

Stardust, real or magic?

Humans struggle to understand worlds outside of their immediate reality. Before the invention of telescopes to observe the universe, and the understanding of quantum mechanics and nuclear physics, what was our understanding of the sun? Early cultures saw it as the divine being of the universe. It took the long accumulation of knowledge, grasping at straws, shifting and creating the language and knowledge to explain the phenomena they saw happening in front of their eyes. Until we develop a framework of understanding a topic, its forces will be left to a magical hand molding the world to the will of a higher power.

Let's start with how our material reality distorts our framework of universal truth by asking a question, What is the composition of stardust (atoms) in our [universe](#)? Would you have guessed 92% Hydrogen, 7.1% Helium? This leaves 0.9% of atoms that make up the rest of the universe. Our entire earth is built on the 0.9% exception. This surprised me until I examined my own material reality and the bias it leaves me with. I've only experienced the earth's surface, where most things are composed of heavier elements. In order to believe the universal truth of the composition of stardust, I have to acknowledge the limits of my material reality and how they warp my understanding of the universe at large.

This distortion of objective truths based on material reality is hugely influential on our understanding of systemic forces. I remember so distinctly the fairness of the world I believed in when I left for college. This belief was built on my experience of the world in Palo Alto and the places I traveled. I saw poverty, but it was few and far between. I was in a school system where my education was a priority, whether I understood it or not. In college, my understanding was challenged, I was surrounded by exceptional people who had to go above and beyond to end up in the same place as me. I recognize now, their above and beyond was required to match my privilege. This solidified my understanding how much privilege isn't supposed to be felt by the privileged. I don't understand the privilege of food security, because I've never been food insecure. I've never understood the privilege of valuing my education because it was always valued for me.

Ignorance through privilege is only one level of the distortion. Propaganda also plays a major role in distorting our understanding of the systems of production. Americans are taught from a young age about how great America is, how we help the world, spreading democracy to all. Without the framework for understanding systemic power, it's difficult to evaluate the reality of that statement. I was left with anecdotal evidence: "My life in America is pretty good so America must also be good." Only once I read the topics of systemic analysis could I come to my own conclusions. Only then was I able to see the flaws in my own logic. Is my life great because America is great, or is my life great because of the exploitation that America enforces for people like me?

Understanding the analytical framework is the only way to illuminate and demystify the reality of the forces inside a system. Whether that's the physics of stardust and how fusion and chain reactions lead to the existence of heavier elements or understanding the class dynamics of America that has led us to another war and recession. Understanding fundamental principles does not build a better world, it is application, and informed application alone, that will be humanity's guiding light.