is deep and specific: Lawson's openness is the CC-C framework's M, the inexhaustible ground that exceeds every closure. Lawson's closure process is the CC-C framework's closure regime: the stabilization of openness into coherent patterns that constitute facts and generate remainder. Lawson's nested layers of closure, from neuronal firing through sensation to language and thought, are the CC-C framework's nested closure ladder. The two frameworks also diverge in one philosophically crucial respect: Lawson is a thoroughgoing anti-realist who holds that openness has no structure prior to closure, while the CC-C framework treats M as genuinely there, as an inexhaustible ground with real properties that exceeds every closure without being constituted by any of them. This divergence is not a reason to choose between the frameworks. It is the most philosophically interesting question they jointly raise, and this paper argues that the CC-C account of M as real provides Lawson's framework with something it currently needs: an explanation of why closure does not merely impose structure on nothing, but encounters genuine resistance from a world that is not indifferent to how it is closed.

1. Someone Named It First

There is a philosophical obligation that arises when you discover someone has arrived at your central concept before you. Not the obligation to abandon the concept, which would be absurd if the concept is right. The obligation to acknowledge the arrival, examine what they found, identify where the paths converge and where they diverge, and explain honestly what each framework provides that the other does not.

Hilary Lawson named closure as the foundational philosophical concept twenty-five years before the CC-C framework used the word. His book *Closure: A Story of Everything*, published in 2001, proposed that all human experience arises from a single underlying process: the closing of openness into something. The world, Lawson argues, is fundamentally open. It has no intrinsic structure, no pre-given objects, no ready-made facts. It is we, through our senses and language, who close that openness into the things we take to be reality. The tree you see is not a tree sitting in an open world waiting to be perceived. It is a closure: a holding together of sensory input into a stable pattern that allows you to act on the world as if there is a tree there. The holding is real. The tree as such is constituted, not discovered.

That claim is radical. It is also, the CC-C framework argues, substantially correct. The convergence between what Lawson found and what the CC-C framework independently develops is the subject of this paper. The divergence is equally important and will be given equal space. Neither framework needs to be subordinated to the other. Both are illuminated by examining what each provides that the other lacks.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 states Lawson's four central claims. Section 3 identifies what Lawson needs that his framework does not yet supply. Section 4 introduces the CC-C framework at the minimum level needed to engage Lawson's account. Section 5 maps the convergence term by term. Section 6 examines the divergence honestly. Section 7 draws the consequences for both frameworks. Section 8 names what the encounter between them produces.

2. Lawson's Four Claims

Lawson's closure theory has four interconnected components. Each is worth stating in plain language before the CC-C framework engages it.

2.1 The World Is Open

Lawson's most fundamental claim is that the world, prior to any human intervention, is open. Not open in the sense of spatially extended or capable of multiple interpretations. Open in a more radical sense: without intrinsic structure, without pre-given identity, without objects or properties that exist independently of the closures that constitute them. The world before closure is, in Lawson's terms, that which is different as different: pure undifferentiated difference, without the distinctions that would make anything a this rather than a that.

This is not a claim about physics or metaphysics in the traditional sense. It is a claim about what the world must be like if closure is to be the foundational process Lawson argues it is. If the world already had structure prior to closure, closure would be description: finding and reporting

what was already there. Lawson wants to say something stronger: that closure is constitutive, that things come to be through the process of closing rather than being closed because they are already there. The openness of the world is the precondition for closure being what Lawson claims it is.

2.2 Closure Is the Holding of Difference as One

Lawson defines closure precisely: it is the holding of that which is different as one and the same. The neuron that fires in response to light does not report that light is there. It constitutes a closure: a holding of multiple distinct stimuli as a single event, a firing, that allows subsequent processes to treat them as one thing. The sensation of blue arises from a higher-level closure that holds many different neuronal firings as one thing, the experience of blue. The word blue is a further closure that holds many different sensations, in many different contexts, with many different phenomenal qualities, as one thing for the purposes of language and communication.

Each closure is a genuine creation, not a discovery. The blue is not out in the world waiting to be named. It is constituted by the closures that hold sensory experience as something. This does not mean the closures are arbitrary or that any closure is as good as any other. Closures are constrained by openness: the world pushes back against closures that do not allow effective intervention. A closure of light that led consistently to you walking into walls would not survive. Closures are pragmatic tools for intervening in the world, not descriptions of what the world independently is.

2.3 Closure Is Layered and Self-Referential

Lawson describes closure as occurring in layers, from the preliminary closures of neuronal response through sensory closure to the inter-sensory closures that constitute language and thought. Each layer takes the output of lower layers as its input and constitutes a new, higher-level closure from them. The word tree does not directly close sensory experience of trees. It closes a complex inter-sensory pattern that itself closed many distinct sensory inputs across many occasions. Language and thought are closures of closures of closures, all the way down to the preliminary closures that allow neurons to fire as responses to the world.

Closure theory is also, Lawson emphasizes, self-referential. It is itself a closure: a holding together of observations about the process of closing into a theory of that process. Lawson does not treat this self-reference as a paradox to be dissolved. He treats it as an honest acknowledgment of what the theory is. Closure theory does not claim to have uncovered the essential character of reality. It claims to be a useful closure that allows us to intervene more effectively in the world by understanding something about the process of intervention itself.

2.4 Science Seeks Closure; Art Seeks Openness

One of Lawson's most striking claims is that science and art represent different fundamental orientations to the relationship between closure and openness. Science is driven by the search for closure: for stable, general, replicable patterns that allow prediction and control. The goal of science is to constitute closures that work across many contexts and that can be shared reliably among practitioners. The success of science is measured by the effectiveness of the closures it produces.

Art, by contrast, is the pursuit of openness: the attempt to escape the closures that ordinarily structure experience and encounter something of the openness that lies beneath them. The great work of art is not the one that says something true about the world. It is the one that opens the viewer or listener to what their ordinary closures have been concealing. Lawson does not oppose science and art. He shows them as complementary orientations to the same underlying tension between closure and openness, each illuminating what the other cannot reach.

3. What Lawson Needs

Lawson's closure theory is one of the most ambitious philosophical projects of the past quarter century. It provides a unified account of perception, language, science, art, and the structure of human experience that avoids both naive realism and the self-undermining relativism of postmodernism. It does this by taking closure seriously as a constitutive process rather than a descriptive one.

There is, however, a question that Lawson's framework raises without fully answering. If the world is open, without structure, without intrinsic properties, without pre-given objects, then what does it mean to say that closures are constrained by openness? Lawson is clear that not any closure will do. The world pushes back. Closures that fail to allow effective intervention are replaced by closures that do better. But if the world is genuinely without structure prior to closure, what is doing the pushing? What is it about openness that makes some closures more effective than others?

Lawson's answer is pragmatic: closures succeed when they enable intervention, and the test of a closure is whether it works. This is a defensible position. But it leaves open the question of what we are intervening in, and why the interventions that work consistently do so. A world of pure openness, genuinely without structure, would offer no more resistance to one closure than to another. The consistency of scientific success, the regularity that allows physics to make predictions and engineering to build bridges, suggests that something is there prior to and independent of any particular closure that makes certain closures more adequate than others.

The CC-C framework provides exactly this. It treats M, the inexhaustible ground that every closure opens onto, as genuinely real: not as constituted by closures but as the ground that every closure partially captures and always exceeds. That account of M gives Lawson's openness the structure it needs to explain why closure is constrained without being determined. M is not open in the sense of having no structure. It is inexhaustible in the sense that no finite closure exhausts its structure. The distinction is philosophically decisive.

4. Two Concepts and One Crucial Distinction

The CC-C framework is introduced here at the minimum level needed to engage Lawson's account. Two concepts and one distinction are all that is required.

4.1 Closure Regime: What Lawson Calls Closure

A closure regime, in the CC-C framework, is a system that stabilizes some content by drawing distinctions, establishing identity criteria, and maintaining lawful relationships among its elements. It constitutes facts within its scope: it determines what counts as the same thing across different occasions, what relationships among things are lawful, and what falls outside its modeling capacity as remainder.

This is Lawson's closure stated in a slightly different vocabulary. What Lawson calls the holding of that which is different as one and the same, the CC-C framework calls a closure regime constituting facts by stabilizing identity across difference. The neuron that fires as a response to multiple distinct stimuli is a closure regime constituting a fact, this is a stimulus worth responding to, from multiple undifferentiated inputs. The sensation of blue is a higher-level closure regime constituting a fact, this is blue, from multiple distinct neural events. The CC-C vocabulary adds precision to Lawson's account without changing its substance.

Remainder is the key addition the CC-C framework makes to Lawson's account. Every finite closure regime generates remainder: the content that the closure's identity criteria cannot capture, the aspects of the world the closure leaves outside its scope. This is implicit in Lawson's account but not formally named. When Lawson says that closures are constrained by openness and that the world pushes back against inadequate closures, he is describing the experience of remainder accumulating: the mismatch between what the closure constitutes and what the world presents. The CC-C framework names this mismatch formally and treats it as a structural feature of all finite closures rather than as a contingent property of particular ones.

4.2 Nested Closures: What Lawson Calls Layers

Lawson describes closure as layered: preliminary closure, sensory closure, inter-sensory closure, language, thought. Each layer takes the output of layers below it as input and constitutes new, higher-level closures from them. The CC-C framework calls these nested closure regimes: higher-level closures that contain lower-level closures as their elements and set the boundary conditions within which lower-level closures operate.

The nesting is not merely sequential. Higher-level closures genuinely constrain lower-level ones: the cognitive closure regime of a skilled musician, constituting the facts of musical structure, actually shapes what the sensory closure regimes below it deliver, not just how that delivery is interpreted. This is the same downward causation that Denis Noble's biological relativity and Karl Friston's nested Markov blankets describe. Lawson's layers are another independent discovery of the same structural truth: organized systems are nested closure hierarchies in which higher levels genuinely constrain lower ones.

4.3 The Crucial Distinction: M Is Real

Here is where the frameworks diverge, and where the divergence matters most.

Lawson's openness is, in his account, genuinely without structure prior to closure. There is nothing in openness that makes a tree-closure more appropriate than a rock-closure or a sound-closure for a particular pattern of sensory input. The world does not contain a tree waiting to be

discovered. The appropriateness of the tree-closure is entirely a matter of its pragmatic effectiveness in enabling intervention. Openness itself has no properties, no structure, no features that constrain closure in any direction.

The CC-C framework disagrees with this, and the disagreement is philosophically productive rather than merely terminological. The CC-C framework treats M, the inexhaustible ground that every closure opens onto, as genuinely real: as having structure and properties that exceed any particular closure's capacity to model them, but that are not constituted by any closure. M is not open in the sense of being without structure. M is inexhaustible in the sense that no finite closure captures all of its structure. The tree-closure is more effective than alternative closures not because any closure is as pragmatically adequate as any other and the tree just happens to work, but because the world contains features that the tree-closure is partially adequate to, even though it does not fully capture them.

This distinction changes the philosophical status of scientific progress. For Lawson, science produces successively more effective closures, but there is no fact of the matter about whether scientific closures are getting closer to truth. For the CC-C framework, scientific closures are genuinely making contact with features of M that earlier closures missed or misrepresented, even though no closure will ever fully exhaust what M contains. The supersession of one scientific grammar by another is not just pragmatic replacement but a genuine expansion of the closure's adequacy to the real structure of what it opens onto.

5. The Convergence: What Each Framework Finds in the Other

Before mapping the convergence in detail, the vocabulary correspondence deserves to be stated explicitly. What Lawson calls openness, the CC-C framework calls M. What Lawson calls closure, the framework calls a closure regime. What Lawson calls the layered structure of closure, the framework calls nested closure regimes. What Lawson calls the pragmatic constraint of openness on closure, the framework calls remainder driving supersession. These are not loose analogies. They are structurally equivalent concepts arrived at independently from different philosophical traditions.

5.1 Openness Is M

Lawson's openness and the CC-C framework's M are the same structural concept stated in different registers. Both name the inexhaustible ground that every closure opens onto without exhausting. Both insist that this ground is not itself a thing, not an object, not a substance, not describable in the terms that closures use to constitute objects. Both insist that this ground is real in the sense of generating genuine resistance to closures that fail to be adequate to it. The difference, which section 6 examines, is in what kind of reality is attributed to this ground.

For Lawson, openness is real in the sense that it provides the occasion and the constraint for closure without having any structure of its own. For the CC-C framework, M is real in the sense that it has genuine structure that exceeds any finite closure's capacity to model it. Both positions agree that the ground is there and that it matters. They disagree about what there means for something that is not an object and cannot be fully constituted by any closure.

5.2 Closure Is Closure Regime

Lawson's closure, the holding of that which is different as one and the same, is the CC-C framework's closure regime at the level of its most fundamental operation. Both accounts locate the foundational act of knowledge and experience in the stabilization of difference into identity. Both accounts treat this stabilization as constitutive rather than descriptive. Both accounts generate the same structural consequence: what is constituted within the closure is a fact within its scope, and what falls outside the closure's identity criteria is not nothing but the remainder, the openness, the M, that the closure could not absorb.

The CC-C framework adds formal precision to Lawson's account by specifying that closure regimes have identity criteria, distinctions, and lawful relationships as their constitutive elements, and that remainder is the formal name for the structural mismatch between the closure and what it opens onto. This precision is not a correction of Lawson. It is a development of what Lawson's account implies but does not formalize.

5.3 Layering Is Nesting

Lawson's account of layered closure, from preliminary neuronal response through sensation to language and thought, is the CC-C framework's nested closure hierarchy described phenomenologically. Both accounts agree that higher-level closures constitute facts from the outputs of lower-level ones. Both agree that the layers are genuinely distinct levels with their own identity criteria, not merely different descriptions of the same process. Both agree that the relationship between layers involves genuine constraint: higher levels shape what lower levels deliver, not just how their outputs are interpreted.

Lawson's account of science as the search for closure and art as the search for openness is, in CC-C terms, a distinction between grammars oriented toward minimizing remainder through increasingly adequate closure and practices oriented toward making remainder visible and inhabitable. Science supersedes its grammars when remainder accumulates beyond what the current grammar can absorb. Art works differently: it does not try to absorb remainder but to make contact with it, to let the openness that remainder points at become the subject of aesthetic attention. Both orientations are necessary. Both are honest responses to the relationship between finite closure and inexhaustible ground.

6. The Divergence: What Each Framework Has That the Other Needs

The divergence between the frameworks on the reality of M, of openness, is not a minor terminological dispute. It is a substantive philosophical disagreement about what it means for a ground to be real without being an object.

Lawson's anti-realism is principled and carefully argued. He has debated realists including John Searle, Simon Blackburn, and Timothy Williamson, and his position has been refined through those exchanges. His concern is that any attribution of structure to openness risks smuggling in a hidden realism: positing a world of objects and properties that exist independently of any closure and that closures are measured against. If openness has structure, then closures can be true or false, adequate or inadequate, not just pragmatically effective or ineffective. And if closures can be true

or false, then truth re-enters the picture in a way that Lawson's framework was designed to move beyond.

The CC-C framework takes this concern seriously and does not dismiss it. The response is that M's reality does not require positing a world of ready-made objects that closures either capture or miss. M is real in a different sense: as an inexhaustible ground that generates genuine constraint on closures, that pushes back against closures that are structurally inadequate to it, without itself being constituted by or describable in terms of any particular closure. M is not a collection of objects waiting to be discovered. It is the ground that every closure opens onto and none exhausts. Its reality is the reality of what resists, not the reality of what waits.

Lawson needs this account of M's reality for a specific reason: without it, his explanation of why closures are constrained by openness remains purely pragmatic. The closure works, or it does not, and that is all that can be said. But this pragmatism cannot explain the deep regularities of scientific success: why the same closures work across vastly different contexts, why predictive accuracy accumulates over time, why some closures fail in ways that point systematically toward better ones. These regularities are most naturally explained by positing that closures are making genuine, if partial, contact with features of a real world. The CC-C account of M provides that explanation without requiring a return to naive realism.

What does Lawson provide that the CC-C framework needs? Primarily, the philosophical tradition. Lawson situates his closure theory in relation to Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Derrida, and the full sweep of twentieth century philosophy of language and postmodernism. He has already done the work of showing how closure theory responds to the post-modern crisis of truth, how it avoids the self-referential paradoxes that undermine both realism and relativism, and how it provides a foundation for genuine intellectual progress without requiring a return to the idea of a single true account of the world. The CC-C framework inherits these arguments when it situates its own account of closure regimes and remainder in the philosophical tradition. Lawson's work is the philosophical context the CC-C framework was developed within and must acknowledge.

7. What the Encounter Produces

The encounter between Lawson's closure theory and the CC-C framework has consequences for both.

For Lawson's framework, the CC-C account of M as real provides the missing explanation of why closure is constrained. Lawson can say that closures are constrained by openness and that the world pushes back against inadequate closures, without being able to say what openness is that makes this constraint possible. The CC-C account of M as an inexhaustible real ground, with genuine structure that no finite closure exhausts, fills this explanatory gap while remaining compatible with Lawson's anti-realism about objects and truth. M is not a collection of objects. It is the real ground that every closure partially contacts and none captures. That account preserves what Lawson's anti-realism is designed to protect while providing the explanatory resource his pragmatism currently lacks.

For the CC-C framework, Lawson's work provides the philosophical tradition and the argumentative resources. Lawson has already engaged the objections from realists and

postmodernists, has already shown how closure theory avoids the self-referential paradoxes that undermine competing positions, and has already demonstrated that a closure-based account of knowledge and experience is philosophically serious and comprehensive. The CC-C framework does not need to make those arguments from scratch. It can build on what Lawson has established while extending the account with the nested closure ladder, the formal treatment of remainder, the account of downward causation between closure levels, and the treatment of C as primitive conscious presence.

For philosophy more broadly, the convergence between two independent closure frameworks, one developed from the British analytic and post-analytic tradition, the other from philosophy of mind, systems biology, and phenomenology, suggests that closure is not a parochial philosophical preference but a structural feature of any adequate account of organized experience in a world that exceeds every description of it. When two frameworks arrive independently at the same foundational concept from different directions, the convergence is evidence that the concept is tracking something real.

The one divergence that remains, on the reality of M, is not a problem to be resolved but a productive philosophical frontier. Lawson's anti-realism and the CC-C account of M as real represent two different ways of honoring the same fundamental insight: that the world exceeds every closure, that this excess is not nothing, and that the relationship between closure and what it opens onto is the central question of philosophy. Working out the precise philosophical status of that excess, whether it is structured or unstructured, real or merely operative, a ground or an occasion, is the question that the encounter between these two frameworks most sharply poses. It is a question neither framework can answer alone.

8. Before and After

Philosophy sometimes produces the experience of meeting a predecessor: encountering someone who arrived at your central insight before you, from a different direction, with different tools, and left it slightly differently shaped than you would have. The encounter is not defeat. It is the most productive kind of philosophical contact.

Hilary Lawson named closure before the CC-C framework used the word. He saw that the foundational philosophical question is not what the world is made of but what it means for a finite being to constitute a world from what is given to it. He saw that the answer involves a process that holds difference as identity, that this process is layered and nested, that it generates remainder at every level, and that the remainder points at something the process cannot absorb. He built a comprehensive philosophical system around these observations and defended it against the strongest objections available.

The CC-C framework arrived at the same foundational concept independently, with a different philosophical apparatus, and found something Lawson's framework left open: the reality of what every closure opens onto. Not a collection of objects waiting to be named. An inexhaustible ground that is genuinely there, that generates genuine constraint on closure, that makes scientific progress more than pragmatic replacement of one set of tools with another.

What each framework provides the other is what it has that the other lacks. Lawson provides the philosophical tradition, the careful anti-realist arguments, and the comprehensive account of how closure pervades all of human experience from neuronal firing to the highest abstractions of science and art. The CC-C framework provides the formal treatment of remainder as a structural feature of all finite closures, the account of M as real inexhaustible ground, and the nested closure hierarchy that shows how downward causation operates between levels without any level being privileged.

Together they do what neither does alone: they show that closure is the central concept of any adequate philosophy of mind, knowledge, and reality, that it has been arrived at independently from multiple directions, and that the question it most sharply poses, what is the relationship between finite closure and the ground it opens onto, is not a problem left over from inadequate philosophy but the deepest question philosophy has always been asking. The grammar of openness is what every closure speaks, imperfectly, finitely, and necessarily. Lawson heard it first. This framework has arrived at the same address by a different route.

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Author's Note

*This paper is the third in a series engaging living thinkers whose work converges with the closure framework developed in *Consciousness, Closure, and the Cosmos*. The first paper in the series engaged Denis Noble's biological relativity. The second engaged Karl Friston's free energy principle. The present paper engages Hilary Lawson's closure theory, which is in several respects the most immediate predecessor of the CC-C framework and therefore requires the most careful treatment of both convergence and divergence. The author does not claim Lawson's endorsement of the CC-C framework or its specific vocabulary. The claim is convergence on a foundational insight with productive divergence on the philosophical status of the ground that every closure opens onto. Hilary Lawson founded the Institute of Art and Ideas and the *HowTheLightGetsIn* festival, which has brought philosophical ideas to wider public audiences for nearly two decades. The author welcomes engagement from Lawson directly and from philosophers working in post-realist metaphysics, philosophy of language, and philosophy of science who find the convergence or the divergence worthy of further examination.*